


2017

Improving Literacy for Diverse Low Socio-Economic Status Middle School Students

Vivian Fowler Means
Walden University

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Walden University

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Vivian Means

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Improving Literacy for Diverse, Low Socioeconomic Status,
Middle School Students in an Urban District

by

Vivian Fowler Means

MA, Webster University, 2012

BA, University of South Carolina-Upstate, 2002

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning

Walden University

October 2017

Abstract

In an urban district, Surfside School personnel were concerned that student literacy proficiency levels were low during 2011-2014 and teachers had not been able to close the achievement gap despite a focus on literacy practices and literacy professional development (PD) provided by the district. The purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions of teachers and administrators in relation to the best instructional practices for increasing self-efficacy when teaching literacy skills and related literacy PD for teachers. Knowles' andragogy theory and Vygotsky's social learning theory formed the theoretical foundation of this study, which hold that PD should provide teachers with explicit instruction and opportunities for collaboration. The research questions focused on how PD helps teachers improve instructional practices. The purposeful sample consisted of 4 middle school teachers and 3 administrators and was collected through surveys, observations, semi-structured interviews, and archival documents. Data analysis consisted of an inductive approach of axial coding and categorizing the interview and observational data to derive themes. Themes supporting the findings indicated targeted PD and instructional coaching (IC) focused on evidence based literacy practices for low-income students using culturally relevant pedagogy were needed to improve teacher self-efficacy and student learning. Findings also indicated that the PD trainings could work more effectively if the teachers had more time to collaborate with the IC. Thus, the resulting project provides collaborative PD and IC targeting literacy practices using culturally relevant pedagogy. Teacher use of these practices will promote social change by improving the students' literacy support in the target district.

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Dedication

This project study is dedicated to my loving family and loyal friends who have encouraged and supported me in all of my endeavors throughout my life. First and foremost, I thank God for my loving children and grandchildren: my beautiful daughter, Shannon Hollis, my handsome son, Octavian Anttoine Hollis, and my beautiful daughter-in-law, Sade Gordon Hollis, my gorgeous granddaughters, Lyric Hollis, Naila Hollis, and Rylei Miller, and my handsome grandson, Octavian Zion Hollis. Last but not least, I want to send a special thank you to my loving and devoted mother Gloria Byrd Crocker, who has always been here for all our family and friends whenever we needed her. Thank you Moma for raising me to be a dedicated, diligent worker and to fight for what I believe in. But more importantly, thank you Moma for being a great example of what a Godly, virtuous woman should be to her family. Without the love, patience, and understanding of my family and friends, this degree would not have come to fruition. I love and thank each and every one of you from the bottom of my heart.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank my Heavenly Father and my earthy fathers for guiding me through life and this doctoral project study. A special appreciation for my spiritual father, Brother Samuel Means who taught me “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!” Philippians 4:13. I know that he would have been extremely proud of my accomplishment. I want to acknowledge my immediate family for the many times of understanding, patience, and unwavering support that the completion and success of this degree necessitated. I want to thank my loving mothers, Gloria Byrd Crocker and my mother-in-law, Mary Means, and Dr. Lorraine Henderson of Webster University for believing in me and encouraging me to pursue and complete this degree. I want to thank my co-workers and special friends for their personal words of encouragement throughout this long and tedious process of writing and researching hours at a time.

I want to thank my interviewees and staff members at my research setting for their participation and assistance. I want to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Cathryn White, for her tremendous heart, devotion, persistence, and direction through this laborious process. I would also like to thank Dr. Dennis Lawrence and Dr. Katherine Norman for agreeing to complete my team and providing guidance through this doctoral process. Special thanks to all my students and parents over the years who prepared me for this day and reminded me daily of my calling to not only be an effective teacher but also an inspiration by effecting change through their students one day at a time. Finally, I thank all of the faculty and staff of Walden University for challenging me to think of ways to truly create social change in the education realm and change the lives of all students from all walks of life into life-long readers and writers.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Learning to read and write is the fundamental building block to a successful life for all children. Researchers in early literacy interventions argue that literacy should be taught early in a child's life with an explicit and systematic focus for successful literacy development (Gaunt, 2008; Gray, 2009; Paige, 2011). According to Davidson (2010), systemic instruction and research-based instruction are critical in achieving literacy success during early childhood development in order to level the learning opportunities for all students. Therefore, it is paramount that professional educators utilize evidence-based learning strategies which are required by NCLB (2002) to support the students' reading development in the early grades so that they experience greater success in middle school, and high school thereby leading them to graduation (Paige, 2011). According to Allington (2011), for success in middle school, students must have more opportunities to engage in appropriate instruction that has been differentiated to meet the individual needs of each student. Moreover, students who are reading text at the appropriate level and making reading progress, are likely to be more advanced in literacy skills, experience a greater degree of success in high school, and be more college and career ready.

Hence, if children do not learn to read in elementary school, then the gap in literacy is magnified by the time they enter middle school (Gaunt, 2008). Davidson (2010) and Gaunt (2008) have also noted that students, who are not reading at grade level, continue to struggle with literacy each passing school year. In middle school in particular, literacy is viewed by the students as challenging and sometimes stressful

which in turn leads students to disengage from the learning process or become overly dependent upon the support of their teachers (Allington, 2011; Li & Husan, 2010; Paige, 2011). Unfortunately, researchers have noted, many middle school students are not reading text or writing at the appropriate level and are not making proficient progress (Davidson, 2010; Paige, 2011; Wagner, 2008). Researchers have also noted that middle school students who struggle with reading and writing are more likely to disengage from the learning process, drop out of high school at a higher rate, and are less likely to attend a higher institution of learning (Milner, 2013; Wagner, 2008).

In order to effectively support struggling readers and provide quality literacy instruction to all students, teachers must have the knowledge and skills and appropriate classroom resources (Allington, 2011; Griner & Stewart, 2013). According to Ladner and Myslinski (2013), in order to promote the goal of “College, Career, and Citizen Readiness,” for 21st century students, the focus must be geared towards advancing teacher quality, greater school accountability, and a greater emphasis on literacy (Wagner, 2008). Consequently, an ideal learning environment for disengaged students is one where teachers provide scaffolding or support to give struggling students the ability to work on grade level in a stable, comfortable, and rewarding environment that is conducive for learning to read and write (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Li & Husan, 2010; Tucker, Dixon, & Griddine, 2010). Therefore, provisions in professional development (PD) need to be made to help teachers improve literacy skills for all students.

According to the middle school literacy/ instructional coach, the challenge for some educators in Surfside School District is how to instruct diverse low socio-economic

status (SES) middle school students in order for the students to reach proficiency in literacy content in the classroom as well as on standardized tests (L. Soroachak, personal communication, April 30, 2015). Guskey (2002) noted, the main purpose of PD trainings is to guide and change professional practices and beliefs in classroom instruction and in the attitudes of educators and administrators to ultimately improve student learning. Hence, Surfside School District implemented a PD system as a means of addressing the lack of literacy skills and to improve teacher competencies while creating conditions for successful instruction. Well-designed, research-based PD has the potential to improve teachers' content knowledge, literacy skills, and result in successful instructional practice (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Allington (2011; 2012) noted that teachers are more likely to change their teaching practices when they are engaged in relative and meaningful PD. PD should focus on teachers' knowledge of the subject matter and how well students comprehend the content of the subject matter in order to increase student achievement.

Researchers have observed that there are a high percentage of students not meeting the criteria for proficiency in literacy on state and federal mandated tests throughout the United States (USDE, 2015b). Hence, research of this topic is crucial because of the urgency to raise the literacy skills for diverse low SES middle school students in this southeastern urban school district (South Carolina Department of Education [SCDE], 2014a). Explicit PD related to literacy, teacher instructional skills, and student-learning strategies are crucial to the success of the middle school students in Surfside School District. This qualitative case study will focus on the current means of

PD as it relates to the best instructional strategies to help improve reading and writing skills for diverse low-income middle school students. This qualitative case study is timely and the research questions are relevant to closing the gap in literacy achievement and helping middle school students meet the high expectations of the common core state standards for literacy proficiency as measured by state mandated tests (SCDE, 2015). The challenge for many educators in Surfside School District is how to instruct diverse low SES middle school students in order for the students to reach proficiency in literacy content in the classroom as well as on standardized tests. The study will focus on the needs, experiences, and perceptions of the middle school teachers, instructional coach, and administrators in relation to the best instructional practices for teaching literacy to diverse low SES middle school students in Surfside School District.

Thus, I conducted a qualitative case study of the participants' needs, experiences, and perceptions concerning literacy in Surfside School District. More specifically, I interviewed teachers using qualitative individual case studies to discern teachers' perceived needs to teach literacy to low SES middle school students. The result of this project study included a PD plan to address the literacy skills and knowledge related to Reading/ ELA instruction for diverse low SES middle school students which has the potential to prepare teachers to teach more effectively thereby equipping students with the practical skills necessary to increase student performance on state mandated tests. The perceptions of the teachers about the best instructional practices needed to help students in literacy were gathered during this qualitative case study. I asked teachers to elaborate on what they felt they needed to know about literacy in order to become more effective

teachers. From that, I was able to design an effective PD plan to help teachers raise literacy skills for diverse low SES middle school students and provide all stakeholders with a focus on improving student literacy and achievement.

Section 1 begins with a definition of the problem followed by a presentation of the rationale for selecting the problem. I have gleaned evidence at both the local level and in the professional literature to support the rationale for selecting the problem. Also included are pertinent definitions, the significance of the problem, the guiding research questions, a literature review, and the potential implications of the data.

Definition of the Problem

Surfside School District, a pseudonym for the research site, is comprised of more than 1000 students from diverse backgrounds and includes many students who are struggling with poverty. Approximately 100% of students are served on Free and Reduced Lunch, which is the indicator school districts use for students living at or below poverty level (SCDE, 2014a). The problem in the local setting is that middle school students have consistently under-performed in the areas of reading and writing for the last three consecutive years, between 2012 through 2014, as evidenced by District Report Cards for 2012 through 2014 found on the district website (SCDE, 2012; 2013; 2014). The problem is evidenced by middle school students in 6th through 8th grades not meeting academic reading and writing competencies on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) for three consecutive years (SCDE, 2012, 2013, 2014). In light of the achievement gap, the district developed and implemented a PD plan for the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade teachers. However, to date, the scores do not reflect improvement. The PASS

data reported on the SCDE website for the target middle school established that over 40% of students have not met the reading grade level standard and over 30% of students have not met the writing grade level standard in grades 6, 7 and 8 for the years 2012, 2013, and 2014. The definitions of the critical terms for PASS test results are found in the *PASS Score Report User's Guide For use with Spring 2012 Score Reports* and are quoted below:

Three performance levels were established to reflect the continuum of knowledge and skills exhibited by students on the PASS, which are “Exemplary, Met, and Not Met” (SCDE, 2012, p.8). Pass performance levels, as defined by the Education Accountability Act, are as follows:

Exemplary- "Exemplary" means the student demonstrated exemplary performance in meeting grade level standards

Met- "Met" means the student met the grade level standards.

Not Met- "Not Met" means that the student did not meet the grade level standards.

The performance levels are useful for assessing a school's overall performance and appropriate for assessing each grade level within the school. For purposes of reporting as required by federal statute, “proficiency” includes students performing at the Met and Exemplary levels (SCDE, 2012, p. 8). Table 1 and Table 2 shows the percentage of students from the target middle school who are categorized under “Met” or “Not Met” as evidenced by the PASS test data by grade level for the years 2012, 2013, and 2014. The demographics on the SCDE website for this district showed the total number of students

in grades 6 through 8 tested at the target site in 2012 was 58. The total number of students tested in grades 6 through 8 was 213 in 2013. The total number of students tested in grades 6 through 8 was 253 in 2014. In 2012, the number of students tested in writing for grades 6 through 7 was too low to give an accurate account of student performance. Therefore, the data reads Not Applicable (N/A) for the year 2012 for sixth and seventh grade students.

Table 1

Percentage of Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Grade Students Meeting or Not Meeting Performance Standards on PASS for 2012, 2013 and 2014

Reading (English/Language Arts)						
Year	Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
	Met	Not Met	Met	Not Met	Met	Not Met
2012	42.9	57.1	55.4	44.6	48.1	51.9
2103	58.8	41.2	56.7	43.3	55.7	44.3
2014	58.3	41.7	53.6	46.4	40.8	59.2

Note. Compiled from SCDE (2012, 2013, 2014).

Table 2

Percentage of Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Grade Students Meeting or Not Meeting Performance Standards of PASS for 2012, 2013 and 2014

Writing						
Year	Grade 6		Grade 7		Grade 8	
	Met	Not Met	Met	Not Met	Met	Not Met
2012	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	58.2	41.8
2103	56.3	43.7	67.1	32.9	66.7	33.3
2014	62.4	37.6	69.5	30.5	52.6	47.4

Note. N/A= Not Applicable if the number tested is less than 10, no other statistics appear. 100% of the student population lives in poverty. Compiled from SCDE (2012, 2013, 2014).

The mission of the district is “to offer a quality, rigorous, and relevant educational program which leads to college graduation and empowers underserved urban students to

become productive, fit, principled citizens in a changing society” (Chairman of the Board of Directors, August 6, 2014). Therefore, as the school enrollment in this southeastern urban middle school continues to show exceptional growth in attendance each year, provisions must be made to address the lack of literacy. With approximately 100 % of the student population identified as living at or below poverty, the school is identified as a Title I campus as are all school campuses in the district (SCDE, 2014). The district has received a significant increase in the amount of Title I funds received over the last three years because of the number of students identified as Title I students in the district. Title I is a federally funded allocation provided to the district based on the number of students receiving free and reduced lunch in an attempt to close the gap between the “haves and have nots” (Title I District Coordinator, September 23, 2014). According to Hughes, Newirk, and Stenhjem (2010, p. 22), “The effects of poverty present major challenges to schools and communities charged with meeting the multiple needs of racially and ethnically diverse youth from high poverty backgrounds.” Hughes et al. (2010, p. 22) suggested students who live in low-income areas lack financial resources, school supplies, and highly qualified teachers and therefore do not have the same school experiences as students who live in high-income areas. Unfortunately, many students living in poverty fare worse academically, do not have access to the best education, and are not offered viable options for improvement (Hughes et al., 2010).

Moreover, effective educators must acknowledge how students’ learning is influenced by not only the SES but community values, background knowledge, talents, as well as language, culture, and family traditions (Elam, Vonzell, & Zork, 2011; Griner &

Stewart, 2013). It is equally important to understand teachers' experiences and perceptions related to training and preparations to teach students from a low SES who struggle with reading and writing (Geisler, Hessler, Gardner, and Lovelace, 2009).

Additionally, the targeted middle school has also had a significant increase in student enrollment within the last three years, which has led to an increase in the number of students taking PASS; the state standards based accountability measure (SCDE, 2012). The target middle school has a diverse student population consisting of approximately 60% African American, 30% Hispanic, and 10% White and other students (State of South Carolina Annual School Report Card, 2014). Considering the results displayed in Table 1 and Table 2, the low SES of the students, and the continuous increase in enrollment, there is an urgency to raise the literacy skills for the middle school students in this southeastern urban school district. For example, when referring to Table 1, over 40% of the student population did not meet proficiency in Reading (English/ Language Arts) for three consecutive years. At the same time, when referring to Table 2, less than 70% of the student population met proficiency in Writing for three consecutive years. In order for middle school students in Surfside School District to achieve academic success in the area of reading and writing, the percentage of students scoring at or above proficiency needs to improve significantly.

For many years, increasing student learning in literacy has been a key goal of instruction, educational research, and educational reform throughout the United States. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson as part of the war on poverty. As a federal policy regarding education, it sought

to level the playing field by providing an equal education for all children. President Johnson's belief and passion for equal educational opportunity came from what he had seen and experienced while visiting public schools (USDE, 2015b).

One reform measure which continues to receive attention is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)/No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a federal reauthorization of the earlier policy enacted in 2001 and signed by President Bush into law in 2002 to hold teachers more accountable, to give the state education system more flexibility, and to encourage more research-based teaching of literacy skills (NCLB, 2002). In January 2015, congress reauthorized ESEA to address the law's moral and legal roots to ensure civil rights and equal opportunity for all children, particularly those from diverse low socioeconomic backgrounds. The reauthorization of ESEA is designed to move our nation closer to the goal of equity in public education for all children. The Obama administration's plan ensures that historically underserved populations are protected, and that educators have the resources they need to prepare all students to succeed in college and careers (USDE, 2015b).

In accordance with the NCLB legislation, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is reported annually for each school district and school using criteria set forth by the United States Department of Education (USDE). The AYP annual report card grade for each school is based on student performance assessment and additional school and district level indicators such as attendance rate, graduation rate, and percent of students tested (USDE, 2014). The student performance indicators are measured or focused on reading, and math achievement as determined by the state assessment.

Moreover, in South Carolina (SC), AYP report cards are posted on the SCDE (SCDE) website for all public school and districts. The purpose of the report card is to “inform the public about the school’s/ school district’s overall performance, assist in addressing the strengths and weaknesses within the school/ district, recognize schools/ districts with high performance and improvement, and evaluate and focus resources on schools with low performance” (SCDE, 2014, para 1). For AYP purposes, the SCDE uses student performance assessments such as the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS), and several more end of course examinations (SCDE, 2014). In July of 2012 and 2013, the SCDE received a waiver from several requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)/ NCLB to replace the former pass/fail system with one that utilized the statewide assessments already in place to measure student performance and growth (SCDE, 2013). The State of South Carolina Annual School Report Card (2013) defines the rating of below average as applying to a school that is in jeopardy of not meeting the standards for progress, suggesting that students will “not graduate with the knowledge and skills necessary to compete successfully in the global economy, participate in a democratic society and contribute positively as members of families and communities” (SCDE, 2013, p. 1). There is not a specific percentage rate that the state should have hit in each of the content areas for 2013 because absolute and growth ratings, established by the state, are based on student achievement across all performance levels for all tested content areas (e.g., Not Met through Exemplary, GCS, 2013). ESEA grades are based on a markedly different calculation using student achievement targets in English/Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies. The state’s goal is to

continually encourage schools to improve student achievement scores. The state sets higher expectations for student performance to show gains in achievement each year (GCS, 2013). Although the schools in the state may not reach the target goal, students who are showing annual gains in performance, are better prepared to compete globally (GCS, 2013).

Locally, the low student performance has triggered concerns from parents, teachers, principals, and board of directors. A principal in Surfside School District indicated in a letter that the consensus among stakeholders is that there is a significant need for action to support students who struggle to meet state performance standards by demonstrating competency on state mandated exams (personal communication, December 3, 2014). The Chairman of the Surfside School District Board of Directors indicated during a school assembly to all faculty and staff that the goal is to prepare these students to read and write effectively so that they can meet the criteria set forth by the SCDE and PASS test in order to graduate from high school and compete in this 21st century workforce and the global economy (personal communication, August 6, 2014). The executive director of the target school also indicated that “the mission of the district is to offer a quality, rigorous, and relevant educational program which leads to college graduation and empowers underserved urban students to become productive, fit, principled citizens in a changing society” (personal communication, August 6, 2014). Unfortunately, there is evidence that there is a problem in Surfside School District with middle school students who are not proficient in literacy skills.

Despite the existing framework for PD in Surfside School District, student literacy achievement has not shown a significant improvement in three consecutive years (SCDE, 2012, 2013, 2014). Therefore, because the PD has not been effective, it was more prudent to explore a deeper understanding underpinning the gap in literacy skills achievement and gather the best instructional practices for teachers on effective ways to teach literacy content to diverse urban middle school students from low SES backgrounds. Hence, this study exploring teachers' and administrators' perceptions regarding literacy instruction was timely and useful to the local setting based on the previous discussion. First I gleaned a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions related to the most effective instructional practices needed to help the students in literacy. From that, I designed an effective PD plan to help teachers raise literacy skills for diverse low SES middle school students and provide all stakeholders with a focus on improving student literacy and achievement.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

According to the middle school literacy/ instructional coach, there may be a gap in practice related to PD training in strategies and skills to address the lack of literacy skills of middle school students from a low SES urban environment who are performing below standards (L. Soroachak, personal communication, April 30, 2015). According to the 2013-2014 School Accountability Report and the district's PASS testing data for the middle school, Surfside Middle School students have not met the expectations of state competency levels in literacy for three consecutive years (SCDE, 2012, 2013, 2014). As

part of the district's strategy to address the gap in student achievement and improve teacher performance, in October of 2012, the district leadership introduced a new PD training system, The System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP), (NIET, 2015).

TAP was created in 1999 by the Lowell Milken Family Foundation to "improve teacher recruitment, retention, motivation, practices, and performance" (NIET, 2015, para. 1). In 2005, Milken launched the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) "to support and manage the TAP System nationally and to foster powerful initiatives" designed to increase teacher effectiveness in the classroom (NIET, 2015, para 2). TAP is currently being utilized throughout the district as a PD system and teacher evaluation tool and is considered the major component of the district's strategic improvement plan to provide uniform structure for teacher development (Principal Burrows, personal communication, January 11, 2015). According to the middle school instructional coach (IC), the PD or "cluster groups" as they are referred to in the TAP system are planned to develop research based strategies in literacy and to analyze the strategies' impact on student learning (NIET, 2014). Teachers within the district are expected to implement the strategies when teaching students across all content areas (L. Soroachak, personal communication, April 30, 2015). In an effort to address the literacy deficit in the district, teachers are taught how to use the TAP rubric in their classroom to teach literacy content across the curriculum in all grade levels based on Common Core State Standards during cluster PD training (L. Soroachak, personal communication, April 30, 2015).

However, a study to explore the PD-training program at the target campus and the teachers' perceptions of the PD training in literacy had never been conducted (L. Sorochak, personal communication, April 30, 2015). Hence, the salience of this project study was to better understand the needs, perceptions, and experiences of the administrator and teachers' PD training related to literacy instruction and student learning. Hence, if the needs, experiences, and perceptions of the teachers and administrators are more deeply understood, stakeholders will have a better understanding of what is influencing middle school students' academic literacy skills and thereby could possibly identify remedies to address this gap in literacy and improve student performance in Reading/ ELA.

The district's board of directors, principals, instructional coaches, and teachers all expressed a concern for the poor student performance based on the Reading/ ELA data for the last three consecutive years (2013/2014 School Accountability Report, October 28, 2014). Consequently, these stakeholders agree that in order to increase student performance in Reading/ ELA, the district must develop a PD plan to meet the annual school goal which states, "Surfside School District will strive for 100% of all students in every class to meet or exceed their Spring MAP Reading goal in 2014- 2015 as measured by MAP Fall to Spring data for grades 5-8." (Dr. Coleman, personal communication, School Accountability Report 2013/2014, October 28, 2014). Also the annual cluster goal for PD states that by the end of the 2014- 2015 school year, teachers at Surfside Middle School will develop specific close-reading strategies to increase student achievement in Reading (L. Sorochak, personal communication, April 30, 2015). Lastly, 100% of all

Surfside Middle School students will achieve sufficient growth in Reading in order to meet their individual student goal as measured by the spring MAP test (Dr. Coleman, personal communication, School Accountability Report 2013/2014, October 28, 2014).

Therefore, the focus of this study was to raise the skills of literacy in diverse low SES middle school students in a southeastern urban school district by providing explicit instructional strategies and literacy skills in PD training. In light of the achievement gap, the district developed and implemented a PD plan for the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade teachers. Since the implementation of PD for Reading/ ELA teachers delivered through the TAP model in this urban school district in South Carolina, no data had been evaluated to determine the perceived effectiveness of the PD training the district has provided, which left district administrators without empirical evidence regarding the value and potential effectiveness of the PD training related to Reading/ ELA instruction. However, as of October 28, 2014, the scores do not reflect improvement. The purpose of this study was to explore the existing PD training in relation to improving student literacy skills and achievement scores and to gather teacher and administrators' needs and perceptions for effective instructional strategies to teach diverse low SES students in Reading/ ELA content. Once I gleaned the needs, perceptions, and experiences of the teachers and administrators, I may use these data to design PD with a focus on improving student literacy and achievement.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

As the school enrollment in this southeastern urban middle school continues to show exceptional growth in attendance each year, provisions must be made to address the

lack of literacy. A Principal in Surfside School District also indicated in a letter dated December 3, 2014, that creating success in the target school is a priority for all stakeholders. According to the National Education Association (NEA), “closing student achievement gaps helps students, empowers educators, and encourages communities” (NEA, 2011, pp. 1-2). Hence, a more in-depth examination of the experiences and perceptions of teachers needed to occur to more deeply understand what is contributing to this lack of literacy skills in this southeastern county school district.

At this time, nationally, school districts’ classrooms are more diverse than any other time in the history of the school’s existence. In fact, researchers state that there will be a steady increase in Hispanic, Asian, Americans, and African American student populations in coming years in the United States public school system. Therefore, as America continues to evolve, race relations can no longer be viewed as simply Black and White but as a melting pot of race, language, and religion (Griner & Stewart, 2013; Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010). Hence, the lack of literacy skills addressed in this study is relevant to the United States because of the increase in the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) and native English-speaking students in this country not meeting the performance criteria for literacy on standardized tests (Curwen, Miller, White-Smith, & Calfee, 2010; Griner & Stewart, 2013). Consequently, the *2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress* (NAEP) (2013) reading assessment reported the overall reading results for public school students given by the National Assessment Governing Board (2014), including students from the target southeastern state, the nation, and the region. Based on the NAEP’s reading scale, the 2013 NAEP report for the overall

performance result of 8th grade students in the target state was an average score of 261. This was lower than that for middle school students across the nation who scored on average 266.

Therefore, in order to address the lack of literacy in student performance in Surfside School District, it was paramount to examine existing administrator and teacher needs, experiences, and perceptions related to strategies for teaching literacy skills to diverse middle school students from a low SES who may learn differently than students living in mainstream America with higher incomes and more resources. Moreover, if these experiences and perceptions are more deeply understood, we will have a better understanding of what is influencing middle school students' academic literacy skills and thereby could possibly identify remedies to address this lack of literacy and improve student performance in reading and writing. Once I identified these best practices, I used them to design PD to assist teachers in becoming better equipped to teach diverse low SES students and to raise student gains in literacy achievement and learning outcomes in this southeastern urban school district.

Definition of Terms

To understand the concept of literacy, instructional coaching, literacy coach, and the impact PD has on literacy instruction, the following definitions were used:

Achievement gap: The difference in the performance between each subgroup within a participating school district and the statewide average performance of the state's highest achieving subgroups in reading/language arts and mathematics, as measured by designated assessments (USDE, 2015).

Andragogy: “The art and science of helping adults learn” in terms of the PD model (Owen, 2002, p. 2).

Collaboration: The systematic process in which teachers, coaches and administrators work together to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve teacher and student learning (NIET, 2012).

Literacy: Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write. Davidson (2010) noted, “The definition of literacy is widely varied throughout the literature, encompassing viewing, listening, speaking, reading, writing, and representing” (p. 246). The SCDE (2015) defines literacy as high-quality instruction provided in reading and writing skills and strategies to increase engaged reading and writing in all classrooms.

Instructional coach/ instructional coaching: An instructional coach is a professional developer who educates professionals on how to use research-based proven teaching methods to help teachers become better practitioners in the classroom and maximize student learning (Barkley & Bianco, 2010; Saphier & West, 2009; Yopp, Burroughs, Luebeck, Heidema, Mitchell, & Sutton, 2011).

Job-embedded PD: Teacher learning that includes regular coaching during the school day and instructional teams that support collaboration and development designed to enhance teachers’ content –specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning (NIET, 2012).

Literacy coach/ reading coach: A literacy coach is qualified as an expert to teach reading content and pedagogy which includes working directly with the classroom teacher to provide research-based strategies geared towards improving students’ reading

and writing skills and teachers' instructional methods (Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010; Blachowicz, Buhle, Ogle, Frost, Correa, & Kinner, 2010; Lockwood, McCombs, & Marsh, 2010).

MAP: The Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) [measurement instrument] is a “computerized adaptive test” which helps teachers, parents, and administrators improve learning for all students and make informal decisions to promote a child’s academic growth. MAP targets student performance growth compared to state norms, which are used to gauge where the average student should be performing. The MAP assessment is a valid tester of student achievement in reading. It is a numerical assessment used to provide information indicating student scores and level of reading proficiency (NWEA, 2014, para. 1).

PD: According to Scher and O’Reilly (2009), PD is an ongoing learning opportunity designed to improve teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement.

TAP: TAP is an acronym for The System for Teacher and Student Advancement. The TAP System is a PD and evaluation program based upon a systematic and explicit rubric with descriptors of good teaching practices (NIET, 2015).

Significance of the Study

Research of this topic was crucial because of the high percentage of students not meeting the criteria for proficiency in literacy on state and federal mandated tests. The PASS data reported on the SCDE (SCDE) website for the target middle school established that over 40% of students have not met the reading grade level standard and

over 30% of students have not met the writing grade level standard in grades 6, 7, and 8 for the years 2012, 2013, and 2014. The result of this project study could be a PD plan to address the lack of literacy skills and knowledge related to Reading/ ELA instruction for students which has the potential to prepare teachers to teach more effectively thereby equipping students with the practical skills necessary to increase student performance on state mandated tests. Based on the data in Table 1 and Table 2, many of the students at the school were unable to pass the literacy part of the state test. However, in order to graduate from high school, these students must ultimately pass these Benchmark tests. Without the skills and knowledge to read and write fluently, these students will not be prepared to graduate from high school or pursue their dreams of having a successful life and career. Based on the previous data, there is a need to improve students' performance in literacy and enhance teacher practices in the Surfside School District. The support given to students, schools, and teachers should include a variety of resources including model lessons, demonstrations, and ways to improve practices of ineffective teachers by providing PD (Geisler et al., 2009; Scher & O'Reilly, 2009; Yopp et al., 2011). The results of this study will provide much needed insight into the instructional procedures by which middle school literacy teachers teach literacy content to the target middle school population. The potential PD plan will be used in conjunction with TAP, the existing PD plan. The goal is to improve teacher instructional practices for teaching diverse middle school students literacy skills, which will ultimately improve student performance in Reading/ ELA content not only in the classroom but also on state, mandated assessments. This is significant to explore and shed light on because if the teachers lack proper training

on how to teach to a diverse student population from low socioeconomic backgrounds then they will ultimately be doing the students in the Surfside School District a disservice by failing to provide them with the most effective education in the area of literacy particularly when teaching reading comprehension skills. In the past, researchers have shown that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds require different teaching strategies compared to mainstream White students in predominately White middle class neighborhoods.

There is a problem with low literacy skills for diverse low SES middle school students at the target school as evidenced by the PASS data reported on the SCDE website (SCDE, 2012, 2013, 2014). Research of this problem and better PD will help to address the problem. Research will increase the prospect of creating social change in the field of education because it has the potential to shed light on the perceptions of teachers related to their preparation, skill and knowledge of how to effectively instruct/teach low SES students in Reading/ ELA content.

The results of this study are important to the students, principals, board members, and parents. These groups are considered the stakeholders because they each have a vested interest in all students at this middle school but the students will be the primary beneficiaries of the study. Insights from this study may aid stakeholders by providing ideas and suggestions to improve student performance in literacy and graduation from high school. Teachers may also benefit from potential PD training designed to address the needs of teachers who instruct high poverty youth in the target middle school. Researchers have shown that the higher degree of education can be a determining factor

in addressing social change and addressing inequities in communities. Therefore, the ultimate goal of this qualitative case study was to understand the needs, perceptions, and experiences of the teachers' PD training in Reading/ ELA at the middle school related to best practices for instruction and achievement of students at the target site in order to design PD to help teachers improve the literacy skills for the target student population.

Research Question(s)

The local problem being identified is set in Surfside School District, an urban middle school district in a southeastern state where a diverse student population from low socioeconomic backgrounds struggles with literacy skills. The problem is evidenced with middle school students in grades six through eight not meeting academic reading and writing competencies on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) for three consecutive years (SCDE, 2014). Over the last 3 years, literacy scores have not increased in Surfside School District despite the fact teachers have been provided ongoing PD on a weekly basis. Therefore, the results of the data might lead one to question if there could be a problem in the way teachers are implementing the PD strategies during their classroom instruction or if the current PD plan is adequately designed to address the needs of the teachers in order to help diverse low SES learners gain literacy skills. Therefore, in order to address the lack in literacy performance in Surfside School District, this research was paramount for examining existing teachers' needs, experiences, and perceptions related to the existing PD framework and how it has prepared them with instructional strategies for teaching reading and writing to diverse low SES middle school

students. The research questions that were explored in this study focused on students identified as diverse low SES and consisted of the following:

RQ1: How do teachers and site administrators perceive the literacy PD has supported teacher personal knowledge and skill development in instructing diverse students in Reading/ ELA content in the target urban middle school?

RQ2: What successful and not successful teaching practices have site administrators and instructional coaches observed in Reading/ ELA following the TAP PD training?

Subquestion 1: What additional supports or resources are needed to support Reading/ ELA skill development of diverse low SES students in the target urban middle school?

Review of the Literature

The literature used to compile this literature review was gathered using Walden University's databases (ERIC, Education Research Complete, and Education: A SAGE Full Text Database) as well as numerous scholarly resources. The literature used included theoretical and research-based sources as well as commercially published books, professional journals, theses, dissertations, and books related to key terms such as *achievement gap*, *literacy*, *PD*, and *instructional coaching*. I conducted several Boolean searches using the key words *literacy development*, *instructional support*, *PD*, *adult learning + theories*, *andragogy*, *adult learning models*. The search for the conceptual framework was narrowed by adding the terms *andragogy* and *adult learning models*.

This review of literature provides information on the conceptual framework of adult learning, PD, the benefit and value of PD, teachers' challenges with instruction, and teachers' challenges with teaching culturally diverse low SES students. These themes were explored in order to address the gap in literacy performance in Surfside School District and examine existing research in order to build a thorough understanding of challenges teachers face when teaching literacy to diverse low SES students.

Introduction

In order to effectively support struggling readers and provide quality literacy instruction to all students, teachers must have the knowledge, skills, and appropriate classroom resources (Allington, 2011; Griner & Stewart, 2013). The past five decades have been characterized by reform with an intense focus on increasing student performance through standards and accountability (Graff, 2011; Milner, 2013). Additionally, increasing student learning in literacy has been a key goal of instruction, educational research, and educational reform throughout the United States (NCLB, 2002). Despite these measures, students still struggle to read and many do not meet proficiency on state standardized tests (SCDE, 2012, 2013, 2014; NAEP, 2011). According to Hughes, Newark, and Stenjem (2010), "The effects of poverty present major challenges to schools and communities charged with meeting the needs of racially and ethnically diverse youth from high poverty backgrounds." Hughes et al. (2010) suggested many students living in poverty fare worse academically, do not have access to the best education, and are not offered the best options for improvement. Thus, experts suggested school districts provide veteran and novice teachers with systemic PD in

literacy content designed to improve instructional practices for diverse low SES students (Graff, 2011). Providing systemic PD designed to improve teachers' classroom instruction will lead to improving student achievement for all learners in spite of their SES (Li & Hasan, 2010; Milner, 2013). Additionally, effective PD training must support adult learners and must acknowledge how low SES might influence student learning (Elam et al., 2011; Griner & Stewart, 2013; Milner, 2013). Therefore, it is imperative to understand teacher's perceptions related to training and preparation to teach diverse low SES students who struggle with reading and writing (Geisler et al., 2009; Graff, 2011; Milner, 2013).

Conceptual Framework

The challenge for the Surfside School District, and similar school districts in the United States, is how to instruct diverse low SES students in order for them to reach proficiency in the content area of literacy with an emphasis on Reading/ ELA as measured by state standardized tests (SCDE, 2014). Researchers suggested that historically, disadvantaged students fare better academically when teachers hold high expectations and provide quality instruction within the classroom (Griner & Stewart, 2013; Milner, 2013). Clearly, literacy is an increasingly important skill for everyday life to access, create, share information and to prepare students to be college and career ready. Researchers indicate an expanded knowledge base of educational theories and a strong philosophical orientation can influence how students are taught in the classroom in several ways (Milner, 2013). This project study primarily utilized Malcolm Knowles'

(1970) andragogy theory and Lev Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory to address the problem.

The first theoretical framework is based on Knowles' (1970) andragogical adult learning model. The term andragogy became popular in the 1960s when referring to educating adults (Merriam, 2009). Although Knowles did not coin the term, Knowles is credited with responsibility for its growth as a key theory (Merriam, 2001). Andragogy differs from pedagogy in that andragogy is learner-centered rather than teacher-centered. In the andragogical approach, the instructor acts as a facilitator of learning by providing academic resources and encouraging the learning process but does not prescribe the learning process (Merriam, 2001; Knowles, 1970). Therefore, the teacher should model the classroom to reflect a constructivist view, which encourages experiential learning where student learning is self-directed and the teacher acts as a facilitator or guide.

Knowles maintained that as adults mature and are actively engaged in the learning process, they become more responsible for constructing their own learning of new concepts. The andragogy theory suggested that the combination of a person's life experiences and the notion of self-construction are the most significant resources that assist adults when learning and teaching new concepts (Knowles, 1970). Knowles suggested that when teachers instruct new concepts and skills in the learning environment, the implementation of the teachers' preferred instructional strategies; they will be influenced by past experiences and practices (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012). According to Knowles et al. (2012) there are several key assumptions about adult learning styles. First, adults need to be informed on why they need to learn the new

material because it makes them feel that they are a part of the decision-making process regarding their learning. Second, because the adult's desire to learn is problem-centered, task-centered, or life-centered, adults are seeking opportunities to connect their learning to their life experience. The newly learned material should help the adult in coping with real-life situations (Knowles et al, 2012). Third, adults are motivated to learn and have a need to be self-directed learners. Fourth, adults need to be directly involved in the learning experience within an atmosphere of mutual respect where the instructor facilitates rather than dictates the learning process (Knowles et al., 2012). Finally, adults seek learning opportunities that have direct relevance to their learning objectives and goals (Knowles et al., 2012). Basically, adults are not only concerned with understanding how to teach the content but why they need to teach the content. Likewise, the stakeholders in Surfside School District are concerned with understanding how to teach literacy skills and why they need to teach literacy skills to diverse low SES middle school students.

Vygotsky's social development theory (1978) promotes learning contexts in which students play an active role in learning. Vygotsky's most influential ideas are those related to zones of development. According to Vygotsky (1978), what a child can do alone lies in the zone of actual development (ZAD), the area where a child is unassisted when completing a task. Vygotsky (1978) believed when the teacher assigns a task and the students successfully complete it without help, they could already do it. Thus, they have been taught nothing. Similarly, constructivists support the belief that when children learn through practical hands-on activities, they integrate prior knowledge with

unfamiliar information to construct new knowledge (Dewey, 1938, 1961; Ultanir, 2012). The place where instruction and learning *can* take place is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Anything that the child can learn with the assistance and support of a teacher, peers, and the instructional environment is said to lie within the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). A term coined by Jerome Bruner (1983) that is associated with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of ZPD and is used to describe this kind of teaching is scaffolding. In the earliest stages of teaching a new concept or strategy, the teacher has the responsibility of creating the type of environment that implements scaffolding in order to support student learning and to develop the students' ability to meet the requirements of the task. The assistance that is provided by a teacher is called scaffolding (Bruner, 1983).

Scaffolding must begin from student's prior experience and build to what is considered hidden or abstract. Vygotskian theory (1978) posits that learning proceeds from the concrete to the abstract. The goal is to equip classroom teachers with instructional strategies or best practices that are sound and readily available to educators to help scaffold students' learning and master these new effective strategies when reading. Unfortunately, due to limited resources, many of the students in Surfside School District have not had the type of learning opportunities many mainstream students in more affluent communities experience in their lives. Therefore, educators must create the type of learning opportunities within and outside the classroom that are experiential in an effort to scaffold students' ability to grasp the desired concepts and/or objectives of the lesson. Undoubtedly, there is a need for learner-centered teaching processes, which

require explicit teaching, scaffolding, and continuous support for improving reading through the middle and high school years. Vygotsky's social constructivism learning theory supports teacher collaboration during PD training designed to develop instructional practices to teach struggling students how to read for understanding. Ideally, teachers and administrators, through job-embedded PD training, learn to infuse social and constructivist principles into their literacy instruction.

Knowles (1970, 2012) and Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical work has been used extensively in PD training courses for teachers in all aspects of education. According to Vygotsky's constructivist theory (1978), teachers in Surfside School District and administrators should collaborate on strategies to address the learning needs of every student while centering the lessons on state standards to create authentic, meaningful and engaging learning experiences to also promote literacy. Researchers have indicated that teachers must acquire an understanding of effective instructional practices to teach all content while demonstrating an understanding of unique learning styles and needs which includes respect for cultural diversity in the classroom (Gardner, 1983; Geisler, et al., 2009, Tomlinson, 2005a, Tomlinson 2005b). Further research and application of educational theory can expand the knowledge base and offer educators a strong philosophical orientation on ways to influence how the students in Surfside School District are taught literacy skills in the classroom. Knowles' andragogical approach is used to support the framework of this project study because Knowles' theory suggested that adult learning should be learner-centered rather than teacher-centered. The PD instructor should act as a facilitator of learning by providing resources to adults who in-

turn use these resources to self-direct their own learning process. In Surfside School District, the learning environment should reflect a constructivist and andragogical approach during PD training in order to help teachers construct, model, and implement the most effective instructional strategies for teaching literacy skills. During PD training, teachers should be given the necessary tools, explicit instruction, modeling, and an opportunity to actively engage in constructing or developing the learning strategy before returning back to teach their respective classroom students. Knowles' andragogy theory provides a framework for the PD training environment, which should be conducive to learning, encouraging, and supportive of teachers using an experiential and self-directed learning approach. Adults need the support of the instructors, instructional coaches, and administrators to develop a mutual level of trust and respect during the PD training in order to be successful, self-reliant, and competent educators.

The primary goal of some school districts is to increase student achievement in literacy. Hence, the need for teachers to remain abreast of how children learn best is crucial to student academic achievement and success in literacy. Richard and Skolits (2009) argued that students' success is directly related to teachers' experiences and expertise within a content area. For example, the more PD-training teachers in Surfside School District receive on how to properly teach literacy content to diverse low SES students, the higher student achievement in learning how to read and write proficiently.

Professional Development

A major component to school reform and improving education is high-quality PD (Biancarosa et al., 2010). Stakeholders and policy-makers must realize that public

education is only as good as the teachers and administrators who work in the system (Biancarosa et al., 2010). Researchers believe that the purpose of PD is to create the conditions under which sufficient levels of knowledge and skill are developed to sustain practice and to provide the conditions that support practice until educators and administrators have fully grasped the objective of the PD and knowledge has been achieved and transfer has occurred (Biancarosa et al., 2010; Popp & Goldman, 2016). Joyce, Showers, and Bennett (1987) suggested almost all teachers and administrators could take useful information back to their classrooms when PD includes four parts:

1. Presentation of theory is the first element of successful training
2. Demonstration of the new strategy
3. Initial practice in the workshop
4. Prompt feedback about their efforts. (p. 84)

Although most PD programs vary widely in their content and focus, the main purpose is to guide professional practices and beliefs in order to bring about change in classroom instruction and in the attitudes of educators and administrators to ultimately improve student learning (Guskey, 2002). Likewise, the goal for the Surfside School District is every teacher and administrator will receive great professional learning as part of the workday and that every student benefits from the expertise of all teachers. According to Scher and O'Reilly (2009), PD is an ongoing learning opportunity designed to improve teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement. The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) defines PD as the continuous cycle of improvement which engages educators in analyzing data, defining learning goals, implementing strategies,

providing coaching, and assessing the effectiveness of PD efforts (NSDC, 2014). Recent research suggested effective PD strategies are only successful when there is a “sufficient infrastructure in place to support it” (Biancarosa et al., 2010; Desimone, 2009; Saunders et al., 2009). In a recent report, “Beyond ‘Job-Embedded’: Ensuring That Good PD Gets Results,” the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) shared a list of core features that need to be in place in order to maximize PD. The list includes a “focus on curriculum and shared instructional challenges; collective participation; opportunities for active learning; sustained duration; and coherence with student achievement goals and other policies” (Kelly, 2012; NIET, 2012, p.1; Strahan, Geitner, & Lodico, 2010). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act as reauthorized by the NCLB Act of 2001 (ESEA), stated that PD should be “high-quality, sustained, intensive and classroom-focused” and “not one day or short-term workshops or conferences”. This amendment clarified what practices qualify for federal and/or state or district funding while stating the PD needs to directly impact the teachers’ immediate classroom practices (Tournaki, Lyublinskaya, & Carolan, 2011). Researchers have suggested that students and adults learn much the same way (Knowles, 1970, 2012; Tomlinson, 200a, 2005b; Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers and students need to receive explicit instructions, scaffolding, modeling, and the opportunity to develop the skills being taught in the classroom. When current instructional strategies are ineffective, PD training should require teachers to revamp how literacy content is being taught to diverse low SES middle school students such as those in Surfside School District in order to increase student achievement scores. Today’s teachers must be willing to adjust to new reforms and new standards. Therefore, school

based PD should be designed to ensure that the learning of educators is relevant to the context of their daily work, providing the impetus for the teacher to apply their learning to their work.

The Benefit and Value of PD

PD is defined by the ESEA (2001) as a comprehensive sustained and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement. According to The National Staff Development Council (NSDC), the definition organizes PD according to the continuous cycle of improvement which engages educators in analyzing data, defining learning goals, implementing strategies, providing coaching, and assessing the effectiveness of PD efforts (NSDC, 2015).

Stephanie Hirsh, Executive Director of NSDC (2015) stated the purpose of PD training is to address two major concerns. The first concern is too few students experience great teaching every day. The second concern is too few teachers receive the quality of PD and teamwork that would enable them to be more effective each day. Educators and administrators can improve instructional practices and student learning outcomes by defining how PD is being implemented in the school environment and professional learning community and by focusing on what each teacher needs based upon their own students and teaching.

Peer collaboration. Another benefit to PD is the opportunity for peer collaboration. Experts suggested that peer collaboration among educators, instructional coaches, and administrators is an essential element of school improvement (Riveros, Newton, & Burgess, 2012). For example, a professional learning community (PLC) is a

school-based learning team consisting of teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators that are engaged in a cycle of continuous improvement. A professional learning community is made of team members who regularly collaborate to meet the needs of the learner through a shared curricular-focused vision based on supportive leadership, a strong, caring infrastructure, a productive environment, and collective decision-making based on the results of student assessment data (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004). The learning team consistently seeks and uses research-based strategies to increase the team's learning in order to improve student achievement (DuFour et al., 2004; Hord, 1997; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009). Professional educators move through the cycle of continuous improvement with collaborative learning in teams where everyone is expected to share what they know through collaborative efforts. Educators share collective responsibility for what students learn and know in order to improve student performance. The NSDC (2015) has stated that every professional educator as a whole is expected to know and understand what works best for their particular situation, student needs and desires for success at the particular school. Student learning needs should drive educators' learning needs and appropriate PD can increase the performance levels of both educators and students.

Functional instructional support. Ideally, PD should be ongoing because the PLC will engage in a continuous cycle of instructional support for improvement. As an integral part of the PLC, coaches consistently seek and use research-based strategies to increase the team's learning. An instructional coach (IC) is a professional developer who educates professionals on how to use research-based proven teaching methods to help

teachers become better practitioners in the classroom and maximize student learning (Barkley & Bianco, 2010; Popp & Goldman, 2016; Saphier & West, 2009; Yopp, Burroughs, Luebeck, Heidema, Mitchell, & Sutton, 2011). Researchers believe that teachers should be able to learn on the job with opportunities for collaboration and individualized support (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010; Popp & Goldman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2009). Therefore, the objective of the instructional coach is to provide teachers with specific feedback to support improvements in their practice. The belief is if educators have the proper instructional coaching, high quality staff development that they find useful, and have more autonomy along with accountability, they will become more highly effective and efficient teacher leaders in the classroom (Marsh, McCombs, & Martorell, 2010; Mintzes, Marcum, Yates, & Mark, 2013).

All teachers can learn and should learn on a daily basis if the school systems provide appropriate and sustained support with a strong PD framework. However, educators have a responsibility to embrace PD, be willing to take responsibility, and hold themselves accountable for their professional learning in order to increase student achievement. The district leaders must also share in the belief that all teachers can learn and will learn on a daily basis and that educators are more effective when they use their minds as active learners and problem solvers. Teachers themselves report that their top priority for PD is learning more about the content they teach; giving high marks to training that is content-specific (Darling-Hammond, Chung, Andree, & Richardson, 2009; Popp & Goldman, 2016). Stephanie Hirsh, Executive Director of NSDC (2015)

asserted that ideally, school districts should promote PD in ways that encourage educators' intellectual development as well as best practices for the classroom to maximize student learning.

In addition to PLCs, some school districts have incorporated the use of literacy coaches to increase the instructional effectiveness of current classroom instruction (Yopp et al., 2011). A literacy coach is qualified as an expert to teach reading content and pedagogy which includes working directly with the classroom teacher to provide research-based strategies geared towards improving students' reading and writing skills and teachers' instructional methods (Blachowicz, Buhle, Ogle, Frost, Correa, & Kinner, 2010; Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010; Lockwood, McCombs, & Marsh, 2010; Mintzes, Marcum, Yates, & Mark, 2013). Professional educators who desire to be literacy coaches must meet specific state criteria and have demonstrated success as a classroom teacher (McCombs & Marsh, 2009; Mintzes, Marcum, Yates, & Mark, 2013). Literacy coaches are viewed as teacher leaders possessing breadth of knowledge in the area of the district's literacy curriculum, state standards, and assessment programs, and have a successful reputation as a facilitator of professional learning (Biancarsosa et al., 2010; Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2009; Gallucci, Devoogt Van Lare, Yoon, & Boatright, 2010; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Mintzes, Marcum, Yates, & Mark, 2013; SCDE, 2014). Researchers believe teachers are likely to keep and use new strategies and concepts if they receive coaching (either expert or peer) while they are trying the new ideas in their classrooms (Knight, 2011; Mintzes, Marcum, Yates, & Mark, 2013; Shidler, 2009; Shidler & Fedor, 2010; Smith, 2012; Yopp et al., 2011).

The System for Teacher and Student Advancement

Clearly the message of current accountability reforms is focused on increasing student achievement for every student (NCLB, 2002; USDE, 2015b). In Surfside School District the main goal is for 100% of the student population to increase learning outcomes in the content area of literacy (personal communication, Laura Soroachak, April 30, 2015). The object of the Teacher and Student Advancement PD training in Surfside School District is to find new instructional techniques for educators to teach students in order to narrow the literacy achievement gap for the diverse low SES middle school student population. Experts suggested that the public school system has an obligation to prepare students academically and socially for college and to equip all students with the skills and knowledge necessary to work and compete successfully in this 21st century global society (NCLB, 2002; USDE, 2015b; Wagner, 2008). Therefore, it is imperative that teachers learn creative strategies to engage all students regardless of their race or SES (Griner & Stewart, 2013). Some teachers state their biggest concern with PD training is it is ineffective; they do not find it practical or they feel it has no impact on student learning outcomes (Darlington-Hammond et al., 2009). Researchers argued that the best approach to PD training should be consistent, job-embedded, on-going regular meetings with opportunities for collaboration, instructional coaching, and individualized support for struggling career teachers (Biancarsosa et al., 2010; Saunders et al., 2009).

Based on recent research by Biancarsosa et al. (2010) and Saunders et al. (2009), job-embedded PD can significantly improve student achievement when there is a strong infrastructure to support the learning environment. According to the report from National

Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET), the Teacher and Student Advancement PD system incorporates collaborative learning teams and instructional coaching to help schools create an infrastructure that supports high-quality PD and ensures that the activities deliver positive results both for teachers and for students (2012). The NIET (2012) explicitly describes how the NIET system ensures consistent results by training administrators, teacher leaders, and establishing protocols for planning and structuring cluster groups (Biacarsosa et al., 2010; Saunders et al., 2009). The NIET (2012) also stated it is not enough for PD training to be job-embedded, invest in instructional coaching, and have regular collaborative meetings. Researchers have found the biggest problem with PD training is the lack of a strong framework to “oversee and monitor it to ensure that it actually positively impacts both teaching and learning” (NIET, 2012, p. 14). According to Hall and Hord (2011), the first task is to identify and remove programs and practices that do not support students in learning well. The next step is to implement a PD system, which promotes quality teaching, which will ultimately increase students’ literacy skills (Hall & Hord, 2011). After successful implementation of the TAP system at the target site, the school district should begin to aggressively focus on increasing students’ scores on high stakes literacy tests. Career teachers and administrators learn ways to implement literacy strategies into the curriculum and then transfer the learning into the classroom. Hall and Hord (2011) stated, “Change is learning”. However, change cannot occur without PD training (Hall & Hord, 2011).

TAP is the existing framework for PD in Surfside School District. When implementing the TAP system, teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and administrators

meet weekly with classroom teachers to discuss teachers' levels of use of the practices. This continuous learning process helps the leadership team to differentiate PD training for the weekly cluster. After the leadership reviews the student data and the student learning goals, master teachers and instructional coaches select research-based strategies to present during cluster to achieve the goals (NIET, 2012). Cluster groups focus on specific goals and solving real problems in student learning rather than wasting time on concepts that are irrelevant to students' needs. Leadership and consistency is crucial because master teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators must examine the data during planning to determine whether the level of support is accurate for teachers and students. According to the NIET (2012), "If the leadership team does not play its role in the cluster cycle then you don't get the improvement for students" (p. 16). The goal is to enable teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators to review where the students are academically based on the data and develop learning outcomes based on the needs of the students. Administrators, instructional coaches, master teachers, and classroom teachers review and also analyze student achievement data and develop differentiated formal learning plans (Tomlinson, 2005a, 2005b) for achieving academic goals (Hall & Hord, 2011). If the administrators, instructional coaches, master teachers, and classroom teachers do not play a role in the cluster cycle, the learning will not transfer to the classroom and student performance will not show significant growth. Desimone (2009) identified a four-tiered framework for evaluating PD programs based on four key questions:

1. Do all teachers experience high-quality PD?

2. Does the PD increase teacher's knowledge and skills?
3. Does the new knowledge and skills translate into new classroom practices?
4. Do the new classroom practices improve student learning? (Desimone, 2009; NIET, 2012, p. 4).

The real issue that needed to be explored is not that teachers are not provided PD training but whether the training being offered was effective at changing teachers' instructional practices or improving student learning outcomes.

Conclusions

Ultimately, in order to meet the goals of NCLB (2002; USDE, 2015) and recent public education reforms designed to narrow the achievement gap, career educators must learn new ways of teaching diverse low SES students (Gulamhussein, 2013).

Gulamhussein (2013) stated, "Schools must consider how teachers learn and adopt new techniques for instruction and tailor the training accordingly" (p. 2). PD training could improve if recent education policy reforms and state standards would encourage teachers and educators to refer to Malcolm Knowles' (1970) andragogy theory and Lev Vygotsky's (1978) *Social Development Theory* as a conceptual framework to address the problem, to engage students in the learning, and by incorporating what students bring to the classroom socially, culturally, and academically. Knowles (1970) and Vygotsky (1978) encouraged teacher collaboration and meaningful classroom discussions. In order to successfully close the literacy achievement gap, schools in Surfside School District may need to implement different practices on how teachers and students learn best and incorporate these theories into their classroom.

As previously stated, researchers have suggested that students and adults learn much the same way (Knowles, 1970; Tomlinson, 2005a, 2005b; Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers and students need to receive explicit instructions, scaffolding, modeling, and the opportunity to develop the skills being taught in the classroom. When current instructional strategies are ineffective, PD training should require teachers to revamp how literacy content is being taught to diverse low SES middle school students such as those in Surfside School District in order to increase student literacy skills and achievement scores. Today's career teachers must be willing to adjust to new reforms and new standards. Recent public education reforms require educators and school districts to implement significant changes in PD training that is transferable to the classroom to continuously improve student performance (Gulamhussein, 2013). The purpose of PD training is to ensure that teachers build the expertise necessary to apply what they learn in the classroom so their students meet pre-established literacy goals. Using TAP, educators and administrators can systematically and continuously sustain student achievement by participating in weekly cluster meetings, utilizing literacy/ instructional coaches, focusing on solutions to specific student needs, establishing explicit protocols to guide PD training, and giving teachers leadership roles in the learning process (NIET, 2012).

Implications

The implications of the research can be valuable in redesigning or implementing a more effective PD training to improve student literacy in Surfside School District for diverse low SES students. Surfside School District serves disadvantaged students who live in poverty stricken communities. Poverty is an issue all over the world that has a

negative effect on millions of people, especially racially and ethnically diverse youth when pertaining to education (Graff, 2011; Hughes et al., 2010; Milner, 2013). The literature review addressed diverse children living in poverty as well as how this problem has an adverse effect on students' education. After analyzing student data, it is evident that Surfside School District is a Title I school district. This means that at least 95% of students live in a home that is considered under the poverty guidelines (SCDE, 2012, 2013, 2014). This issue can severely effect student achievement for reasons such as: lack of nutrition which can effect student participation which directly effects student achievement, no parental involvement due to incarceration or death, students being parents instead of children, birth defects from drug abuse, parental neglect, etc. These elements have the ability to effect student achievement in many ways. Students should be afforded the opportunity to learn to read without adversities and those that are not given that chance usually suffer greatly in academic achievement (NCLB, 2002; Milner, 2013; USDE, 2015c).

Researchers suggested that many times struggling readers find it difficult to comprehend and communicate what they read (Allington, 2011; 2012). As a result, struggling readers tend to give up on learning how to read due to high levels of frustration they experience when they cannot comprehend what they read. Many times when students struggle to read, they also struggle to communicate in writing. In addition to understanding the content of a core of knowledge and skill for students, teachers in Surfside School District need to understand the fundamentals of how diverse students

learn and develop cognitively in order to provide the most effective learning strategies for each student to achieve success.

Surfside School District implemented the TAP system as the major source of PD in response to the problem of low student achievement in literacy. During this qualitative case study, I investigated the impact on teaching practices, teacher perceptions, and teacher and administrators experiences as a result of the implementation of the TAP PD system to address the lack of literacy skills. The qualitative case study has the potential to provide rich qualitative data to inform administrators, master teachers, instructional coaches, teachers, and students pertaining to perceptions of peers in respect to the impact of the current PD training and accompanying learning environment. The findings may offer insight regarding the implementation of new instructional strategies to teach diverse low SES students. Newly designed PD can be useful in addressing the gap in literacy achievement of the target middle school students. Researchers have suggested students perform at their highest potential when presented with “appropriate instruction” that is “evidenced-based” and “related to the cultural values, passions, learning styles, and interest of students” (Williams, 2015). Experts agree positive teacher-student relationships develop when instruction is culturally responsive and engaging (Williams, 2014; 2015). This qualitative case study has the potential to influence social change because it will offer solutions to minimize the achievement gap in literacy, enabling all students a fair chance of competing in this 21st century global society (USDE, 2013, 2015c; Wagner, 2012). From the findings of this qualitative case study, I will design an

effective PD literacy program with a focus on improving student literacy skills and achievement for diverse low SES middle school students in Surfside School District.

Summary

The literacy achievement gap of U.S. students continues to grow especially among diverse subgroups of students living in poverty. The local and national goals are for every student to complete high school, complete a college degree, and become productive citizens in the workforce (U.S. Department of Education, 2013, 2015b, 2015c; Wagner, 2008, 2012). In order to achieve these goals, it is paramount that highly qualified, effective, masterful instructors guide students in learning how to read in engaging, collaborative, and creative learning environments (U.S. Department of Education, 2013, 2015b; Wagner, 2012). Thus, it is of utmost importance for educators to understand how students learn and develop and to provide various learning opportunities adapted to diverse learners that support all students' intellectual, social, and personal development (INTASC Principles, 2015). Ultimately the inability to read and write can result in social, cognitive, and psychological issues in adult life. Therefore it is imperative for the educator to be properly prepared to address any instructional challenges that may exist when students learn to read and begin to develop writing skills within the classroom.

In Section 2 of this project study, I will discuss the specific methodology used to answer the central and sub-questions discussed in Section 1. In addition, I will describe the sampling procedures, data collection, and data analysis procedures proposed to

answer the research questions identified in Section 1 so that the local gap in practice and local problem identified can be further explored.

Within Section 3 of this project study, I will discuss the aspects of the project that will be developed after gaining some insight on the possible answers to the central and sub-questions discussed in Section 1. In addition, I will discuss the description and goals, rationale, review of literature, implementation, and project evaluation of the potential project based on the data collected and analyzed within Section 2. Finally, I will discuss the implications including social change. Within Section 4 of this project study, I will discuss the project's strengths in addressing the lack of literacy skills in Surfside School District. In addition, I will recommend remediation of the limitations to determine alternatives in addressing the problem. Finally, I will reflect and self-analyze on what I learned about scholarship, project development, and leadership and change.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of exploring the needs, experiences, and perceptions of the literacy teachers was to better understand how literacy teachers in the target urban middle school district perceive the implementation of literacy content and use of instructional best practices to teach literacy content to diverse low SES middle school students in a southeastern urban community. This qualitative case study research design was used to investigate the needs, experiences, and perceptions professional educators and administrators have regarding PD training and instructional practices. Therefore, in order to address the gap in literacy skills in Surfside School District, this research was paramount for examining existing administrators and teachers' experiences and perceptions related to PD training and how it has prepared them with instructional strategies for teaching reading and writing to diverse low SES middle school students. The research questions explored in this study focused on students identified as diverse low SES and consisted of the following:

RQ1- How do teachers and site administrators perceive the literacy PD has supported their personal knowledge and skill development in instructing diverse students in Reading/ ELA content in the target urban middle school?

RQ2-What successful and not successful teaching practices have site administrators and instructional coaches observed in Reading/ ELA following the TAP PD training?

Sub question 1: What additional supports or resources are needed to support Reading/ ELA skill development of diverse low SES students in the target urban middle school?

Within Section 2 of this project study, I discuss the methodology used to determine the findings to the research questions discussed above. I employed a collective case study approach. Utilizing the collective case study approach allowed for a rich thick description of the experiences and perceptions of the middle school literacy teachers in Surfside School District.

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

The research design and approach for this qualitative research study was a methodology that derived from sociology and anthropology and adapted to the educational setting (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative researchers use an inductive method of reasoning to focus on a person, people, or an event in the field or in its natural setting (Creswell, 2009; Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle, 2010). When using the qualitative research approach, researchers observe routine behaviors and attempt to give voice to feelings and perceptions of the participants in the study (Creswell, 2009). Participants for qualitative research are selected through purposeful sampling because they may be able to provide essential information that is key to the study. Another important characteristic of the qualitative approach is that researchers collect data through observations, interviews, and document analysis and then summarize the findings primarily through narrative or verbal means (Creswell, 2009). The qualitatively based research questions in this project study were based on inductive reasoning to focus on meaning and

understanding. I utilized inductive methods of data collection such as recording observations, interviews and document analyses to discern how teachers' needs, experiences and perceptions influence classroom instruction. The major goal of this qualitative research study was to provide an in depth descriptive analysis of a bounded case study of literacy teachers and administrators in an urban middle school district located in the southeastern part of the United States. Research of this topic was crucial because of the need to raise the literacy skills for diverse low SES middle school students in this school district who had low literacy skills for three previous school years. Hence, this case study was designed to address the achievement gap in literacy skills of diverse low SES students in Surfside School District.

One of the most common qualitative approaches is the case study (Lodico et al., 2010). "Case studies usually focus on small groups or individuals within a group and document that group's or individual's experiences in a specific setting" (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 15). Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p. 59) also noted that a case study is a research design that seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of "one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event". According to Yin (2014) and Creswell (2012), the use of a case study is an appropriate design for the exploration of a central phenomenon which is the middle school teachers' perceptions related to best instructional practices for teaching literacy skills and related literacy PD in the target urban school district. Therefore, this collective case study was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the needs, experiences and perceptions of the middle school teachers and administrators within this case study by collecting multiple forms of data, such as

interview data, observational data, and documents (Creswell, 2012). Case studies differ from other studies because they are focused on a bounded system, meaning there is a limit to the number of participants who could be interviewed or observed during the data collection process of the study (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 1998).

The purpose of this case study was to explore the needs, perceptions, and experiences of literacy teachers and administrators of diverse low SES middle school students in the target district in relation to the best instructional practices for teaching literacy skills and related literacy PD. Additionally, the case study was used to seek possible reasons why the students' literacy skill deficits persisted despite the fact teachers had been provided years of PD in explicit literacy instruction on a weekly basis. As the primary instrument for data collection, I interviewed a purposeful sample of teachers and administrators using qualitative individual case studies to discern teachers' perceived needs to teach literacy to low SES middle school students in Surfside School District.

A qualitative collective case study approach was used to explore the needs, experiences and perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the PD training and instructional practices of literacy teachers in the target school district. According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010), the major goal of qualitative research is to provide a detailed understanding of a limited setting, group, or person using rich, thick descriptions, but it also probes deeper into how students learn best and how to achieve desired learning outcomes. According to Creswell (2012, p. 465), an instrumental case will serve the purpose of "illuminating a particular issue" and explain reasons why it is crucial to the success of students to become proficient in literacy. The study was problem

based and the qualitative research design of collective case study worked best with this problem-based research (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, the rationale for using the collective case study was to design effective PD training for instructional practices in the content area of literacy based on the needs of middle school career teachers and students in this southeastern urban school district. The qualitative collective case study approach worked best because it allowed me to formulate a hypothesis only after I interviewed teachers, the instructional coach, and administrators. As Merriam (2009) suggested, through this systematic method of inquiry, I learned several things about the needs, experiences, perceptions, and best instructional practices of the middle school literacy teachers in this urban community in the Southeastern state while attempting to address the problem. The investigation focused on the teacher's needs, perceptions, and experiences of how to promote literacy success for diverse low SES urban middle school students. The ultimate goal was to inform teacher practice through several forms of data collection such as observations and interviews in order to deepen the understanding of how to effectively implement literacy instruction to diverse middle school students and to promote student growth related to literacy.

I used a qualitative case study research design to substantiate the proposed research questions and chosen problem for this qualitative research study. This was a collective case study using multiple heterogeneous (maximum variation) sample cases in order to further investigate the central phenomenon of increasing student achievement in literacy skills for diverse low SES middle school students. To align with the chosen design and approach, middle school literacy teachers and administrators were invited to

participate in this study in order to understand teacher's needs, experiences and perceptions related to PD training and instructional practices for students who struggle with reading and writing.

The qualitative case study approach was best suited for this project study for several reasons. First, this case study focused on the middle school teachers and the PD in an urban school district to determine how teachers utilized instructional strategies to improve the literacy skills of the middle school students and decrease the achievement gap in academic performance. Secondly, the case study allowed me to get close to the teachers and administrators in the natural setting of the middle school thereby providing a rich, thick detailed description of the setting through observing and asking questions.

Other research approaches were considered but not chosen for the following reasons. First, a phenomenological design is a broad approach where the researcher would seek to understand the essence of a lived experience regarding some phenomenon or human condition (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This was not an appropriate design because I was not seeking teachers' perceptions specifically related to training and preparation for students who struggle with reading and writing. Secondly, the grounded theory is useful when systematic data collection and analysis processes are used to explain the actions of people in order to develop a theory, which was not an appropriate design for this study because I was not attempting to build theories (Yin, 2014). Rather, my focus explored a central phenomenon in order to more deeply understand the nature of the phenomenon of literacy achievement for middle school students (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). According to Creswell (p. 469), ethnography would not work because I did

not have long-term access to participants, nor were the participants considered a culture-sharing group, meaning having “shared behaviors, beliefs, and language”. Lastly, the action research design was not an appropriate choice because my study was not designed to have the teachers immediately change their instructional methods but to glean from the teachers their best instructional practices for teaching literacy to diverse low SES middle school students (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Therefore, based on this analysis of other research methods, using a qualitative collective case study was the most appropriate design for my research study.

Literacy teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators must collaborate to help improve instructional processes for the target middle school teachers in order to increase the literacy skills of the students. Literacy coaches, teachers, and administrators all work collaboratively guided by their shared experiences and knowledge to meet the literacy needs of all students. Therefore, I conducted this qualitative collective case study to learn more about the experiences and perceptions of the teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators involved in the implementation of the existing PD training to improve literacy skills for the target population. Through this qualitative collective case study research, I specifically explored how the teachers, instructional coach, and the administrators think about the current PD framework for teaching literacy. In addition, I successfully elicited and subsequently coded participants’ perceptions regarding PD and the use of resources designed to increase instructional support to promote literacy achievement for diverse low SES urban middle school students during a semistructured

interview (Creswell, 2012, Yin, 2014). Therefore, a collective case study design aligned with the purpose of this research study.

Participants

Sample Size

The setting for this study is in a diverse low socio economic public urban school district, Surfside School District, in South Carolina. The target school is set in a small charter school district comprised of one elementary school campus and a middle/ high school early college campus governed by a local board of directors comprised of area citizens and business people, and parents of the students. The school district is accountable for meeting state standards, federal mandates as well as fulfilling the guidelines of its charter. The school district receives over \$1 million in Federal funding through Title I to increase the reading and math achievement scores. The student population is approximately 60% Black, 30% Hispanic or Latino, and 10% white and other (SCDE, 2015). There are approximately 1104 students enrolled in the school district and one hundred percent of the students receive free lunch. More specifically, there are approximately 635 students enrolled at the elementary grade levels (K-5), approximately 282 middle school students (6-8), and approximately 187 high school students (9-12) enrolled in Surfside School District. Using a qualitative heterogeneous multiple case study design, I focused on the middle school site in Surfside School District.

Participants Description

During the 2014-2015 school year, there were approximately 57 teachers employed within the target school site. The target sample for this study was middle school literacy teachers, the instructional coach, and administrators. There were approximately 15 middle school teachers employed at the target site. All middle school teachers are charged with teaching close reading skills through the content areas as part of daily instruction for the target school (Personal communication, L. Sorachak, Instructional Coach, 7-15-15). Close reading describes, in literary terms, the careful, sustained interpretation of a brief passage of text while paying close attention to individual words, syntax, and the order in which sentences and ideas unfold as students are engaged in reading which leads to deeper comprehension of the text (Boyles, 2012). Approximately 15 middle school teachers and administrators were initially invited to participate via electronic mail by the Executive Director of the District ensuring that it was clear that the participants would need to email me directly to express interest in participation (Appendix B and Appendix C). However, the sample was reduced to seven case study participants who voluntarily agreed to be in the study on the basis of being in the target district and if they meet the criteria specified below. Creswell, (2012), Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, (2006) and Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013), suggested that only a few cases are necessary in qualitative research studies when selecting participants because generally, the fewer the participants the deeper the inquiry per individual. Fewer participants allowed me to gather thicker descriptive data that was coded into emerging themes about each participant at the target site (Creswell, 2012;

Guest et al., 2006; Marshal et al., 2013). In keeping my sample small, I was able to engage in deeper inquiry with each participant.

Criteria for selection of participants. Administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers were selected for this study because of their specialized knowledge and expertise in literacy education and leadership at the middle school level. The participants in this project study were all African American and consisted of four middle school literacy teachers, one middle school principal, one instructional coach, and one executive administrator who responded to the initial letter of invitation. Subsequently, the seven respondents who volunteered were electronically sent the applicable consent form and demographic survey questionnaire (Appendix E -I) (Lodica et al., 2010). In order to provide insights into the effects and influences of the TAP PD training on instructional practices of the middle school teachers and instructional coach, a convenience sample best served to illuminate each case in the target school district (Creswell, 2008; Yin, 2014). The primary criteria for selecting the participants was as follows: (a) Participants must have taken part in TAP PD training in Surfside School District, and (b) Participants must have actively participated in lesson planning for Surfside School District's literacy PD trainings. It was not necessary to use additional criteria because no more than seven participants volunteered to participate in the project study. The demographic breakdown of the participants is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of Basic Demographics of the Participants

Participants	Education	School Role	MS Experience in Literacy
Participant 1	Master's	Principal	15 years
Participant 2	Master's	Instructional Coach	28 years
Participant 3	Master's	7 th Grade Teacher	6 years
Participant 4	Master's	6 th Grade Teacher	2 years
Participant 5	Bachelor's	5 th Grade Teacher	2 years
Participant 6	Master's	7 th Grade Teacher	1 year
Participant 7	Master's	Administrator	20 years

Note: N=7; MS=Middle School.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

I gained approval for the study from the district offices' executive director, who functions as the research administrator for Surfside School District before I accessed participants or conducted the data collection at the target site. I secured the Executive Director's signature on the letter of cooperation specifying Surfside District's agreement to participate in the project study (Appendix D). The official letter of cooperation was electronically signed by the Executive Director of the school district granting permission for access to the participants and target school for the project study via email (Appendix D).

After receiving the approval letter of cooperation, I was also granted approval (# 05-13-16-0360453) from Walden University's Internal Review Board (IRB) through completion of the IRB application. After receiving approval of the IRB research application, I electronically shared the IRB approval and approval number with the

Surfside District executive director. Next, I arranged for a meeting with the Executive Director of Surfside School District to review the purpose of the study and answer any relevant questions or concerns. The executive director agreed to initially electronically distribute the invitation to participate letter to each middle school teacher, instructional coach/ master teacher, and administrator of the targeted middle school within the school district on my behalf, ensuring that it was clear that the participants would need to email me directly to express interest in participation. Once the participants were selected, given an overview of the study and a description of the project, permission to participate in the study was granted through an electronically signed informed consent form (Appendix E and F). Upon obtaining informed consent from the respondents, including communication via e-mail of data collection procedures and the participants' voluntary role in the study, I worked to establish a researcher-participant relationship. A researcher-participant relationship ensured all individuals felt comfortable sharing their experiences, perceptions, and views about PD and their best instructional practices for teaching literacy content to diverse low SES middle school students.

Establishing a Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

According to Creswell (2012), purposeful sampling was logical because the target school and respondents were intentionally selected to participate in the research study. First, in order to gain access to the participants, a detailed formal letter of cooperation was electronically sent to the Executive Director of Surfside School District via email. As previously stated, the letter of cooperation (Appendix D) requested approval to enter the middle school facility and classrooms where I conducted the study. It explained the

purpose of the study, the data collection procedures, and gave an overview of the project study. The responsibilities of the participants were also described in the applicable letter of participation (Appendix B and C) and applicable informed consent form (Appendix E and F) obtained from each participant. As the researcher, I was the primary instrument for gathering data; therefore, my goal was to establish a trustworthy relationship with the participants in the study (Merriam 2009). I achieved a researcher-participant relationship by obtaining approval to conduct research from Surfside School District and Walden University IRB, in addition to the informed consent from potential participants.

Once permission to conduct research and collect data within the target school was granted by the Executive Director of Surfside School District and Walden University IRB, I emailed an invitation to participate letter (Appendix C) and informed consent form (Appendix E) to the Executive Director of Surfside School District. The Executive Director of Surfside School District served as the initial conduit to electronically distribute the invitation to participate letter to the principals, instructional coaches, and middle school literacy teachers. After checking the results of the invitation to participate letters, I then emailed respondents the applicable consent form and the demographic questions incorporated as part of the questionnaire each group was asked to complete (Appendix G- I). The demographic survey/ questionnaire was used to provide the researcher with the background information of the potential participants, personal experiences and perceptions along with their consent to participate. This background information included the participant's gender, highest level of education, years of middle school experience, and current role in the district. Once the consent form and

demographic survey/ questionnaires were returned, I proceeded to personally contact each potential participant via separate email who completed the electronic consent form and demographic survey/ questionnaire to schedule a date, time, and location to conduct the interview and, when applicable, observations (Appendix J and K). A total of nine respondents responded via electronically to sign the documents necessary to participate in the study. However, only seven participants met the criteria specified in the invitation to participate letter.

Any previous biases concerning the study were controlled by following the pre-established data collection protocols (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2012). Before interviewing the participants, I defined my role of researcher as a listener and not as a judge. As the primary instrument for gathering data, I built trust and established a trusting relationship with the participants in the study, which allowed for the participants to feel comfortable enough to explicitly answer the interview questions. I followed a pre-established set of interview questions with a few probing questions to illicit explicit feedback from the participants (Appendix L). I was attentive to the participants during the interview and observation to establish rapport and to assure participants that the information shared was valuable to the study. By previously exploring my personal experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon, I was better able to address any personal prejudices or assumptions. At the same time, I was aware of my personal experiences, biases, prejudices, and assumptions and addressed them accordingly as not to impede the data collection process (Merriam, 2009). Likewise, I valued the time, the feedback, and was willing to address the needs of the participants before, during and after the data

collection process in order to develop a more productive researcher-participant working relationship (Merriam, 2009).

Participant confidentiality. Participant confidentiality was of the utmost importance. I protected the participants by communicating consent forms and notifications via email to avoid paperwork or verbal exchanges. Once the respondents agreed to participate in the research study via email or by signing the consent form (Appendix E- F), an observation and interview time and location was scheduled (Appendix J- K) that would not interfere with their daily instructional routines. The interview took place in a private setting such as the classroom or conference room. The participants were expected to respond to emails, to schedule interviews, to ask questions, to share perceptions and concerns, and to share documents. In addition to email, if a participant had any questions before the study, they could contact me via telephone. All data or documents collected, consent forms, and recorded interviews from the study are being stored under lock and key in a secure file cabinet in my home. Communication, selection criteria, and subject participation conformed to the standards of Walden University's IRB. The IRB determined if all ethical issues were considered before data collection to ensure all potential participants were protected from harm.

Protection of participants. As evidence that I fully understand the ethical protection of all participants, I obtained a certificate from The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research. As an elementary teacher, my role in the district did not directly influence my interpretation of participants' responses. I have never been a middle school teacher. I have never supervised middle school teachers and I

have never had access to daily middle school literacy instruction. The middle school teachers are not at the site where I teach.

Although the respondents were given a formal consent form before data collection, I also explained verbally the objectives, expectations, and procedures of the data collection process. I reiterated verbally and in a written statement that participants had the right to refuse to participate in the research project study at any time without any negative consequences or repercussions. Respondents were informed and reassured verbally and in the formal consent statement that their identity would not be used or revealed at any time and they would not be asked to provide their name on any survey documents. I replaced the names by sanitizing the data with a number and assigned each participant a number (from 1-7). I used a corresponding number for each interviewee to code the data to the transcription. Participants remained anonymous throughout the duration of the project study. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities when reporting the findings within this project study. The identity of the participants, as well as any identifying factors will be kept confidential. The data will not be accessible to any additional individuals and will be stored on a password-protected computer in my home. Additionally, all data collected will be stored using a memory apparatus or in the researcher's locked briefcase until transferred to a secure file cabinet in the privacy of my home. Every attempt was made to ensure that these data were kept confidential throughout the duration of the project study. There were no projected risks associated with participation in the study and vulnerable participants were not included. I took measures to routinely self-evaluate and minimize any personal or unforeseen bias by

routinely writing my feelings in a personal reflection journal during this study.

Participants were informed that results and findings of the project study would be made available at a future date. All electronic and nonelectronic data will be stored for five years then be destroyed per Walden University protocol.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative data consists of interview-based direct quotations, opinions, knowledge, experiences, perceptions, and observation-based descriptions of actions and behaviors (Merriam, 2009). The most common form of data collection in the field of education is the interview (Merriam, 2009). The data collection process for this study consisted of a demographic questionnaire, observations, semi-structured one-to-one interviews using the open-ended interview protocol, and the review of archival documents. The archival documents requested and reviewed from the middle school participants included: (a) a sample of current school year's lesson plans and (b) a list of the participants' current school year PD with artifacts used in training whether formal or informal, (c) student learning objectives (SLOs) for the current year. Although the archival documents did not allow me to explore teachers' perceptions, the lesson plans and PD outlines showed me student-learning objectives and specific instructional strategies used in some of the middle school literacy classes.

In this case study design, the qualitative data collection procedures used were most appropriate for collecting evidence of administrators and literacy teachers' needs, experiences, and perceptions of the PD with regards to the best instructional practices for teaching literacy content (Lodico et al., 2010). The rationale for using the qualitative case

study design was to determine the effectiveness of the PD for instructional practices in the content area of literacy for all middle school teachers in the diverse low SES urban school district. The inductive data collection methods consisted of reviewing seven demographic questionnaires, conducting four classroom observations and seven semi-structured one-on-one interviews, and reviewing archival documents provided to me by the participants which added to the descriptive nature of this qualitative case study analysis (Merriam, 2009).

Questionnaire. Initially, participants were asked to answer a demographic survey and questionnaire, which was attached to the consent form via email during the informed consent process. Data were collected through the questionnaire to glean information about the participants' past, current, and future plans for utilizing the PD resources and the instructional coach in assisting with classroom instruction. Participants were asked to complete short closed-ended questions about their particular demographics relevant to the study prior to the observation and interview. Collecting the demographic and background information, job description, and responsibilities prior to the interview allowed the interviewer to focus on the participants' needs, experiences, and perceptions (Merriam, 2009). The demographic/questionnaire (Appendices F-H) elicited background information such as (a) highest level of education, (b) how many years they have taught in the middle school, (c) the subjects they currently teach, (d) how often they meet for PD, (e) how often they meet with the instructional coach, and (e) if the PD and/or instructional coaching has been effective in improving instructional practices for teaching literacy to diverse, low SES middle school students.

Observations. According to Creswell (2012), observation is the process of collecting firsthand information through observing individuals at a research site. Before interviewing the participants, I observed each classroom teacher regarding literacy instructional practices being used by the teacher during classroom instruction. In this case study, I conducted four, 60 minute, non-participatory observations within each participant's classroom during literacy instruction to observe teachers' behavior and instructional strategies as they related to improving literacy skills. During each observation, descriptive and reflective fieldnotes were recorded on an observational protocol (Appendix M). For example, I observed and recorded notes about the daily lesson, the participant's classroom instructional strategies, content, activities and materials used to achieve the objective of the lesson. In addition, I reflectively noted if the students and teacher were actively engaged in the lesson. These notes were included in a qualitative database to triangulate and corroborate interview data with archival documents during data analysis (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014).

Researchers suggest that an advantage to conducting observations is that it allows the researcher to see the participant in their natural setting utilizing daily routines and instructional procedures (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) noted, usually the observer is more likely to notice teaching practices that have become routine to the participant. An advantage of conducting the observations before the interviews was that it allowed me to see the instructional practices being used in the classroom setting which supported the responses from the post-interview (Merriam, 2009).

For the purpose of this qualitative case study, I arrived to each participant's classroom a few minutes prior to the agreed time and date. Each participant made me feel welcome in their classroom and offered me a seat near the back of the classroom where I could easily observe the teacher's methods and instructional strategies as they relate to teaching literacy content. I observed the type of lesson being taught and whether the teachers' behaviors or actions were indicative of he or she being knowledgeable, competent, and confident in teaching reading and writing content to diverse low SES middle school students. I conducted a non-participatory observation within each participant's classroom for one 60-minute class period. Individual classroom observations were scheduled via e-mail prior to the interview and observation. Observations were conducted with each participant during the mutually agreed upon time and location on a date prior to the participants' interview. During the observation, I recorded rich, descriptive and reflective field-notes on an observation protocol (Appendix M). The observation notes were numbered to correspond with the identifying number during the interview process (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). Therefore, the assigned numeric pseudonym remained the identifying number of the participant throughout the duration of the data collection processes including the interviews and obtainment of the archival documents. The assigned numeric pseudonym was also written on the top of observation protocols, interview protocols, and archival documents. At the conclusion of each observation, I confirmed the previously scheduled interview date, time, and location. Soon after the conclusion of each observation, I electronically recorded the data in a narrative form within a case study database so that the data could be coded, analyzed,

stored in a password protected file on my home computer and retrieved during the analysis process or after the research was complete (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014).

Interviews. Interviewing teachers, instructional coaches, and site administrators provided a significant aspect of data to determine teachers' needs, experiences, and perceptions of the PD for best literacy instructional practices. Each interview did not exceed 60 minutes. The interview protocol (Appendix L) was used to inform participants of the initial questions which were asked in the semi-structured interview format (Lodico et al., 2010). The interview questions included general information about PD, specific comments about literacy coaching, and changes in practices as a result of PD trainings. Interviews were used to gather information regarding the participants' needs, experiences, knowledge, and perceptions about PD for literacy instruction. The majority of the questions were values and opinion based or experience and behavior questions, all of which are acceptable types of interview questions for qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). I reiterated that all names and identifying details would be kept confidential in order to protect anonymity and elicit open, meaningful, and honest responses. I informed participants that they could withdraw from the interview or refuse to answer questions that made them uncomfortable at any time without repercussions. The questions asked participants how they perceived teaching and learning had been impacted by the district PD literacy trainings. This type of information cannot be determined by observations alone (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) stated, the most common way to record interview data is to tape the interview in addition to taking notes to ensure accuracy is preserved for analysis. During the interview, I probed beyond the protocol to

gather more information about the needs of the teachers, best instructional practices, experiences, and meanings by asking the participant to clarify any statements that may be considered ambiguous or unclear. While conducting the interviews, I recorded and transcribed all interviews immediately to ensure accuracy, maintain ethical standards, and to minimize researcher bias (Merriam, 2009).

Interviews were supplemented with a primarily open-ended questionnaire (Appendices G-I) completed by the participants prior to the interview. Creswell (2012) suggested using open-ended questions because the participants will be more likely to provide deeper, richer responses based on their unique experiences. I had a panel consisting of a National Board Certified principal and a TAP Master teacher from a different school campus to review the questions for the interview protocol (Appendix J) prior to beginning the interview process in order to edit any questions deemed confusing or ambiguous (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) noted, good questions are clear and unambiguous while being sensitive to class, cultural, and gender differences. I asked one administrator and one master teacher to review and provide feedback regarding the quality of the interview questions. I edited and revised my questions as needed based upon verbal and written feedback so that clear and reliable responses were obtained.

Individual interviews were scheduled via email or telephone after all participants' observations were completed for whom informed consent was secured. Each interview took place at a mutually agreeable time and location but did not take place during classroom instructional time. Each interview was numbered to correlate with the observation participants to ensure that the participants' identity was kept confidential

throughout the study. I verbally informed the participants that the interview would be recorded. In addition, I used the interview protocol paper (Appendix J) to write responses and field-notes as suggested by Creswell (2012) and Yin (2014). All data were transcribed verbatim to minimize any unethical issues such as deception, confidentiality or risks that might harm the participants, and to ensure accuracy during data analysis.

Documents. Archival data were requested from each participant to provide the researcher with an additional source of information. Archival documents can assist in validating data collected during the interview and observation process (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014). For the purpose of this study, the archival documents requested from the middle school literacy teachers included: (a) samples of 2015- 2016 school year lesson plans, (b) a list of the PD trainings attended for the current year, and (c) samples of student learning objectives (SLOs) for the current year. Lesson plans and SLOs were included as a component of the district's requirements and were viewed and analyzed in order to provide information that addressed the teacher practices and instructional strategies related to literacy instruction and to augment the data collected through interviews and observations. Although archival data did not allow me to explore teachers' perceptions or experiences, documents did reveal learning activities that involved best literacy instructional practices, which tied in with answering the research questions. I requested each participant to provide the typed or photocopied archival documents to me at the time of the interview. In addition, I reviewed sample district PD documents pertaining to literacy instruction. These archival documents were triangulated with the

interview, and observational data. All identifiable data, such as names of teachers and schools were removed from the archival documents.

Lastly, I used various techniques to collect data from teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches in order to solicit their perceptions and experiences about the professional training and best instructional practices for teaching literacy skills as stated in the research questions. The goal was to promote gains in literacy skills for diverse low SES middle school students in Surfside School District, an urban school district. The rationale for using the qualitative case study design for this study was to determine the effectiveness of the PD trainings for instructional practices in the content area of literacy for all middle school teachers in the target school district and to address the research questions in this study.

System for Keeping Track of Data and Emerging Understanding

In order to organize the data collected from the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, and archival documents, field-notes and journal reflections were written during and after each data collection phase to monitor the process of data collections as well as analyze the information (Merriam, 2009). Reflections were written immediately following each interview and observation to record thoughts, behaviors, and reactions (Creswell, 2012). Field-notes regarding each of the data collection phases were organized by highlighting key words, quotes, and emerging themes, and understandings. Notes and reflections regarding each interview and observation were recorded on an interview protocol, observation guide, and a protocol transcript. I also kept track of archival documents in a password protected computerized file. According to Merriam

(2009), member checking is a common strategy in ensuring internal validity and credibility. I was the primary instrument for collecting data. Therefore, I encouraged participants to read transcripts and make corrections where necessary. The participants were given a copy of the transcriptions and the researcher's interpretations of the interviews and observations to make comments and/or necessary corrections. Member checking and debriefing were valid methods to assure participants that there were no judgements or negative thoughts based on any experiences or perceptions revealed during the questionnaires, interviews, and observations. Member checking served as a safeguard against biases, and ensured internal validity and credibility (Merriam, 2009).

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

I used a convenience sample of teachers and administrators from one location, Surfside School District, to conduct the interviews and observations. I utilized a readily available classroom or office within the school, mutually agreed upon by the participants, to conduct the interviews. All interviews were conducted in a quiet and private location and did not exceed 60 minutes (Creswell, 2012). Observations took place at a mutually agreed upon date in the teachers' classroom and did not exceed a 60 minute class period.

Role of the Researcher

I have been employed within Surfside School District for eight years as an early childhood and elementary education teacher. Therefore, I believe that there were some preconceived notions, perceptions, and biases that I brought to the project study that were relative to the topic of literacy. As the primary instrument in the research, certain beliefs and dispositions that I held as a teacher, might have affected the data collection process

and data analysis. As a second grade literacy teacher in this poverty stricken urban community, I saw firsthand the effects that poverty could have on the education of children who have no other choice than to live in these communities. I felt that I had some biases for wanting to see those strong-willed, resilient middle school students succeed in spite of their circumstances.

Secondly, I taught literacy so I understood the struggles that many diverse low SES students were having when it came to reading and writing. More than 50% of the classes in which I taught contained students who were reading below grade level in this urban school district. In response to the urgent need to address this gap in literacy, I felt that I had a grave responsibility to help those students to not only succeed in school academically, but more importantly, to teach them how to succeed in life.

Moreover, although I do not teach middle school literacy or have ever been employed in a middle school, I have been certified as a highly qualified educator to teach early childhood and elementary literacy within the public school system for 14 years. Consequently, I endeavored to acknowledge my hidden biases in a personal reflection journal in order to minimize the effects my teaching experiences and perceptions had on the project study.

Finally, I was the primary instrument for gathering data (Merriam, 2009). I did not work at the target school nor did I ever work with the participants. Therefore, there were no conceived conflicts of interest or perceived coercion to participate due to any existing or expected relationships between the participants and the researcher. Moreover, I maintained a neutral position when interviewing and observing participants. I did not

advise the participants on how to answer the interview questions or offer my personal opinions. I relied on the interview protocol and adhered to the pre-established questions to avoid biases and unethical problems. I practiced showing genuine respect and attentiveness for each participant during the interview and observation. During the data collection and analysis phase, the participants had the opportunity to review the results and check for accuracy of the transcribed data.

Data Analysis

The goal of this qualitative case study was to investigate the needs, experiences and perceptions of the middle school literacy teachers, instructional coach, and administrators in regards to the literacy PD and its impact on their instructional practices when teaching diverse low SES students. When utilizing the qualitative case study approach, the inductive process is characteristic of analyzing qualitative data (Merriam, 2009). The data analysis consisted of specific analytic techniques of axial coding and categorizing the collected data. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, observation notes, and archival documents, and other materials to enable the researcher to come up with findings. The data analysis focused on the experiences and perceptions of the middle school literacy teachers, administrators, and literacy instructional coach during the process of implementing PD training with the goal of increasing literacy gains in student achievement.

In order to ensure accuracy and credibility, the data from the observations and interviews were transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft word document and stored in a

protected computer. Then the data were prepared for coding after each observation and interview. The data analysis process was done simultaneously with the data collection process.

The first step in the process was to organize and prepare the data for analysis. This involved transcribing interviews, typing field notes that were bracketed in the margin of the interview protocol, and sorting and arranging the data into sections. Secondly, I analyzed each transcript and interpreted all responses by carefully reading and rereading sections of the transcribed data to reflect on the information and to get a sense of its overall meaning (Creswell, 2009). Then the transcribed data were divided into sections to better identify emerging themes, patterns, and commonalities responsive to the research questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

After a thorough analysis of the data, I used axial coding procedures. Coding is the process of organizing the data into chunks of text then into categories and labeling the categories with specific terms (Creswell, 2009). The text codes were categorized and described using descriptive words and phrases that were grouped together into themes relevant to teachers' instructional best practices, increasing literacy skills, and PD (Creswell, 2012). Based on the information obtained during the data collection process, key words and phrases were used as topics to assist in answering the research questions (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011). All data were analyzed in depth, using thick, descriptive detailed, reflective interviews, observation field notes, and other documents (i.e. lesson plans, work samples, etc.) of the middle school literacy teachers. I included observer comments in which I recorded my own personal thoughts and feelings about what I saw,

heard, and speculated about during the observations and interviews (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). The goal was to synthesize categories of data into themes that illuminated how the teachers defined their setting, teachers' views about the literacy curriculum, the middle school students' achievement, and teachers' experiences in relation to the classroom implementation process of newly learned instructional strategies from the literacy PD trainings. It was paramount that I explored the theme related to teachers' perceptions of a low sense of self-efficacy in regards to teaching literacy skills to diverse low SES urban middle school students. Teacher self-efficacy is defined as the teachers' view of how well they perceive their ability to accomplish student learning goals set to increase student academic achievement (Bandura, 1997). Mowat(2015) suggested that teachers' opinions, beliefs, and perceptions about diverse low SES students have a direct correlation on how effective teachers are when teaching low-income students from urban communities.

Accuracy and credibility. Credibility is crucial to improving the quality of the data collection and analysis process. In order to maintain the quality, accuracy, and credibility of the findings, I made several visits to the research site in order to develop rapport, to establish dependability, and trustworthiness. According to Creswell (2012) and Merriam (2009), meaningful and useful data will emerge when participants feel both comfortable and accepted. During the post-data collection visits, I implemented validation strategies such as peer debriefing and member checking to give participants the opportunity to review the observation and interview transcripts for accuracy, respond to reflective journal entries, make statements, make changes or address any questions or

concerns that may have arisen and notify me via email with the revised information (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). A peer debriefer was used to examine the field notes, identify missed themes, and to provide an alternate view of looking at the data (Lodico et al., 2010). Lesson plans and other professional documents were triangulated to minimize researcher bias and increase validity and credibility of the recounted experiences of the literacy teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches.

Additionally, I triangulated the data collected from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and archival documents to corroborate the data collected and to increase accuracy, credibility, and validity of the findings (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). During the data analysis stage, I emailed each participant a narrative of my findings to review and revise if needed in order to validate the accuracy of my interpretations and ensure that each participant would be accurately portrayed in the final report of the project study (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014). However, none of the participants wished to make any revisions to the findings.

Discrepant cases. According to Gast and Ledford (2014), discrepant cases are data that are considered to be examples of conflicting information or hold inconsistencies with the emergent themes or categories found during the initial data analysis process. More precisely, discrepant cases are those instances where new coding, or meaning, rise from the data such that it disconfirms the current themes (Erickson, 1986; Merriam, 2009). According to Lodico et al., (2010), if most of the cases confirm the analysis, the discrepant cases would be noted for further analysis or to develop potential themes or categories. However, discrepant cases provide the opportunity to proffer a wider

inclusion in the study's findings and therefore are welcomed (Erickson, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). I minimized the potential for discrepant cases by requesting participants to clarify and elaborate their responses (Yin, 2014; Lodico et al., 2010). No instances of discrepant cases were noted in this study.

Data Analysis Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the needs, perceptions, and experiences of literacy teachers and administrators of diverse low SES middle school students in the target district in relation to the best instructional practices for teaching literacy skills and related literacy PD. The case study also sought reasons why the students' literacy skill deficits persisted despite the fact teachers had been provided years of PD in explicit literacy instruction on a weekly basis. Qualitative data collection included questionnaires, four observations, seven semi-structured interviews, and archival documents (i.e. sample of current year's lesson plans). Initially, analyzing these qualitative data included finding codes and recurring themes of the experiences and perceptions of the middle school literacy teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches within Surfside School District. The study provided insight into the perceptions, beliefs, and perspectives of the participants towards the best instructional practices for teaching literacy skills to diverse low SES middle school students. The data collected were employed to address two central research questions and one sub question. Member checking, peer debriefing, and the use of direct quotes from participants were used to reinforce, to explain, and to interpret the data analysis results and findings of this study. Subsequently, the findings were organized by the research questions.

During each interview, each participant shared rich and in-depth detailed descriptions of their experiences and perceptions as an educator within Surfside School District. After the observation, interview, and archival data were collected and aggregated, I arranged the responses to the central and sub-questions after inductive analysis of the qualitative data occurred in several steps (Hatch, 2000; Rubin, 2005). Throughout the data analysis process, the data that was generated was continuously read over and over. I recorded my ideas and confirmed my ideas and discarded some initial ideas. I extracted information from the interview and observation transcripts, archival data, and the responses to the demographic surveys. I used the information to identify domains by highlighting and coding each domain into specific categories. I placed brackets around phrases and specific quotes and placed the bracketed information under specific categories to formulate the initial themes. After further aggregation of the results of the data, I inserted the specific supporting data and quotes under each category. From the categories, I was able to extract the final themes. Subsequently, the triangulation of the data contributed to the rich, in-depth information, which contributed to the findings being organized by the research questions.

Findings

Within this section, I discussed the findings of the data analysis. Member checking and peer debriefing were implemented to help interpret the results of the data analysis in order to reinforce the dependability and validity of the findings. This section consists of the following subsections: demographics, data results, results and summary of findings, research questions and sub-questions, themes from the findings and summary. A

summary of the findings is organized in Table 4 based on how the participants responded to the central and sub research questions. The research questions that were explored in this study focused on students identified as diverse low SES and consisted of the following:

RQ1- How do teachers and site administrators perceive the literacy PD has supported teacher personal knowledge and skill development in instructing diverse students in Reading/ ELA content in the target urban middle school?

RQ2-What successful and not successful teaching practices have site administrators and instructional coaches observed in Reading/ ELA following the TAP PD training?

Sub question 1: What additional supports or resources are needed to support Reading/ ELA skill development of diverse low SES students in the target urban middle school?

Table 4

Summary of the Major and Minor Themes Derived From the Research Questions and Subquestion

	Major Theme	Minor Theme	Occurrences	%
RQ1	PD (PD) is beneficial but it needs to explicitly address the low sense of teacher self-efficacy when teaching diverse low-income students literacy skills.		7	100
		Instructional coaching (IC) should be intentional.	6	86
RQ2	Teachers need more personal post-PD opportunities to collaborate on best practices for integrating a more culturally responsive pedagogy.		7	100

			80
SubQ1	Poverty relates to student learning therefore more PD is needed to increase teachers' cultural awareness about urban risk factors.	7	100
	More PD training is needed on strategies to build student repertoire	7	100
	Limited resources affect student learning	7	100
	Lack of one-to-one time with the IC modeling strategies	5	71
	Lack of student access to multicultural literature	7	100

Demographics

From all the middle school invitees who were initially contacted, seven teachers and administrators agreed to participate in the study. Selection criteria for participants in the study included: (a) participants must have taken part in TAP PD training in Surfside School District, and (b) participants must have actively participated in annual planning for Surfside School District's literacy PD trainings. There were exactly three male and four female participants. The demographic breakdown is summarized in Table 3.

Results and Summary of Findings

After obtaining informed consent, each participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (Appendices G-I) to discover each participant's years as a

professional educator and experience with teaching literacy (Reading/ ELA). Along with the demographic background information acquired from each applicable questionnaire, participants also verbally responded to the interview questions in the interview protocol (Appendix L). Middle school teachers also participated in a 60-minute classroom observation. I recorded my observations using the observation protocol (Appendix M). Observations and interviews were conducted over a 2-week period at the target site in a private office or classroom. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed to capture the essence of efficacy of teachers' and administrators' experiences with the literacy PD trainings as noted by the transcript. Participants were asked to read the transcript of their interview to check and see if his or her response was accurately reflected their experiences. Seven participants were interviewed.

As shown previously in Table 3, participants varied from years teaching literacy from one year to 28 years. From the applicable demographic questionnaire (Appendices G-I) the participants shared that they are engaged in the PD trainings on a weekly basis. Information gathered from the demographic questionnaire, the teachers, instructional coach, and administrators suggested that the literacy PD is effective in supporting teachers' skill development, personal and professional knowledge. However, some participants shared similar sentiments regarding the lack of effective PD that focused specifically on culturally responsive literacy instructional strategies as impacting their efficacious feelings of teaching literacy skills to diverse low-income urban students and these students' literacy achievement. Participants 3, 4, 5, and 6 referenced the lack of PD offered by the district with regard to incorporating diversity topics and instructional

methods to promote using a variety of multicultural literature and texts during literacy instruction. Participant 5 stated, “None of the training I have had through the district this school year [2015-2016] specifically dealt with how to gain access, incorporate, or direct teachers to multicultural resources that would influence students to read a variety of multicultural texts.” Participant 7 saw the potential for the PD to be more effective if it was always intentional and focused on strategies that address the needs of the teachers. All of the teachers and the instructional coach (IC) shared during the interview and demographic questionnaires that they feel instructional coaching could be more effective if the teachers had more opportunities to use the IC as a resource, to collaborate about literacy instructional practices, and to discuss the best literacy strategies for teaching literacy in the classroom.

Research Questions

In this subsection, I provide a summary of the findings for the two central research questions and one subquestion, which is separate from the themes from the findings. I organized this subsection as follows: RQ1, RQ2, and Subquestion 1.

Central RQ1. RQ1 was as follows: How do teachers and site administrators perceive literacy PD has supported teacher personal knowledge and skill development in instructing diverse students in Reading/ ELA content in the target urban middle school? Findings indicated that all teachers and site administrators perceived the literacy PD trainings as being supportive in increasing teacher personal knowledge and skill development in instructing diverse students in Reading/ ELA content. However, the PD framework may not be conducive to all learning and teaching styles whereas some

teachers need more explicit one-to-one instructional coaching and modeling in order to grasp the concepts and some teachers do not in regards to how to teach literacy skills to a diverse student population. Findings also indicated that the PD trainings could work more effectively on increasing student literacy skills if the teachers had more time to collaborate one-to-one with the IC in order to feel more confident and competent that they were properly implementing the instructional strategies within their respective classroom curriculums. Participant 4 stated, “I lack both the training and the materials to incorporate multicultural literature that is relevant to the students I teach into my classroom when teaching reading skills.” With the apparent lack of PD opportunities afforded to literacy teachers specifically dealing with diversity issues, all of the participants felt that they needed more PD opportunities.

Central RQ2. The second research question, RQ2 was: What successful and not successful teaching practices have site administrators and instructional coaches observed in Reading/ ELA following the TAP PD training? Findings indicated that the IC believed that the TAP PD framework provided “amazing support for teachers” because it gives educators effective, relevant, explicit feedback and embedded literacy strategies for teaching low diverse middle school students. In addition, the IC was supportive of mentoring teachers and consistent teacher collaboration and using TAP as the central framework for PD. However, administrators indicated that some teachers needed more explicit one-to-one training opportunities to work with the IC in order to build teachers’ sense of self-efficacy to feel successful and competent when teaching literacy skills to diverse low SES students. Furthermore, the administrators indicated that the middle

school is a Title I school with an elevated number of students living in poverty. Thus, poverty created additional barriers that the educators and administrators must first overcome in order to successfully and effectively educate the student population and address the gap in literacy achievement that is present within Surfside School District. Finding also indicated that the yearly goal of the Surfside Middle School is for teachers to develop an in-depth understanding of the TAP rubric in order to effectively plan lessons which will optimally impact students' achievement gains in literacy. The site administrators and IC agreed that the field experiences of the teachers should also be taken into account because some teachers may need more explicit PD trainings than others to increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy. The desired goal for the PD is to present the teachers with the best instructional strategies for addressing multicultural differences relating to teaching literacy skills to diverse, low SES middle schools in this poverty-stricken urban school district. The site administrators and the IC expressed similar views when they stated "collaboration is key to PD" but it needs to be focused around best practices such as the IC modeling lessons for teachers and showing teachers ways to scaffold student learning. Findings also indicated that the PD should be thoughtful, well planned and utilize "intentional teacher collaboration" focused around best practices for teaching literacy skills.

Subquestion 1. The subquestion was: What additional supports or resources are needed to support Reading/ELA skill development of diverse low SES students in an urban middle school? Findings indicated that the students in this diverse low SES southeastern urban school district attend schools which are stigmatized by being labeled

“at risk” or by being labeled “Title I students,” being poorly funded, lacking the proper financial and material resources, having little to no parent involvement, and receiving the least qualified educators. Hence, there were several resources that the middle school lacked to support the literacy development of the target student population. Subsequently, teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators all agreed that there should be a plan of action devised to address the needs of the students and overcome the previously listed barriers in order for the students to successfully become literate citizens in this southeastern urban community.

Findings also indicated that educators need more PD to build self-efficacy, to explore explicit diversity issues affecting diverse low SES students, ways to build student repertoire, and trainings to provide an increased awareness of how middle school students living in poverty learn differently from mainstream middle class students. Additionally, teachers should have access to instructional leaders who are familiar with a multicultural curriculum specifically geared towards teaching literacy skills to diverse low SES middle school students.

Themes from the Findings

Based on all of the analyzed data, the responses of the participants were coded and categorized into a total of three major themes and five subthemes. The findings derived from the data were within the categories of teacher-self efficacy, PD, instructional coaching, cultural awareness and cultural responsiveness relating to poverty in urban school districts. It was found that these three major themes are crucial in improving instructional practices for teaching literacy skills to diverse low SES middle

school students in an urban community. The TAP professional framework was found to be beneficial to the success of the teachers, instructional coach, and administrators. However, the school administration and staff need further methods and instructional strategies targeted to better address multicultural issues and best instructional practices for teaching literacy skills to diverse low SES middle school students in this southeastern urban middle school district.

Major theme 1: PD and teacher self-efficacy. The first major theme emerged from all participants' responses to (RQ1): How do teachers and site administrators perceive the literacy PD has supported teacher personal knowledge and skill development in instructing diverse students in Reading/ ELA content in the target urban middle school? Findings indicated that the teachers and site administrators perceived that the literacy PD has supported teacher personal knowledge and skill development in Reading/ ELA content in the target urban middle school. The overarching perception from all participants was that the PD framework is beneficial, but has the potential to be more effective in improving teacher self-efficacy and student learning if it focused on culturally responsive instructional strategies for instructing diverse students from low-income families. Teacher self-efficacy is teachers' view of how well they perceive their ability to accomplish student-learning goals set to increase student academic achievement (Bandura, 1997). During the interviews, Participants 6 and 7 shared the belief that PD is more effective in improving teachers' instructional practices when it is "intentional" or focused on explicit strategies that are relevant to addressing the needs of the teachers and all students. Participants 2 and 7 shared that the PD framework is effective in some ways

however, “it has a long way to go” to increase student gains in literacy. Participant 1 added, “Understanding how to teach the literacy strategies that we are looking at and understanding how to effectively do that in such a way that you know students can get it is key to achieving a successful PD program. When asked, “Do you feel the PD has been effective in improving instructional practices for teaching literacy skills to diverse low socioeconomic (SES) middle school students in this urban school district?” Participant 1 replied:

I think that everyone is trying to move in the right direction. Do I think we’ve gotten to where we are really, really good at teaching literacy to low SES students? No. I think we still have a lot of work to do just based upon the data, looking at test scores, and where students are and what we are seeing as results. (personal communication, June 9, 2016)

However, Participants 3, 4, 5, and 6 maintained that PD positively influenced their instructional practices when teaching literacy strategies to the middle school students but it did not explicitly address ways to teach to diverse low SES urban middle school students living in poverty. “Collaboration is critical to teacher development and school improvement” (Flores & Forte, 2014, p. 91). Participant 6 expressed by reflecting, he is able to incorporate the new skills that are taught in PD by implementing them into his classroom teaching for each particular lesson. Participant 6 also stated in the demographic questionnaire:

The PD sessions have surely been effective towards helping me improve instructional practices when teaching literacy skills. While being present in the

sessions, I am able to recognize areas where I am weak and work efficiently to transform those weaknesses into strengths. Additionally, the sessions provide me the opportunity to speak with fellow teachers who may be sharing experiences relative to my situations. Gaining knowledge is certainly an aspect I have certainly witnessed come to pass every time I attend a PD session. The master teacher/ IC who facilitates the sessions is truly gifted. When she speaks, everything she teaches and highlights is assuredly understandable. (personal communication, June 16, 2016)

However, the lack of PD that specifically focused on addressing diversity issues and multicultural differences during literacy instruction within Surfside School district left some participants reporting a low sense of self-efficacy regarding how to teach literacy skills to diverse low SES urban middle school students. Participant 5 stated, “I do not feel confident or effective when teaching students from diverse low SES backgrounds because I have not received the appropriate training to address their needs.”

Instructional coaching. Participant 7 asserted, “Instructional coaching is key to a successful teaching force. Everything goes back to the skill set of the teacher.”

Participant 2 stated, “Teachers do not have a choice as to whether they receive instructional coaching because that is one of the things about the structure of a TAP school. Teachers are assigned to specific mentors or to the Master Teacher depending on what their level of need is in that specific area and that is fluid.” During cluster, teachers are sometimes grouped like they are in the classroom with different learning styles and abilities. Findings indicated that the IC consistently scaffolds teachers as needed

according to the teacher's instructional learning goals, their refinement and their reinforcement goals, which are assessed by the site administrators and IC using the TAP rubric. Participant 2 referenced the archival data to discuss the 2015-2016 literacy plans and goals, which guided the PD curriculum and weekly plans for the middle school. Based on comments from Participants 1, 2, and 7 during the interviews and the archival data, the IC and site administrators had planned weekly clusters to address several instructional methods explicitly designed to show teachers how to teach specific literacy strategies to the middle school students. Participant 1 stated, "Having a person [IC or Master Teacher] in the classroom to watch, observe, and then give feedback is crucial. Teachers want someone to come in and give them an accurate, fair assessment of what they're doing because no one wants to be unsuccessful. They just want to do well."

Major theme 2: Teacher collaboration. The second major theme emerged from RQ2: What successful and not successful teaching practices have site administrators and instructional coaches observed in Reading/ ELA following the TAP PD training? The second major theme derived from the target site administrators and the instructional coach who perceived that teachers need more personal post-PD opportunities to collaborate with the IC on best practices for integrating a more culturally responsive pedagogy. Participants 1, 2, 6, and 7 all observed that teachers want to be able to engage in one-to-one constructive communication about the best instructional strategies to teach literacy skills to diverse low SES middle school students who struggle to read and write on grade level. Participant 7 stated, "I think collaboration is important but it needs to be focused around best practices and intentional." Participant 6 asserted, "Sometimes I feel

my lessons are inadequate when teaching reading to my students because I don't have the knowledge and resources to meet their needs." Participant 2 agreed, "Teachers who have never taught in this type of learning environment sometimes feel overwhelmed by the low reading ability levels of the students and need support to differentiate their lessons." Teachers also want the IC to first model the explicit strategies learned in PD in their classroom before they teach it to their students in order to develop self-confidence. During the interview, Participants 3, 4, 5, and 6 expressed the desire to have more time to discuss lesson plans and collaborate on ideas before teaching the newly learned strategy to their students because they wanted the Instructional coach to first model teaching it to their class. According to the demographic surveys and interview data, Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 communicated that they met for PD sessions or "cluster" once every week for two hours. The meetings were led by the IC and involved all of the middle school teachers gaining insight and knowledge regarding matters concerning literacy, student development, and teacher development. On the contrary, Participant 7 asserted that, "PD by itself is not the sole factor in moving student achievements. It's mainly instructional coaching that does it through increasing teacher self-efficacy." In addition, Participant 7 stated:

PD is empty and meaningless unless there is intense intentional coaching around what is taught in PD. I think effective teacher collaboration helps with teachers feeling more self-efficacious and competent when teaching reading but I also think there also needs to be a framework on what is the agreed way that we are teaching reading, and the best practices, and making sure that the collaboration is

centered around an objective centered around a focus versus just sitting down and collaborating for the sake of collaborating. (personal communication, June 27, 2016)

Participants 1, 2, and 7 agreed that collaboration is important but it needs to be focused around best instructional practices. Participants 1, 2, and 7 also observed that the most effective instructional practices or strategies that are used to teach Reading comprehension skills are the Close Reading structure. Participants 3, 4, 5, and 6 also expressed that the whole structure of teaching Close Reading strategies is extremely beneficial to the success of the students' learning how to comprehend what they read. Close Reading strategies encompass pre-reading, previewing texts, and turning back to the text to get text based evidence to answer questions specifically as it relates to nonfiction text. All of these Close Reading strategies are paramount to teaching reading to middle school students.

Participant 1 and 2 suggested that having the cluster or the regular PD on a weekly basis has a great effect on the teacher learning, student learning, and student gains in literacy achievement. Participants 1, 3, and 7 agreed that the clusters affect teachers' planning for future lessons and the manner in which educators teach an explicit Reading strategy or literacy skill that was learned during the weekly cluster. Participant 2 communicated that educators are taught that effective PD is relevant to what the middle school teachers need in order to help "scholars" become comprehensive and fluent readers. Effective PD is research-based in a team leadership training (TLT) setting to determine what is the greatest and most current research done that supports something

that should be implemented to help scholars from diverse low SES backgrounds make significant gains in literacy achievement. Participant 2 also reported:

By field-testing the middle school scholars, the leadership (TLT) team takes strategies into classrooms; test those strategies to see if it helps the scholars to have achievement gains. Then TLT will pull apart the student work, decide what the critical attributes are of that student's work and how the teacher would need to teach it so that the TLT could emulate those positive results for every scholar that uses the literacy strategy. (personal communication, June 15, 2016)

Site administrators and the IC also observed that educators are implementing what is taught in PD to teach scholars to access background knowledge, and to utilize their ability to find clues that are in the text. Educators emphasized students finding text clues and their ability to put those strategies together to form an inference. Participants 1 and 2 agreed that teaching scholars all parts of the newly learned reading strategy meant being transparent with the students and helping them to understand what the explicit reading strategies are and how they are going to use the strategy in each content area because in middle school, students have to be able to read to learn in each of their content area classes.

Major theme 3: Poverty relates to student learning. The subquestion stated: What additional supports or resources are needed to support Reading/ ELA skill development of diverse low SES students in an urban middle school? Findings indicated that because the target middle school is set in an impoverished urban school district, there are several barriers that may contribute to the significant number of students not meeting

yearly reading and writing goals. All of the participants agreed that the PD framework should include a goal, which would educate teachers and administrators and bring awareness to specific educational disparities that prevail in many urban school districts. Findings indicated that all participants felt that poverty related to student learning. Therefore, more PD is needed to increase teachers' cultural awareness about urban risk factors. Participants 1, 2, and 7 shared that the first challenge for the administration is to make sure teachers understand the multicultural backgrounds that feed into the target middle school. Participant 1 stated, "Teachers must recognize that the cultural dynamics of the student population does play a significant role in whether the student population will achieve the level of success in literacy skills as the mainstream student population."

Based on the findings, the target middle school has limited access to financial resources and classroom materials. However, all of the participants shared the belief that despite the setting, all students should be treated with respect and have access to highly qualified and effective teachers who care about the well being and the education of the students. Based on the observations and interviews, approximately 60% of the students were African American, 30% were Hispanic, and 10% were white or other races or nationalities. The school demographics can be described as a Title I charter middle school in an urban community where 100% of students receive free/reduced lunch. The student population is also considered at-risk due to a higher rate of absences and behavioral issues, a higher than normal number of students who have been previously retained in elementary school, and significantly lower test scores on standardized literacy test.

Building repertoire. Participant 3 asserted that, “All students must first know that teachers care before they care what teachers know.” All participants agreed that certain diversity issues should be addressed in PD trainings foremost because they affect student learning and the way teachers teach to diverse low SES students. Building student-teacher relationships and making connections between cultures improves teaching and student learning (Baldwin, 2015). Participants 3, 4, 5, and 6 suggested that students must feel valued by their teacher before they can learn from their teacher. Participants 1, 2, and 7 agreed that student motivation and scaffolding student learning has a direct correlation to student achievement. Participants 3, 4, 5, and 6 spoke about the importance of being aware of the different learning styles. Participants 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7 stressed that it is crucial to know the needs of the students in order to support the development of their Reading/ ELA skills. Participant 6 stated, “I wish that I knew more about the population of students that I am teaching so I will feel more effective when teaching literacy skills.”

During an observation, Participant 4 set up a small diverse group of nine struggling readers to teach a reading and writing lesson, which involved problem solving skills and reading strategies. The students used a graphic organizer and an interactive notebook to write about what it takes to be a superhero in school. This lesson showed Participant 4’s knowledge of the students’ reading abilities and addressed the needs of the students. It was obvious that Participant 4 had concern for each student by the way she addressed each student, used the appropriate instructional tools, and because the students were all happily engaged in the lesson. The students and teacher appeared to be

comfortable, competent, and confident. The students knew what was expected of them in order to achieve the objective of the lesson. Participant 4 was supportive of the students' learning and offered praise to students for participating in the lesson activity and classroom discussion. Findings indicated that Participants 3, 4, 5, and 6 understood how students' learning is influenced by individual experiences, talents, and prior learning as well as language, culture, family, and community values. Researchers have argued that diverse low SES students are more likely to succeed academically if the climate of the classroom and school is warm and welcoming, and they feel that their culture is valued (Baldwin, 2015; Dixon & Griddine, 2010).

Barriers to learning. One reoccurring topic was that the school district has a limited supply of resources. Participant 2 and 7 shared the belief that the two main conversations educators and administrators should be having, should be about PD and teacher support. Participant 2 and 7 suggested that teachers who are not offered enough support leave the classroom because they feel frustrated, angry, exhausted, isolated, and terrified that they cannot do the job that they desperately want to do well. Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 expressed that there is not enough time for the IC to support all of the classroom teachers. Participants 3, 4, 5, and 6 all agreed that they wanted more one-to-one opportunities to collaborate with the IC. However, all participants agreed that the PD framework provided amazing support for teachers.

When asked: What are some specific barriers that may influence instructional practices when teaching literacy to diverse low SES students, Participant 4 stated that the diverse low SES students lack background knowledge:

Some of our scholars have not been out of their neighborhood and I truly believe that when I am trying to introduce them to a piece of literature and they don't understand what the terms or vocabulary means because they don't have that background knowledge then it sets the class back to where I have to build that background knowledge and then move on from there. (personal communication, June, 2016)

This strategy is the theory Bruner (1983) discussed when he introduced the idea that teachers should first scaffold student learning by finding creative ways to build student background knowledge before they can expect them to learn new concepts.

Participant 4 expressed the desire to have the IC model lessons in their classroom of the newly learned strategy. Participants 5 and 6 agreed with Participant 4 on the idea that it would be helpful to have the instructional coach to come into one of the toughest classes and to model a lesson. Participant 4 elaborated on this idea:

When working with adults in a PD session, adults who are cooperative, who are going to do what you say do and who are coherent, who have great background knowledge, and who are professional, it is not the same as working with diverse low SES middle school students. Consequently, when teachers try to implement newly learned strategies into their classroom curriculum, scholars who come from a demographic with low SES backgrounds, are asked to apply or perform what the teacher just learned in cluster, it is difficult to transfer the skill, it is not easy, and it does not always have the desired outcome or meet the expectation of the classroom teacher. (personal communication, June 2016)

Time for the IC to model. Likewise, Participants 3, 4, 5, and 6 expressed that they felt it would be more effective to have the Master teacher or IC to go into the “tougher” classrooms and model the strategy. However, Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 all agreed that there is not enough time for the IC to get into every class on a regular basis and teach the class. Therefore, time is a major barrier to the IC collaborating with the teachers on ideas for modeling and teaching explicit literacy instructional strategies geared towards diverse low SES students. Furthermore, Participant 7 asserted that the relationship between the IC/Master Teacher holds the highest value to the classroom educator. Participant 7 explained that this relationship holds the highest value because student achievement is directly correlated with good effective coaching and consistent coaching. Therefore, there cannot be high levels of student achievement without an IC coaching the Reading teacher around best practices on teaching literacy. Participant 7 also suggested that in order to achieve success, “one must first know what success looks like.” Administrators, teachers, and the IC must define success together by collaborating on best practices to achieve success. Subsequently, when the parents, IC coach, teachers, educators and administrators, all of whom hold a vested interest in the success of the student, work as a team to implement a more practical coaching framework, it may positively affect student achievement in literacy by producing top performing middle school scholars.

Student access to literature. Findings also indicated that other than PD and teacher collaboration, all participants inferred that having an adequate source of literature was crucial to improving the literacy skills of the scholars. Participant 7 observed,

“Students need to have access to a variety of leveled reading text. They must have access to books.” Participant 7 was adamant when he shared that students need to have more access to leveled reading text as well as below and above level reading text in order to develop vocabulary skills, reading comprehension skills, and to become fluent readers. Participant 7 also asserted that researchers have shown that “eyes on text” means how many minutes per day a child’s eyes are on texts. During the interview, Participant 7 sounded hopeful that the teachers would set a classroom goal that 100 minutes per day; a child’s eyes will be on text. Participant 7 elaborated, “Having a goal of 100 minutes of eyes on text a day is something that researchers have shown is in direct correlation to students’ abilities to read more fluently as well as in increasing student comprehension skills.”

Participant 1 stated, “Student reading levels are very low. Sometimes teachers are taken aback by just the level of where their students are. Some of our students come to us several grades below level.” Participant 1 and 7 agreed that many of the middle school students have not been exposed to a culture of reading. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the educator to instill that desire in them. According to Gardner (1983), being able to adjust and differentiate in the space of a 55-minute classroom lesson and effectively teach all levels in the class is difficult to do. This is especially difficult when the students do not understand the importance of reading because their parents were not readers at home.

Summary

This collective case study was used to examine the participant's needs, experiences, and perceptions relating to the existing PD framework and how it has

prepared them with instructional strategies for teaching reading and writing to diverse low SES middle school students. The participants were considered to be experienced and knowledgeable of the PD framework for Surfside School District and participated in TAP during the 2015-2016 school year. Information that was gathered in this study was derived from a careful analysis of the observational, demographic survey questionnaire, interview, and archival documents using a thorough thematic analysis of the data.

Based on the data analysis, there were three major themes and five subthemes established that addressed the two central research questions and one subquestion. The findings determined that all participants viewed the PD as being significant to student and teacher learning. However, the participants also agreed that there is a need for ongoing PD specifically focused on using explicit culturally responsive literacy strategies to increase teacher self-efficacy when addressing literacy skills for diverse low SES middle school students from a southeastern urban school district. With partnership from parents, teachers, the instructional coach, and site administrators, the PD framework may succeed in preparing teachers to have an appreciation for diversity issues and ways to implement an additional multicultural reading curriculum into the PD framework.

Conclusions

In section 2, I discussed the methodology of the study. The methodology included the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, setting, participant selection, instrumentation and data collection, data analysis plan, data analysis results, and findings. To maintain alignment with the purpose of the study stated in Section 1, the qualitative research design with a collective case study approach was used to further investigate the

central phenomenon. Based on the results of this study, a PD program may be designed to address ways to improve teacher's instructional strategies for teaching literacy to diverse low SES urban middle school students. Preparing teachers for the demographic student population and the various levels of student learning abilities in the classroom, and increasing awareness of ways in which low SES plays a crucial role in the academic success of the students. The ultimate goal is to provide teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators with the most effective culturally responsive instructional strategies and best practices to meet the needs of the diverse low SES urban middle school students in increasing gains in literacy skills to aid the students in becoming fluent readers and writers in this 21st century.

Within Section 3 of this project study, I will discuss the PD program that I developed based on the findings of the study. In addition, I will discuss the description and goals, rationale, review of literature, implementation, and formative and summative evaluations of the project. Finally, I will discuss the implications of this project including positive social change.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative collective case study was to explore middle school teachers' perceptions of PD and self-efficacy when implementing instructional strategies for teaching literacy to diverse low SES urban middle school students in a southeastern state in the United States of America. Based on the findings of the research, I developed a 24-hour, face-to-face, PD workshop (Appendix A), which is designed to co-exist with the current PD framework. This additional PD workshop, entitled *Increasing Teachers' Sense of Self-efficacy Using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy to Enhance Literacy Instruction*, is designed to offer teachers, instructional coaches and administrators explicit strategies to address the literacy needs of the diverse low SES urban middle school students and it is included in Appendix A. In this section, I discuss the major elements of the project including the description and goals, rationale, review of literature, implementation, and project evaluation. Lastly, I address the local and national implications for social change.

Description and Goals

An exploration of the perceptions of four middle school teachers, one instructional coach, and two administrators, allowed me to triangulate questionnaire survey/data, observational, interview, and archival documents using a general inductive approach to identify emerging categories and themes. As a result of the aggregation of the research findings and a rich in depth analysis of the data, I developed a project that addressed teachers' lack of self-efficacy regarding the best instructional practices for

teaching literacy skills to diverse low SES urban middle school students and to better serve this group of students by increasing student achievement gains in literacy. Analysis of the findings suggested that there was a need for PD (PD) at the target site with a specific focus on increasing teacher self-efficacy when teaching multicultural literacy instruction to diverse low SES urban middle school students.

As a result of the findings from this study, I have developed a face-to-face PD workshop that focuses on increasing teacher self-efficacy and an appreciation for developing and implementing instructional methods that incorporate cultural responsiveness, diversity concepts and multicultural literature into the current PD curriculum. The major objective of the culminating PD was to increase teachers', instructional coaches', and administrators' knowledge and understanding of ways to integrate multicultural focused lesson plans and diversify instructional methods that incorporate attributes of cultural responsiveness. This PD follows a face-to face instructional learning format designed to take place at the target site throughout the course of the school year. There are three essential questions that the PD will address:

- What type of PD would be conducive to increasing teachers' self-efficacy in addressing barriers to student literacy achievement in an urban school district?
- What are the most effective instructional practices for teaching literacy skills to diverse low SES urban middle school students?
- What supports or resources are needed to increase the literacy achievement of students in an urban middle school?

Goals of the PD are listed below:

- Goal 1: Teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators will begin to build a face-to-face learning community to discuss teacher self-efficacy, cultural responsive pedagogy, poverty, and urban risk factors.
- Goal 2: Teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators will develop an understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and demonstrate application of evidence-based strategies when working with diverse students from low-income families in order to promote student-teacher repertoire.
- Goal 3: Teachers will demonstrate cultural awareness, cultural responsiveness, and a perceived sense of self-efficacy by incorporating diverse multicultural literacy strategies and diversity scenarios into their lesson plans to create a multicultural diversity project.

The PD will be specifically designed to address study participants' feedback. The participants in this study maintained that they believe students and teachers lack access to high-interest multicultural literature, which reflects the demographics of the student population, addresses the interest and cultural diversity represented within Surfside School District. Hopefully, teachers' and administrators' participation and support for the proposed PD will promote positive social change by increasing educators' knowledge and understanding of more hands-on practical ways to educate diverse low SES urban students in the area of literacy achievement. Thereby, fulfilling the teachers' and administrators' desire to increase a sense of self-efficacy in the use of diverse instructional strategies while simultaneously addressing the various learning styles of this diverse urban middle school student population.

Rationale

The findings presented within this study showed that there is a need for ongoing PD that specifically focuses on incorporating a multicultural curriculum into the current PD framework with a focus on creating more self-efficacious teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and administrators who have a renewed appreciation for educating children living in poverty, diversity issues, and cultural responsiveness. When teachers feel competent about what they are teaching and comfortable with whom they are teaching, they hold a higher sense of self-esteem and believe that they can accomplish the objective of educating all students (Gutshall, 2013). Findings suggested that it would be beneficial to the students, parents, teachers, and administration to have more PD opportunities to address ways for the IC to collaborate with the literacy teachers when implementing newly learned instructional strategies for teaching literacy skills to diverse low SES middle school students.

Based on my observations during the project study and the archival data of the school's annual PD curriculum, there were no specific PD trainings being conducted to explicitly address diversity issues and focus on implementing multicultural literature into classroom libraries to help teachers differentiate their literacy lesson plans and to become more culturally responsive for the current school year. Therefore the project entitled, *Increasing Teachers' Sense of Self-efficacy Using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy to Enhance Literacy Instruction*, is designed to increase teacher-self efficacy and cultural awareness through an additional multicultural literature curriculum. During the PD, literacy teachers, instructional coaches and administrators may be enlightened on the

effects of poverty on education and may increase perceptions of self-efficacy in teaching multicultural literature to diverse low SES urban middle school students.

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this project workshop entitled *Increasing Teachers' Sense of Self-efficacy Using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy to Enhance Literacy Instruction*, is to strengthen teachers' in the areas of self-efficacy, cultural responsiveness, and to develop effective instructional strategies to enhance the literacy skills of diverse low-income urban middle school students. Findings in this study indicated that the participants desired PD that has the potential to increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy and enforce culturally responsive pedagogy. Participants felt unprepared to meet the challenges of working with diverse students from low SES homes. Findings from the study also indicated that teachers perceived a need for PD that supports working with diverse low SES middle school students when teaching literacy skills in the general education classroom. Most participants agreed that there was a need for teachers to better understand the varying cultures of the student population and the uniqueness of each student. The value of culturally responsive literacy instruction, teacher perceptions and beliefs, and teacher-student relationships are discussed in this review of literature. The literature review also includes a discussion of the conceptual frameworks of the study, the attributes of effective PD, characteristics of effective teachers, effective instructional strategies to improve literacy skills of diverse low-income students, and the significance of each topic in closing the literacy achievement gap.

In this section, I present a scholarly review of literature related to the genre of PD that supports the education of diverse low SES urban middle school students and helps teachers and administrators stay in tune with the literacy needs of all students in Surfside School District. The review of literature includes increasing teachers' sense of self-efficacy; elements of culturally responsive pedagogy, effective instructional strategies, effects of instructional coaching, professional learning communities (PLC), poverty and urban risk factors are presented.

Current, peer-reviewed research studies were gathered by conducting searches in the Walden University Library, journal articles, and web publications. Research databases used included Google Scholar, ProQuest, Educational Resource Information Center [ERIC], and SAGE Premier. Search terms included several key phrases: *PD for urban middle schools, self-efficacy, cultural identity, cultural awareness, culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, multicultural literature, literacy achievement, effective teachers AND instructional methods, instructional coaching, teaching reading to diverse students, poverty AND urban schools, reading PD AND teacher beliefs, urban risk factors AND student learning*. The literature explored in this study was used to support literacy learning as well as enhance teachers' self-efficacy regarding the implementation of multicultural literacy instruction to diverse low-income students who continue to read below grade level in the target middle school. Over 50 scholarly sources, published within the last five years were identified as significant to this study.

Conceptual Framework

One reoccurring theme that emerged from the data analysis and shared by most participants was a lack of PD focused on explicitly teaching the most effective instructional strategies to help teachers meet the needs and challenges of the many diverse low SES urban middle school students who are not proficient readers and writers. Most of the participants expressed concerns that the lack of explicit culturally responsive intervention strategies during PD opportunities, contributed to the low sense of self-efficacy of teachers and consequently, the significant gap in literacy skills. Participants must first understand the importance of being culturally responsive and how it can potentially improve feelings of self-efficacy, student learning and literacy achievement. The PD workshop will support the development of teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators in becoming more culturally responsive. The theoretical frameworks that form the basis of this project are Bandura's (1986, 1993, 1997) social learning theory and Gay's (2013) theory of culturally responsive pedagogy. Both theories are paramount in producing self-efficacious, competent, culturally responsive teachers.

This study utilized Gay's (2013) theory of culturally responsive pedagogy and Bandura's (1993, 1997) social learning theory. Applying Gay's theory of culturally responsive pedagogy and Bandura's (1993, 1997) social learning theory asserted that generally people learn from observing a particular instructional method being modeled by someone else. Bandura's theory (1986, 1993, 1997), suggested when students are motivated by their teachers by what is being taught in the classroom teachers feel more competent and increase their sense of self-efficacy. These theories provide insight into

the most effective strategies to help teachers become more self-efficacious and culturally responsive in the process of learning to educate diverse low-income urban middle school students in the area of literacy.

Culturally responsive pedagogy. Pedagogy is the study of different teaching methods (Peel, 2014). In the field of education, PD is used to help teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators implement various methods in order to achieve specific learning goals (Peel, 2014). Gay (2013), defined culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 50). According to Gay (2010, 2013), educators whom teach to diverse, multicultural student populations, should promote educational equity and empower all students to strive for excellence regardless of their race, ethnicity, and cultural identity (Dell’ Angelo, 2016; Hunt, 2014; Wiesman, 2012). Moreover, researchers asserted that educators should seek to understand their students’ beliefs, values, and cultural traditions, language, learning styles, behavioral and relationship customs before they can effectively teach them (Ford, Stuart, & Vakil, 2014; Gay 2013; Rychly & Graves, 2012). Gay (2013) also noted that culturally responsive teachers value the uniqueness of their students and believe all students can be successful in school and life regardless of their race, cultural background or SES.

Social learning theory. Bandura (1986, 1997) argued that people learn through observation and self-motivation. The belief is that people learn by first watching others then mimicking what others do. This belief is crucial to teaching students because it enables the student to be more successful when the learning expectation is first modeled

by the instructor (Kretchmar, 2016). Additionally Bandura (1997) referred to self-efficacy as the level of one's belief in one's own capabilities to complete a desired task (Kayapinar, 2016). Teachers must have a positive mindset that they can achieve the desired outcome. Bandura (1997) asserted that this belief, known as self-efficacy, has a significant impact on ones' motivation to teach others. When teachers feel competent, they hold a higher sense of self-esteem and believe that they can accomplish the objective of educating all students (Gutshall, 2013). Moreover, Gutshall (2013) asserted that teachers' mindset affect their sense of efficacy and their instructional practices. Therefore, teachers need PD opportunities to learn from each other through observation and modeling of effective instructional strategies.

Participants stated that during the 2015-2016 school year, there were no PD opportunities offered by Surfside School District that focused on incorporating diversity and multicultural literature during literacy instruction. However, based on Gay's (2010, 2013) and Bandura's (1986, 1993, 1997) theories, inferences can be made that teachers within Surfside School District possess minimum understanding on how and why they should incorporate diverse multicultural resources during literacy instruction. These conceptual frameworks are especially important in developing culturally responsive educators and impacting student learning and literacy achievement in this 21st century.

Face-to-Face PD

Through face-to-face PD, participants engage in educational learning that requires hands-on activities, instructional coaching, peer coaching, collaboration, observation, modeling and imitating (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Kretchmar, 2016). Therefore, creating

purposeful, intentional face-to-face PD can increase teachers' self-confidence, self-competence, and help teachers become more receptive to change by acquiring information to grow their mindset emotionally, socially, mentally, and culturally (Kayapinar, 2016; Siciliano, 2016). Educators at Surfside School District have the ability to grow themselves into being more culturally responsive to the needs of the diverse student population and their peers when they feel that they are being professionally supported by their peers, school leadership, and the administrative team (Kretchmar, 2016; Moon, Passmore, Reiser, & Michaels, 2014).

Teacher Self-efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy is teachers' view of how well they perceive their ability to accomplish student-learning goals set to increase student academic achievement (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Teachers' schema or background knowledge and life experiences help shape their beliefs about self-efficacy as it relates to teaching diverse low SES urban middle school students who attend Surfside School District located in a southeastern state in the U.S.A. Bandura (1986, 1997) argued that when teachers collaborate and observe other teachers and instructional coaches, their teaching styles are directly influenced by what they observe. Teachers compare themselves and gauge their competence level by whomever they observe and self-judge their teaching ability by comparing it to the performance of others (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Researchers have stated, students from diverse low SES homes bring emotional, behavioral, and academic challenges to the classroom, which may adversely affect teacher self-efficacy (Gutshall, 2013). Gutshall (2013) suggested that teachers' mindset could affect their sense of self-efficacy and limit

their instructional practices when teaching diverse low-income urban middle school students. PD is one avenue to improving teachers' cultural awareness and cultural responsiveness to increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy in the general classroom.

Professional Development

A reoccurring theme in the study findings was a need for PD opportunities to train teachers how to address diversity issues and increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy when implementing multicultural literature into their literacy curriculum. All of the participants asserted that there is a need for more explicit PD on effective instructional strategies for teaching diverse multicultural literature with a focus on issues relevant to today's general education classroom. Furthermore, teachers and administrators expressed that many times teachers are "taken aback" by the students' ability levels and lack of literacy skills because so many students are reading below grade level in the target middle school. The objective of the PD workshop is to provide opportunities to increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy in understanding how students from diverse low SES families with diverse cultural beliefs learn differently and to offer literacy materials, relevant information, and the most effective instructional strategies for teaching low-income urban students (Bandura, 1986; Barnes & Gaines, 2015; Garcia & Chun, 2016). A common theme that emerged from the participating teachers during the data analysis was that instructional strategies are "thrown" at them constantly during PD trainings and they are not given the opportunity to completely digest and then apply the new strategies into a cohesive instructional unit before being given a different strategy in the next cluster meeting. Social interactions among fellow teachers and more one-to-one time with the

instructional coach could build a sense of trust and may increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy and willingness to engage in more authentic learning experiences and try new instructional strategies. Hence, in order to increase student achievement gains in literacy, the PD must be designed to address the needs of the students, teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators.

Collaboration. PD provides opportunities for teachers to collaborate.

Collaboration is a way teachers share and interact with each other to promote excellence in teaching and student learning. Researchers noted that collaboration is “critical to teacher development and school improvement” (Forte & Flores, 2014, p.91).

Collaboration during PD is paramount in improving the amount of cultural awareness and diversity appreciation that teachers bring to the general education classroom. The PD workshop I have designed (see Appendix A) reflects teachers' and administrators' understanding of low SES students and the attitudes of teachers in regards to teaching multicultural literacy to diverse low SES urban middle school students. Researchers have suggested that teachers' opinions, beliefs, and perceptions about diverse low SES students have a direct correlation on how effective teachers are when teaching low-income students from urban communities (Mowat, 2015). Consequently, meaningful and purposeful PD has to be cultivated and nurtured by teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators alike in order to produce a positive social change in the lives of diverse low-income urban students (Toom, 2016).

Instructional coaching. Findings suggested that participants desired more opportunities for the teachers and the instructional coaches to collaborate on the most

effective instructional strategies and to scrutinize each other's instructional methods (Chong and Kong, 2012; Toom, 2016). Instructional coaching is a process that helps teachers and literacy coaches to collaborate using "evidenced-based literacy practices and apply effective practical instructional conventions across all content areas" (Eisenberg, 2016, p.10). The purpose of the PD is to increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy and strengthen the capacity for teachers to teach the most effective literacy strategies, to increase fidelity, and to enhance the existing PD framework by collaborating with teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators. Findings indicated that teachers desired to strengthen their capacity to teach diverse low-income urban middle school students how to use diverse multi-cultural literature during literacy instruction. Hence, the structure of the current PD framework must be hinged on the support of the instructional coaches, and administrators providing teachers with current, relevant information and adequate resources in a collaborative learning environment (Lin, 2013; Toom, 2016). In order to transform the school into a literate rich community of life long-readers, every student, teacher, and administrator must have "the necessary resources to reinforce literacy learning skills and enhance those skills as tools for thinking, questioning, and reflecting" (Eisenberg, 2016, p.10). Transformation occurs through varied reading writing, and speaking that students and teachers engage in during PD as well as in the classroom environment. "The more literacy-rich a school environment is with relevant content, motivated students, knowledgeable staff, and a climate conducive to ongoing learning, the more likely it is that a school community will be successful"

(Eisenberg, 2016, p.10). Hence, effective high-quality continuous PD for all teachers facilitated by instructional coaches is needed to accomplish such a culture.

Additionally, teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators must be willing to collaborate with parents and family members to develop school-wide community outreach initiatives that partner with non-profit agencies to provide services such as free tutoring (Mintzes, Marcum, Yates, & Mark, 2013). Consequently, students are more likely to feel appreciated and view themselves as valuable members of their classroom community. Students are more engaged in the learning process when their culture and customs are integrated into the literacy curriculum and they are able to make real-world and text-to-self connections. By increasing the capacity of teachers to understand the emotional, social, as well as academic impact of culturally responsive pedagogy on the academic achievements of diverse low SES students in this southeastern urban school district, the likelihood of students increasing their reading and writing skills will improve over time (Askell-Williams & Murraray-Harvey, 2013; Barnes & Gaines, 2015; Broomhead, 2013a, b).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Many school districts in the US struggle with race related and income-based achievement gaps in literacy. Race and income are key factors that contribute to the myriad of inequitable student outcomes for poor African- American, Hispanic, and Latino children who statistically fare worse in literacy achievement gains than their more affluent, White, and Asian peers (Peters, Margolin, Fragnoli, & Bloom, 2016; USDE, 2015c). As a result, the demographic differences between teachers and students in US

public school districts have garnered increased attention as being key players in the income-based and racial disparities in the field of education (Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016). According to the National Center of Educational Statistics, in 2012, the majority of US public students were non-White, while about 49% of public school students were White, and 82% of the nation's teachers are White (Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016; Peters, Margolin, Fragnoli, & Bloom, 2016). As the student population in the US becomes increasingly diverse, the teaching force remains predominately White. According to the study by Gehlbach and Robinson (2016), "These racial mismatches between teachers and students can trigger problems of cross-cultural misunderstanding" (p. 342). Gehlbach and Robinson (2016) explored possible solutions to the teacher-student diversity gap by developing an intervention that focused on improving individual student-teacher relationships. The study included 25 teachers and 315 students. The researchers administered a "get-to-know-you" survey to each participant with five similarities each student had in common with their teacher and then split the students into four groups. While there were no significant difference in the findings for White or Asian students, the findings were significant in connections with teachers' relationship with their African-American and Latino students. In fact, when teachers saw similarities between themselves and African-American and Latino students they taught, student-teacher relationships improved and students' grades improved 60% reducing the achievement gap (Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016). Thus, strengthening teacher-student relationship offers a promising approach to decreasing inequities in US schools (Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016).

Culturally responsive teaching. As a result of the increase in racial diversity in the student population, schools of education must train all teachers to be culturally responsive in their teaching. Schools who advocate for equitable education for all students must continue to not only strive to diversify the teaching population, but to advocate for building repertoire between teachers and students (Gay, 2010; Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016). Cultural awareness and cultural responsiveness requires an understanding of students' cultural backgrounds, as well as factors that affect student performance in order to avoid racial issues, teacher biases, and racist teaching practices in the classroom (Gay, 2010; Peters et al., 2016; Williams & Bryan, 2013). In the study by Peters et al., (2016), participants expressed the need to learn more about cultural differences and understand students' cultural backgrounds and home lives because they perceived home-life and customs as an important part of a child's life and fuels a child's personality. Researchers have suggested that White teachers may not be cognizant of their biases and may have lower achievement expectations for students of colors (Rychly & Grave, 2012). Without adequate training, White teachers remain unaware of biases and privileges associated with being White (Peters, et al., 2016) and may view White privilege as the norm (Peters et al., 2016).

Peters et al., (2016) also suggested that teachers need to see the value of multicultural education and adapt their instructional methods and curriculum to meet a range of student needs as they endeavor to understand the impact of race on learning. According to evidence presented by Durden and Truscott (Peters, et al., 2016), even when White teachers explained the difference in culturally relevant teaching strategies for

teaching diverse students, their classroom behaviors were not representative of culturally responsive teaching. Researchers argued that teaching using culturally responsive strategies effects student motivation, behavioral issues, and improve literacy achievement (Ford, Stuart, & Vakil, 2014; Garcia & Chun, 2016; Rychly & Graves, 2012). As the US public school system fights the battle against inequity in the education system, developing culturally responsive teachers will help increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy and diminish the gaps in understanding diverse low-income students, decrease the literacy skills deficit, and increase cultural awareness and an appreciation for the different learning styles, traditions, beliefs, and values of its diverse student population (Aronson & Laughter, 2015; Gay, 2010, 2013; Hachfeld, Hahn, Schroeder, Anders, & Kunter, 2015). Therefore, culturally responsive pedagogy should help promote healthy student-teacher relationships.

Building student-teacher repertoire. As educators, we must create a safe haven for our students. Schools should feel safe and comfortable enough for students to engage in a learning environment that is constructive and conducive for open dialogue that is designed to raise awareness of critical social issues, including classism, racism, and prejudice. Students will engage more willingly in conversation with their peers and teachers if they feel that the teacher cares about their well-being. Kao (2017, p.41) suggested that, "Ultimately, the strength of the students' relationships to each other and to the teacher provides the safety net necessary for these difficult discussions." Students need to feel that their differences in opinions will not negatively affect their relationships with their teacher or their peers (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2017). Students who feel

safe and protected by their teachers will more readily engage in relevant, genuine, discussions about critical social issues (Allen, Gregory, Mikami, Lun, Hamre & Pianta, 2013; Bandura, 1986). Teachers need to care about the whole student including their feelings and not just about their academic performance (Gay, 2010; Hachfeld et al., 2015; Sanacore, 2017). Students who feel that the teacher cares about them as a whole person are eager to participate and feel self-confident when taking risks in their learning (Bandura, 1986). Teachers should demonstrate patience and genuine interest in understanding the individual learning needs of each student on a daily basis (Gay, 2010; Hachfeld et al., 2015; Sanacore, 2017). When considering the daily stresses of teaching, teachers must not forget that students are intrinsically motivated and the most productive way of reaching their minds can be through their hearts (Bandura, 1986; Gay, 2010; Hachfeld et al., 2015; Sanacore, 2017). In spite of the daily challenges of teaching students whether from diverse low-income, impoverished urban communities or from affluent white collar neighborhoods, an effective teacher finds enjoyment in learning about the whole person and genuinely loves each student in a unique way (Harter, 2012; Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbound, 2013; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2017; Williams & Bryan, 2013). Additionally, effective teachers implement culturally responsive strategies to help students become better readers and writers.

Culturally responsive literature. Literature should be enjoyable to read and relevant to the lives of the students. In order for classroom teachers to successfully integrate a multicultural literacy curriculum that is more culturally responsive to the needs of its diverse student population, teachers need to model explicit instructional

strategies (James, Hemphill, Troyer, Thomson, Jones, LaRusso, & Donovan, 2016). The following strategies are based on evidenced-based research:

Offer opportunities for diversity through daily choice. Students need access to a wide variety of reading materials. Students benefit from the opportunities to make decisions about the literature materials they choose to read or write about in the classroom. Publishers have a variety of genres and culturally relevant resources for all ages and reading ability levels. The teacher can guide students to materials and offer support for students' emotional and intellectual responses when choosing text, which promotes intrinsic motivation and may have a positive effect on students' lifetime literacy habits (Hachfeld et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2016; Sanacore, 2017).

Curriculum diversity. It may be safe to say that the United States is currently experiencing a "cultural revolution". Issues involving race and racism are prevalent in the media and on a lot of people's minds. If schools want to stay relevant they must engage in teaching students about the many experiences of people of color that make up this nation's story (Hachfeld et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2016; Stallworth, 2017). Begin by teaching students how to recognize that all people in the classroom are real people who are dynamic individuals with interesting personalities and lifestyles who change and grow and have faults and as well as good characteristics. Teachers should model what culturally responsive reading looks like in the classroom. Gradually, students will begin to see that the diversity in language and literacy practices are valued, appreciated, and connected to create a classroom culture of acceptance and understanding (Hachfeld et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2016; Whittingham, 2016). Classroom libraries should include

literature that reflects the diverse world in which we live in, give all students a voice, and dignify all races of people.

Establish a community of readers. Teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators should encourage reading across the curriculum throughout the day in every classroom. The literacy curriculum should include creative opportunities that will allow time for students to read to their peers, to their teachers, to their parents, to the administrators, and to community leaders whether inside or outside of the classroom. Students, teachers, and administrators should read with others of diverse backgrounds and form book talks in a safe learning community. PD should encompass teachers reading to each other and engaging in difficult discussions about relevant and genuine issues concerning race and diversity. Consequently, the PD workshop (See Appendix A) and personal development will potentially lead to an increase in teachers' cultural responsiveness and self-efficacy when teaching diverse urban middle school students from low-income families. Ultimately, the PD will enhance the capacity of teachers' instructional practices when integrating multicultural literature into the learning environment (Hachfeld et al., 2015; Peters et al., 2016; Quiroa, 2017).

Urban Risk Factors

The perils of living in an impoverished urban community puts students at a greater risk of not getting an adequate education or successfully completing their high school degree. Therefore it is imperative that teachers establish a productive student-teacher relationship that is conducive for reciprocal student learning, student-teacher collaboration and genuine communication between adults and students (Carter & Pool,

2012; Labush, 2014). Consequently, the purpose of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was to provide an avenue for all children to receive an equitable education in the U.S.A and to eliminate the literacy achievement gaps across the nation (USDE, 2002). Unfortunately, urban schools nationwide still have the greatest gaps in literacy and academic achievement (Dell' Angelo, 2016; USDE, 2015c). Therefore, it is crucial to the success of these students and our nation's economy that diverse students living in low SES urban communities are provided the best educational opportunities and receive the most highly qualified literacy teachers (USDE, 2002; USDE, 2015c). According to researchers Gardiner, Davis, and Anderson (2009), in six urban schools, the NCLB Act was not successful in lessening the literacy gap within these schools because it did not address the issues that caused declining academic performance, such as the community where the students live. Hence, in order to close the literacy skills achievement gap in the target middle school and address the needs and concerns of the students and teachers, the literature review will address some specific urban risk factors that contribute to the gap in literacy skills in this urban middle school.

Poverty in urban schools. Schools located in urban communities are typically referred to as Title I Schools and are characterized by high poverty rates in their student population, problems retaining highly qualified teachers, lack of resources, and increased discipline issues (McCurdy, Mannella, & Eldridge, 2003; Weiss, 2014). Poverty is defined as “the extent to which an individual does without resources” (Lacour and Tissington, 2011, p. 522). According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) in a recently released policy statement, poverty is a toxin in urban communities and

contributes to several child health and learning disparities (AAP, 2016; Dell' Angelo, 2016). According to the statement by the AAP (2016), children living in poverty are at increased risk of difficulties with controlling their anger, behavioral issues, self-discipline, inattention, impulsivity, defiance and poor peer and student-teacher relationships. Poverty can also make life difficult for parents, especially for single-parent families in the context of concerns about inadequate housing, food, financial resources, transportation, childcare, and education (AAP, 2016).

Poverty in the United States. Poverty affects up to half of US children. Child poverty is greater in the US than in most countries in the world. In a 2014 report from the Organization for Economy Cooperation and Development (OECD), the US ranked 35th of 40 nations in the rate of child poverty in the world (AAP, 2016). In 2012, 67% of African American children, 42% of Hispanic and Latino children, 17% of Asian children, and 25% of White children lived in single-parent households (AAP, 2016). According to 2014 Census data, an estimated 21% of all US children younger than 18 years live below the federal poverty level in households labeled as “poor” and close to 43% live below or near the poverty line labeled as “near poor or low-income” and 37% of all children live in poverty sometime in their childhood (AAP, 2016). Researchers have suggested that demographics have an effect on the likelihood that African American, Hispanic, and American Indian/ Alaska Native children are three times more likely to experience poverty or low income than are White and Asian children (AAP, 2016; Dell' Angelo, 2016; USDE, 2015c). According to statistics, children born into poverty and who live consistently in poor urban communities are at a greater risk of facing adverse conditions

or hardships such as not enough food, dilapidated housing, exposure to violence more frequently, crime, unemployment, homelessness, inadequate or no healthcare, and excessive behavioral issues in school (AAP, 2016; Thomas et al, 2012; USDE, 2015c). Children who are exposed to the aforementioned toxins, if left unchecked, are more likely to have difficulties in school and in society in general (AAP, 2016).

Pediatricians bring a unique perspective to poverty-related issues in education by reframing poverty as an evidence-based health concern with life-long consequences (AAP, 2016). Poverty and other adverse social determinants have a detrimental effect on child health and are root cause of child health and educational inequity in the United States. Understanding the causative relation between poverty and education should inform and influence the decisions of policy makers, researchers, teachers, administrators, parents, and community leaders (AAP, 2016). The evidence-based researchers strongly suggested that these stockholders are essential assets in efforts to ameliorate the adverse effects of poverty on the education of diverse low SES children living in impoverished urban communities (AAP, 2016; USDE, 2015c). Hence, the first responsibility as a cohort of educators is to band together to find solutions to correct the devastation that poverty has on the students living in these impoverished urban communities. As educators, the first task is to acknowledge these disparities and harmful effects of poverty on children and families then work together as a team to embrace solutions.

In the urban setting, it is crucial that schools acknowledge the significance of establishing ties with students and their families. In his study, Auerbach (2009),

addressed the importance of creating strong meaningful student-teacher relationships and working with families in urban school who are from low SES backgrounds. Auerbach (2009) suggested that by doing so, would result in positive effects on student academic performance. Researchers also noted that an increase in prolonged parental support and school involvement has shown to produce a positive effect on student behavior and increased student resilience in academic performance (USDE, 2015c). Furthermore, when teachers and administrators become involved in the families of students, it creates a sense of transparency and a trusting environment within the learning community. Teachers' perceptions of diverse students affect belief in self-efficacy and determine how successful they will be when teaching low-income urban middle school students. When teachers and administrators collaborate in support of a culturally responsive pedagogy, teacher-efficacy is strengthened; students make gains in literacy skills, and demonstrate significant increases academic achievement (Bartling, 2015; Dell' Angelo, 2016). The school district must support the development of culturally responsive pedagogy in order for the students and teachers to feel successful.

Summary

The purpose of this collective case study was to examine the middle school teachers', instructional coaches', and administrators' needs, experiences, and perceptions of the existing PD framework and how it has prepared them with instructional strategies for teaching literacy skills to diverse low SES urban middle school students. A 24-hour, face-to-face, PD workshop, entitled *Increasing Teachers' Sense of Self-efficacy Using*

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy to Enhance Literacy Instruction, was designed after I gained insights to possible answers to the central and sub-questions. This additional PD workshop is designed to co-exist with the current PD framework. The findings of the data presented in the study helped me to determine that there is a need for ongoing PD specifically focused on using explicit culturally responsive literacy strategies. The workshop will offer teachers, instructional coaches and administrators explicit strategies to address culturally responsive pedagogy and increase teacher self- efficacy when addressing the literacy needs of the diverse low SES urban middle school students through the integration of multicultural literacy. Literature on the project's genre was presented in the literature review, such as: face-to face PD, teacher self-efficacy, PD, urban risk-factors, and culturally responsive pedagogy. In addition, literature was presented on the content that might be utilized in a culturally responsive-based PD for teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators: collaboration, instructional coaching, poverty in urban schools and the United States, culturally responsive teaching, building student-teacher repertoire, and culturally responsive literature. Through PD, teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators will be able to learn about instructional strategies and culturally responsive pedagogy to enhance teacher self-efficacy when teaching diverse low SES middle school students (Bandura, 1993, 1997; Gay, 2013; Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016; Peel, 2014). The topics addressed in this literature review are designed to help prepare teachers to have a renewed appreciation for teaching students from diverse low SES backgrounds ultimately improve their literacy skills and decrease the literacy achievement gap.

Project Description

This project will be a 24-hour, face-to-face, PD workshop, entitled *Increasing Teachers' Sense of Self-efficacy Using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy to Enhance Literacy Instruction*, designed to increase teachers' perceived self-efficacy and provide teachers, instructional coaches and administrators with explicit multicultural instructional strategies when using culturally responsive pedagogy to address the literacy needs of the diverse low-income urban middle school students. When teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators attend relevant and intentional PD, potential changes in instructional methods, teacher self-efficacy, and a growth mindset can occur and may lead to a significant improvement in literacy skills and an increase in academic achievement across the curriculum (Hachfeld et al., 2015;). In addition, the PD may succeed in preparing teachers to have a deeper appreciation for diversity, the effects of poverty on student learning, and become cognizant of cultural disparities and misunderstandings that may exist between teachers and various ethnic cultures (Bandura, 1993, 1997; Gay, 2013; Peel, 2014). All students can learn to read fluently when their parents, teachers, and administrators give them the opportunity, adequate resources, and believe in them. The key to learning lies in differentiating the curriculum to address all races and diverse cultural ethnicities. The criteria and outline of the face-to-face PD were determined based on the study's findings and review of relevant literature.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The resources for this PD include year-round campus-based instructional coaches, Reading coaches, Mentor and Master teachers and Reading interventionists whose job is

to assess and monitor students' reading data through-out the school year and then aid teachers in ways to monitor and adjust instructional strategies. The support staff also included English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and reading specialists. Together, as a cohort, they provide evidence-based instructional strategies and purposeful content for PD and provide teachers with one-to-one support when needed.

Surfside District personnel will provide additional support materials and resources required to implement a quality PD. The support material and resources that will be used to assist teachers in being successful may include but are not limited to: the Internet, chart paper, technology, audiovisual equipment, printers, copy paper, and writing journals for reflections.

Potential Barriers

Potential barriers of this PD project are resistance from teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators to change their mindset and instructional practices. The district has an existing PD framework, which is based on the framework for TAP. First, the administrators might meet communicating the need for this type of PD with resistance if they do not have time to review the project before the start of the school year. I would need to follow school protocol before being granted permission from the executive director to present this PD project to Surfside School District's board of directors as a multicultural addition to the current PD curriculum. Another barrier is finding time during the school year so that the PD will co-exist with the current time frame for PD and can be periodically implemented throughout the year. Veteran teachers will be more likely to resist changing their instructional methods to include multicultural literature

because they may feel that the traditional way of using classic literature to teach themes about life have been successful and effective in the past. Therefore, their belief is that there is no valid reason to change their instructional strategies to include more contemporary culturally responsive literature.

Another potential barrier are financial resources. The school district has a limited supply of multicultural resources available in the school library. Therefore, the school would need to adjust its budget for purchasing more multicultural books, audio visual aids, and culturally responsive learning tools to add to classroom libraries to make materials readily available for students and teachers to read. When school districts value the PD as being high-quality PD, they will afford teachers time and a budget during the school year for high-quality PD (Bartling, 2015).

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

To maintain alignment with the purpose of the study, a 24-hour PD was designed to build teachers' sense of self-efficacy in working with diverse low-income students who struggle to read on grade level and develop culturally responsive literacy rich classrooms. Based on the findings, some of the participants wanted to learn more about how to address cultural differences when working with minority students. According to Gehlbach and Robinson, 2016, teachers do not feel efficacious or competent when teaching culturally diverse students reading skills in the general education classroom. Gay (2013), suggested PD builds teachers' awareness of cultural differences and promotes teacher self-efficacy and competence when utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy, which has the potential to impact student achievement in literacy (Bandura,

1993). The PD framework in Surfside School District is organized based on the TAP system. This PD workshop is designed to co-exist with the current PD framework. PD is currently facilitated by the Principals, Instructional Coach, Master, and Mentor teachers. The project study must be shared with the Executive Director of the district before approval will be granted to implement the PD workshop in the target middle school. Once the Executive Director grants approval, the middle school administrators will notify the teachers and instructional coaches via email to explain that the PD workshop will be implemented into the current PD framework. If the Executive Director decides to offer the PD, discussion will occur at that time as to the date and time of the delivery of the PD.

The face-to-face proposed 24-hour PD delivery recommendations will be implemented during the fall and throughout the school year. I will enlist the support of the classroom teachers, administrators, Instructional Coach, Master teacher, and Mentor teacher to implement ongoing one hour monthly sessions. It is recommended that middle school teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators are required to participate in the training to receive credit hours for PD certification. Information for the PD sessions will appear in the district's annual PD outline via the district's SchoolNet. The 24-hour PD workshop will be designed to guide participants through culturally responsive pedagogy. The over-arching goal is to introduce explicit instructional strategies to enhance teachers' self-efficacy when teaching literacy skills to diverse low SES middle school students from impoverished urban communities.

The PD workshop will be a face-to-face 24-hour workshop. The PD workshop will commence at 8:00 AM and conclude at 4:00 PM for Day 1 and Day 2 for a total of 16 hours (See Appendix A). Additionally, the remaining 8 hours will be delivered as 8 monthly face-to-face one-hour campus-based PD sessions to coexist with the normal PD cluster meetings. The coach, master and mentor teachers will facilitate the monthly sessions. Participants will be expected to bring back success stories, share multicultural lesson plans that worked, share unsuccessful experiences, discuss interim assessments, data analysis, best practices, questions and concerns about delivery methods for culturally responsive teaching, reading strategies, reflections, and outcomes. The three main goals of the PD will be:

- Goal 1: Teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators will begin to build a face-to-face learning community to discuss teacher self-efficacy, culturally responsive pedagogy, and the effects of poverty on diverse low SES students in urban communities.
- Goal 2: Teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators will develop an understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and demonstrate application of evidence-based strategies when working with diverse students from low-income families in order to promote student-teacher repertoire.
- Goal 3: Teachers will create and apply culturally responsive lesson plans to teach literacy skills using multicultural literature to help them develop their perceived sense of self-efficacy.

Roles and Responsibilities of Instructor and Others

The purpose of the PD workshop is to provide explicit culturally responsive instructional practices and evidence-based strategies to develop teacher self-efficacy, which will ultimately close the achievement gap in literacy skills. As the instructor, my role will be to present the findings and seek permission from the Executive Director of Surfside District to implement the PD. I will serve as the change agent by actively helping individuals grow their mindsets personally and professionally. I will serve as a facilitator to participants during the 2-day PD sessions and support the on-going PD monthly cluster meetings throughout the year. I will serve as a facilitator to participants via email and on campus during discussions, and activities. The week before the PD workshop, I will print, copy, and collate the workshop materials and place them into a 3-prong binder for future reference, which will be presented to the workshop participants the first day. Participants will be expected to collaborate with others and share in discussions. The workshop PD will require a commitment of time, expertise, and resources from various stakeholders in education in order to provide the opportunity for professional growth and implementation of effective culturally responsive instructional models. Campus-based reading instructional coaches, Mentor and Master teachers are responsible for mentoring and coaching teachers using culturally responsive strategies throughout the year, and for helping teachers monitor student reading progress and the literacy achievement gap in the target site.

Project Evaluation Plan

The overarching goal of this PD workshop is to offer teachers, instructional coaches, and administration evidence-based culturally responsive instructional strategies to develop teacher self-efficacy and close the gap in literacy skills. The continuous goal is to increase teachers' knowledge and understanding of developing lesson plans and implementing culturally responsive instructional methods that integrate multicultural literature into the general education classroom. PD sessions will be evaluated via formative and summative evaluations. Formative evaluations will be used to provide constructive feedback, which will help to measure the effectiveness of the program's content on an ongoing basis (Lodica, et al., 2010). Moreover, formative evaluations will be used to monitor participants' learning, collaboration, and level of engagement throughout each PD session (See Appendix A). Summative evaluations will be used to determine whether the participants have met the goals of the PD sessions (See Appendix A). The goals of each PD session will be evaluated through a formative evaluation tool. Participants will complete a 5- point Likert scale evaluation tool, which will include a place to record observations and reflections at the conclusion of each session. Participants will complete evaluations at the end of each session. The information collected from the formative and summative assessments will assist me in determining what was helpful and what modifications should be made to improve the PD. Session 1 will also be evaluated using a summative evaluation, which will determine if the training content provided the participants with essential and relevant information about poverty and culturally responsive pedagogy. Did the training allow the participants to collaborate with other

educational professionals on various models of culturally responsive strategies? In Session 2, the participants will begin to collaborate to develop culturally responsive lesson plans. At the end of Session 2, participants will be evaluated through a summative evaluation to determine if the training on instructional content effectively presented ways to develop culturally responsive lesson plans that incorporate multicultural literature to help increase participants' knowledge and skills. Summatively, if the participants are able to determine the most effective instructional content to incorporate into their lesson plans, the goal will be achieved. In Session 3, the participants will continue work cooperatively as a group to develop culturally responsive lesson plans. The participants will interact and role-play culturally responsive teaching using scenarios relevant to the target-learning environment based on their lesson plans. The summative evaluation will determine if the training effectively presented teachers with explicit instructional strategies to integrate culturally responsive instructional methods, ideas for multicultural literature, and additional materials.

The key stakeholders will be the teachers, instructional coaches, and principals because they will be requested to participate in the formative and summative evaluation process of the PD workshop to evaluate the ongoing effectiveness of the workshop curriculum and resources based on the materials presented. The collected data from the formative and summative evaluations will be shared with the Executive Director and Board of Directors of Surfside School District, teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators who participated in the training. The PD instructor will present the evaluation data to the school leadership team in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of

preparing educational professionals for effectively implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in their campus to meet the literacy needs of diverse students from all socioeconomic backgrounds and cultures. In the next sections I will discuss the implications for social change.

Project Implications and Potential for Social Change

Local Community

The project presented in this study, a 24-hour face-to-face PD, was designed to support teachers who work with diverse low SES urban middle school students in order to develop self-efficacy and increase their capacity to teach using a more culturally responsive literacy curriculum. This project is important to local stakeholders because teachers who are culturally responsive recognize the effects of poverty on urban middle school students and their education. By educating teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators on the effects of poverty, urban risk factors, and culturally responsive pedagogy, students and teachers will have the necessary tools to address the achievement gap in literacy skills. This will ultimately effect social change because educators will gain a better appreciation for the diversity in the classroom and be able to monitor and adjust their instruction to meet the needs of the low-income middle school students, thereby increasing gains in literacy skills. Thomas et al. (2012) noted that youth exposed to poverty and specific urban risk factors need positive community-based participation to counter-act the negative results such as low academic achievement, emotional, social, and behavioral disorders typically associated with the learning environment of urban schools. Therefore, this project has the potential to increase teach self-efficacy along with student

performance. Ultimately, students who feel appreciated by their teacher will work harder to improve their reading skills.

Far-Reaching

The implications for social change, resulting from this study, could include a model for United States school systems to use when making decisions related to implementing a PD framework to being more culturally responsive in order to address the needs of teachers who work with students from diverse low SES backgrounds. This project has the potential to cater to developing teacher self-efficacy in Surfside School District. Many of the problems in the educational system are rooted in larger contexts within urban communities and society at large, such as poverty, racism, unemployment, and the lack of proper health care (AAP, 2016; Gardner et al., 2009; Gehlbach & Robinson, 2016; USDE, 2015c). These issues should be addressed to decrease inequality and learning gaps, which are present in many urban schools in the United States.

Conclusion

Participation in a highly-qualified culturally responsive PD could be beneficial for educators, instructional coaches, administrators, and school systems to work together to minimize the effects of poverty on students from diverse low SES families. In order for all students to receive an equitable education and become proficient readers in this 21st century, all stakeholders must be knowledgeable of the phenomena of culturally responsive pedagogy and how to utilize the school's instructional support system effectively to increase teacher capacity for working with students from all walks of life. In Section 3 of this study, I discussed the aspects of the project that were developed after

gaining insight of middle school teachers', the instructional coach's, and the administrators' needs, experiences, and perceptions of the effectiveness of PD in helping educators become better literacy teachers. I also discussed the description and goals, rationale, literature review, implementation, project evaluation plan, and project implications. In Section 4, I discuss the project's strengths in building middle school reading teachers' sense of self-efficacy and competencies to close the literacy skills' achievement gap using culturally responsive pedagogy. Finally, I reflect on what I learned about the scholarly development of the project study, leadership and change, and the implications for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative collective case study was to explore middle school teachers' perceptions of PD and self-efficacy when implementing instructional strategies for teaching literacy to diverse low SES urban middle school students in a southeastern state in the United States of America. Based on the findings of the research, I developed a 24-hour, face-to-face, PD workshop (Appendix A), which is designed to co-exist with the current PD framework. This additional PD workshop, entitled *Increasing Teachers' Sense of Self-efficacy Using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy to Enhance Literacy Instruction*, is designed to offer teachers, instructional coaches and administrators explicit strategies to address the literacy needs of the diverse low SES urban middle school students and it is included in Appendix A.

In this section of the study, I present my reflections of the strengths as well as the limitations to the process of implementing a PD workshop that will be beneficial to teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators in their effort to close the achievement gap in literacy skills for low SES middle school students in an urban school district in the southeastern part of the United States. In addition, I reflect and self-analyze on what I learned about scholarship, project development, and leadership and change.

Project Strengths

The project study is crucial to the success of the students, teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators in addressing the literacy gap in the target school. This project is applicable to addressing the need for further methods and instructional

strategies to target diverse students from low-income families who struggle to read and write proficiently on state standardized tests. This project study has the potential to impact teachers and administrators across the state by offering effective, evidence-based, culturally responsive strategies targeted to address multicultural issues and best practices for teaching literacy skills to diverse low SES middle school students. The overall strength of the project study is its intense focus on PD. The PD workshop I have designed will reflect teacher and administrator understanding of the purpose for a more culturally responsive pedagogy. Additionally, in regards to educating the participants on how to implement a more diverse curriculum, the PD has the potential to increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy and student achievement in literacy skills. Researchers have suggested that teachers' opinions, beliefs, and perceptions about diverse low SES students have a direct correlation on how effective teachers are when teaching low-income students from urban communities (Mowat, 2015). The project provides a clear rationale for how culturally responsive pedagogy can increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy in understanding how students from diverse low SES families with diverse cultural beliefs learn differently and offer effective evidence-based instructional strategies to close the gap in literacy achievement (Barnes & Gaines, 2015; Garcia & Chun, 2016).

Project Limitations

One of the project's limitations in addressing the problem is finding the time to educate teachers on the intense effects that poverty has on the educational success of the students. The PD workshop only touches the surface of education disparities that prevail in many urban school districts. When teachers can not relate to the marginalized culture

that they teach, they are more resistant to changing their instructional methods because either they do not see the importance or value in teaching a more culturally responsive pedagogy or they feel ill-equipped to meet the challenge (LeFevre, 2014; Park & Jeong, 2013). Teachers in this study shared that they wished that they had more PD and one-to-one instructional coaching opportunities to prepare them for the barriers that they faced while teaching a diverse low SES urban student population. Participants in this study had a low sense of self-efficacy about teaching culturally responsive literacy skills, which increased their resistance to diversify instructional methods (LeFevre, 2014; Park & Jeong, 2013).

Another limitation of the potential project is that it focused solely on the practices of the target middle school in the southeastern region of the United States. This limits the ability to generalize the findings despite the value of the data collected in this project study. In order to strengthen this study, additional research could expand the participation of subjects and include a larger sample of school districts to add validity to the findings (Peters, et al, 2016).

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Providing additional resources online through open discussions, blogs, success stories, lesson plans, and document uploads on a monthly basis could help teachers diversify their curriculum while in the process of adapting to a more culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2013). The online PD has the potential to increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy by providing them with fast, relevant, effective evidence-based teaching

strategies that are personalized to meet the needs of the participants and their students (Bandura, 1986, 1997).

Another recommendation would be to conduct more research to expand the sample to more school districts in different regions to gain a broader perspective of teachers', instructional coaches' and administrators' perceptions of utilizing an intense PD with a focus on culturally responsive teaching strategies and implementing an additional multicultural curriculum to address the needs of its diverse marginalized student population in closing the gap in literacy skills (Peters, et al, 2016).

Scholarship

Over the course of this project study, I have learned a plethora of information about the process of scholarly research and development. The development of this project study began with an inquiry into the problem of urban middle school students not meeting proficiency in literacy on state standardized assessments for three consecutive years (SCDE, 2012, 2013, 2014). After the problem was identified, I engaged in an exhaustive search of timely, relevant peer-reviewed literature to support potential solutions to the problem. Initially, I felt that the process of developing this study was a daunting task until I learned ways to adjust my level of self-esteem and change my thought process to be inductive and analytical. Hence, I deem changing my perception and way of thinking as the most significant factor in the process of becoming a scholarly thinker, researcher, and writer. The project study has challenged me to dig deeper, think far beyond my educational scope and surpass the limitations of my imprisoned mind. The scholarly process allowed me to gain practical skills and a wealth of knowledge about the

value of an effective classroom teacher and the importance of embedded PD in the framework of the learning community.

Scholarship was first achieved by looking through the lens of teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators to capture the essence of their perceptions of effective PD. The byproduct of my scholarly research was the project development of a potential PD workshop that intentionally provides teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators with effective evidence-based culturally responsive instructional strategies and additional multicultural resources for implementing a more diverse literacy curriculum, which has the potential to increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy and close the gap in literacy skills for diverse low SES urban middle school students.

Project Development and Evaluation

The rationale for the project study emerged from 15 years of teaching as an elementary level teacher. For the last 13 years, I have compassionately taught students in impoverished urban school districts where the student population is predominantly Black, Hispanic, and Latino. As a classroom teacher, I have witnessed firsthand the negative effects of poverty primarily on the learning experience of students of color. Moreover, I have witnessed some teachers perpetuate a stereotypical negative view of marginalized students by holding low expectations for student achievement. As a result, I felt compelled to address this problem. My desire is to help diverse low SES urban middle school students become proficient readers and writers and support the dedicated urban middle school educators in their fight to ameliorate the gap in literacy skills that plague urban communities across this nation. When teachers develop into more efficacious and

culturally responsive educators, they have the potential to change the trajectory of the many low-income students who struggle to read on grade level into literate, productive citizens in this 21st century global economy.

Conducting the literature review was the most complicated of all my tasks because I had to learn how to organize the information that I gathered in a cohesively organized paragraph with transitions to make my writing flow. At first, writing was difficult because I did not know about the MEAL plan for paragraph structure. However, once I sought advice from Dr. Cathryn White, I was able to complete the task almost effortlessly. I enjoyed reading and learning from the list of peer-reviewed articles because it enlightened me on various topics and theories.

The most tedious part of the process was transcribing, analyzing, and coding the data collected to develop emergent themes to ultimately design PD to address the needs of the teachers. Another challenge was deciding what information to include and how to create tables to accurately summarize the findings. Additionally, I felt that being organized was crucial to a successful project study. I used a systemic approach to organize the literature review based on themes that were the most relevant to address the needs of the teacher. I organized the outline for the PD workshop agenda to correlate with the order of the literature review.

As the developer of the project, it was paramount that I was able to determine the effectiveness the project provided and its rate of success by using both summative and formative evaluation instruments. The evaluation instruments were simplistic and easy to administer and explicitly stated unbiased questions. It is imperative to the success of the

PD workshop to know whether participants felt more self-efficacious at the end of the PD workshop compared to the start of the PD workshop.

Leadership and Change

I believe that true leaders seek to teach others how to lead. The most effective leader will lead by example to support change in the learning community. Effective leaders recognize when there is a problem and work to find solutions immediately to change the situation. Most importantly, effective leaders create environments in which students, families, educators, and administrators feel valued by their peers. Leaders intentionally foster empowering PD opportunities that make individuals feel supported and respected. Leaders create cultures in which trust is commonplace and people know that they belong to an awesome learning community. Leaders build in people a sense of efficacy; a feeling that together, they can be successful in accomplishing any goal.

Leadership and change are ongoing processes that work together to accomplish goals for the school. As a project developer, I learned to listen to the participants and to my leaders at Walden University to develop an effective and purposeful PD project. The PD project has the potential to effect change in the lives of all stakeholders in the target urban school district. Consequently, the target middle school students will achieve better learning results on standardized literacy test and educators will feel efficacious, valued, and respected by the leadership in the learning community.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

As a developing scholar, I was unsure of myself at the initial start of the program. I questioned my competence level because I have never developed a project of this

magnitude. As I progressed through each chapter of the project study, I learned to build upon what I learned from the previous chapters. There were numerous occasions when I had to rely on the expertise and the encouragement of my doctoral committee to guide me through the process. Preparing an exhaustive literature review, rereading and analyzing my data gave me a wealth of information to glean from in order to design a purposeful PD project. This rigorous doctoral project helped me to hone in on my writing and research skills to be able to comprehensively research a topic in education. As a result, I have grown to respect myself as a professional scholar who has studied and acquired the skills and qualifications to be called a doctor of education.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

As a practitioner in the field of education, I have learned practical ways to improve my instructional methods and to promote student achievement in the classroom. I am more determined now to effect change for the students in the target middle school in regards to helping them become proficient readers and writers. My professional goal is to work with all stakeholders to effect change on the local and state level through the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2013). More importantly, I want to develop lifelong relationships with the stakeholders and participants that will allow me to network and assist all stakeholders with explicit evidence-based strategies and solutions to achieve educational goals.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

As a novice project developer, initially I was intimidated by the doctoral project study. As a classroom teacher, I had not acquired the experience of formulating a PD

project of this magnitude. However, I understood the value of the project study and the urgency to help the students, teachers, and administrators in the target school improve literacy skills for its marginalized student population. Therefore, I used the project study as an opportunity to develop into a scholarly researcher. Although the participants shared that the current PD framework was beneficial, they also asserted that they had a low sense of self-efficacy when teaching diverse low SES middle school students' literacy skills. I believe that the PD project I have developed will provide teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators with the opportunity to learn more about culturally responsive pedagogy and will enhance the existing PD framework. The overarching goal is to empower students and teachers using the theory of culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Gay, 2013) and the social learning theory (Bandura, 1986, 1997), as a PD framework to increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Many participants in the study understood that race is an issue in teaching and being culturally competent in racial issues does affect student-teacher relationships and ultimately student achievement (Peters et al, 2016).

Reflection on Importance of the Work

Researchers have suggested that urban schools serving low-income Black, Hispanic, and Latino communities tend to achieve poor academic results (AAP, 2016; USDE, 2015c; Weiss, 2014). My vision for the development of this PD project will be to support scholars in achieving better learning results for students of color living in poverty. I believe that this PD when used appropriately can make a difference in the lives of all children. Teachers and administrators must first commit to using the PD project as a

way to improve teachers' instructional practices and subsequently increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy (Baldwin, 2016). As I reflect on the project study, I believe strongly that middle school teachers in this southeastern state of the United States need this project. The efficacy of teachers being more culturally competent and culturally responsive may depend on incorporating the project study into PD to address diversity in the learning environment (Bartling, 2015). Teachers must address the needs of the students before they can teach the students (Aronson et al, 2015). Students are more likely to succeed academically and emotionally if they feel valued by their teacher and peers (Baldwin, 2015; Griner & Stewart, 2013). The project study workshop I developed has the potential to prepare teachers to help educators and administrators understand the culture of the demographics of the student population (Bartling, 2015). The project study also has the potential to enlighten educators on how poverty indirectly decreases student achievement. The ultimate goal is to provide students, teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators with the most effective research-based instructional strategies to meet the needs of the diverse low-income urban middle school students to aid them in becoming fluent readers and writers in this 21st century global economy.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Impact on Social Change

This project study will ultimately effect social change because educators will gain a better appreciation for the diversity in the classroom and be able to monitor and adjust their instruction to meet the needs of the low-income middle school students thereby, increasing gains in literacy skills. Thomas et al. (2012) noted that youth exposed to

poverty and specific urban risk factors need positive community-based participation to counter-act the negative results such as low academic achievement, emotional, social, and behavioral disorders typically associated with the learning environment of urban schools. Therefore, this project has the potential to increase teach self-efficacy along with student performance. Ultimately, students who feel appreciated by their teacher will work harder to improve their reading skills. In order for all students to receive an equitable education and become proficient readers in this 21st century, all stakeholders must be knowledgeable of the phenomena of culturally responsive pedagogy and how to utilize the school's instructional support system effectively to increase teacher capacity for working with students from all walks of life.

Directions for Future Research and Application

The results of this study were grounded in the experiences of middle school teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators. This project study encouraged all stakeholders to embrace culturally responsive pedagogy (Baldwin, 2015; Gay, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Rychly & Graves, 2012) as an ongoing initiative to support the educational experience of its diverse student population and increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy when teaching diverse marginalized students from low income-families. The findings of this study present implications for the continual implementation of the existing PD framework. However, literacy teachers in the general education classrooms will be trained to use the instructional strategies introduced in the PD workshop to enhance the current PD framework by integrating culturally responsive pedagogy into the ongoing PD to help develop teachers' sense of self-efficacy and increase the capacity to

teach diverse low-income students from impoverished urban communities. Researchers have investigated the theory and practice of culturally responsive pedagogy and there are many areas that remain to be investigated (Baldwin, 2015; Barnes & Gaines, 2015; Chong & Kong, 2012; Dell' Angelo, 2016; Ford et al, 2014; Gay, 2013; Siciliano, 2016). Future research could investigate the impact of culturally responsive teaching on student literacy achievement. Additionally, research could be done to investigate the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy on the level of teachers' sense of self-efficacy after the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy compared to the previous years.

Conclusion

The project study was developed to explore the perceptions, needs, and experiences of the teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators in regards to improving the instructional skills of literacy teachers. The project study allowed me the opportunity to develop a PD workshop, which consisted of educators and administrators collaborating to learn ways to embrace culturally responsive pedagogy as an ongoing initiative to support the existing PD framework in an effort to close the gap in literacy skills for middle school students in an urban school district in the southeastern part of the United States. The project study should be utilized for future PD for all stakeholders in the learning community.

Within Section 4 of this project study, I reflected on the project study, the strengths, the limitations, the implications, and the recommendations for future research. Furthermore, I included an analysis of what I learned throughout the process about scholarship, project development, and the potential to effect social change in the field of

education. During the process of this doctoral journey, I grew into a scholarly research project developer. I have a newfound appreciation for the unwavering determination and scholarship of researchers in the field of education. It is my vision to one day effect change in education for not only marginalized students of color, but for all students so that they might receive a truly equitable, purposeful education; one in which educators respect and consider the value of diverse cultures to the general education classroom. As I welcome the end of this phase of my doctoral journey, I will continue to seek opportunities to effect change in the field of education locally and nationally in an effort to increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy and to encourage more urban school districts to implement and utilize a more intentional culturally responsive pedagogy to inspire educators to sharpen their instructional practices, which may result in higher standardized test scores and close the gap in literacy skills for diverse, low SES urban middle school students.

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Appendix A: The Project

Increasing Teachers' Sense of Self-efficacy Using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy to Enhance Literacy Instruction

Cultural diversity is present in almost all classrooms in every school in the nation. Researchers suggested that America would continue to evolve into a melting pot of race, language, and religion well into the 21st century (Griner & Stewart, 2013). The learning environment I observed for this project study mirrored the image of a melting pot of diverse cultures. When it pertains to educating its citizens, researchers suggest that the US wants educators to do what is best for students in every diverse and multi-cultural classroom that permeates the nation's school system regardless of race or SES (CIA, 2014a; 2014b; USDE, 2015c). For more than five decades, increasing student learning in literacy has been a key goal of instruction, educational research, and educational reform throughout the United States. I learned from the project, that the US has responded to poverty related risk factors in urban communities such as high rates of illiteracy, high birthrates, as well as differences in socioeconomic statuses in order to educate all children even in the most remote areas of the country (CIA, 2014a; 2014b). In summary, I learned through research that the key education issues that are a concern for the US include the process of selecting highly qualified teachers and assigning them to schools, the quality of teacher PD training programs, incentives to improve student and teacher performance, and the quality of teaching (OECD, 2014). Findings indicated that all teachers and site administrators of Surfside School District perceived the literacy professional development trainings as being supportive in increasing teacher personal knowledge and

skill development in instructing diverse students in Reading/ ELA content. However, the professional development framework may not be conducive to all learning and teaching styles whereas some teachers need more explicit one-to-one instructional coaching and modeling in order to increase self-efficacy to grasp the concepts and some teachers do not in regards to how to teach literacy skills to a diverse low SES student population.

Findings also indicated that the professional development trainings could work more effectively on increasing student literacy skills if the teachers had more time to collaborate one-to-one with the IC in order to feel more confident and competent that they were properly implementing the instructional strategies within their respective classroom curriculums. Gutshall (2013) suggested that teachers' mindset can affect their sense of self-efficacy and limit their instructional practices when teaching diverse low-income urban middle school students. Professional development is one avenue to improving teachers' cultural awareness and cultural responsiveness to increase teacher self-efficacy in the general classroom.

Purpose of Project

The purpose of this PD project is to address the efficacy needs of middle school literacy teachers, instructional coaches and administrators through culturally responsive instructional practices to ameliorate the gap in literacy skills for diverse impoverished urban middle school students. Guskey (2002) noted, the main purpose of professional development trainings is to guide and change professional practices and beliefs in classroom instruction and in the attitudes of educators and administrators to ultimately improve student learning. The belief is if educators have the proper instructional

coaching, high quality staff development that they find useful, and have more autonomy along with accountability, they will become more highly effective and efficient teacher leaders in the classroom (Marsh, McCombs, & Martorell, 2010; Mintzes, Marcum, Yates, & Mark, 2013). Therefore, the PD workshop is essential to addressing the lack of literacy skills in urban middle schools, increase educator's knowledge, self-efficacy related to literacy instruction, and it has the potential to prepare teachers to teach more effectively thereby equipping students with the practical skills necessary to increase literacy performance on state mandated test and become proficient readers and writers in this 21st century.

Target Audience

The primary target audience for this PD will be middle school reading teachers, instructional coaches, master and mentor teachers, and administrators employed within Surfside School District. As the PD develops, the audience may be broadened to include all reading teachers employed within the district and surrounding districts who may see a need for their teachers to attend a PD that focuses on developing culturally responsive teachers in order to close the literacy achievement gap.

Timeline

This PD follows a 24-hour face-to face instructional learning format designed to take place at the target site throughout the course of the school year. The face-to-face proposed 24-hour PD delivery recommendations will be implemented during the fall. The PD workshop will commence at 8:00 AM and conclude at 4:00 PM for Day 1 and Day 2 for a total of 16 hours. Additionally, the remaining 8 hours will be delivered as 8 monthly

face-to-face one-hour campus-based PD sessions to coexist with the normal PD cluster meetings. The coach, master and mentor teachers will facilitate the monthly sessions. Participants will be expected to bring back success stories, share multicultural lesson plans that worked, share unsuccessful experiences, discuss interim assessments, data analysis, best practices, questions and concerns about delivery methods for culturally responsive teaching, reading strategies, reflections, and outcomes. On Day 1, Session 1 will focus on Goal 1 and over the course of 4 hours, developing a learning community to discuss teacher self-efficacy, culturally responsive pedagogy, and multicultural resources relative to diverse people in urban communities. Attention will be placed on participant self-reflection of their cultural beliefs, biases, values, behaviors, and mindsets and how these qualities influence instructional practice and contribute to the achievement gap. Session 2 will focus on Goal 2 and over the course of 4 hours, participants will develop an understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy to promote teacher-self-efficacy, build student-teacher repertoire, and demonstrate application of evidence-based strategies when creating lesson plans. On Day 2, Session 3 will focus on Goal 3 and discuss content-based approaches in classrooms to create culturally responsive lesson plans using multicultural resources. Over 8 hours, teachers will identify effective instructional strategies to teach reading to culturally and ethnically diverse students, design culturally responsive lesson plans, and practice implementation. The agenda for Session 1 is presented first with the supporting documents followed by Session 2 and Session 3's agenda and supporting documents.

Goals of the PD are listed below:

- Goal 1: Teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators will begin to build a face-to-face learning community to discuss teacher self-efficacy, culturally responsive pedagogy, and the effects of poverty on diverse low SES students in urban communities.
- Goal 2: Teachers, ICs, and administrators will develop an understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and demonstrate application of evidence-based strategies when working with diverse students from low-income families in order to promote student-teacher repertoire.
- Goal 3: Teachers will create and apply culturally responsive lesson plans to teach literacy skills using multicultural literature to help them develop their perceived sense of self-efficacy.

Materials and Equipment

- Audio visual presentation device
- Internet access
- Markers and highlighters
- Pocket folders with lined writing paper
- Post-it chart paper, Post-it sticky notes, index cards
- Pens and notepads
- Handouts and presentation articles
- PowerPoint presentation
- Laptop

Increasing Teachers' Sense of Self-efficacy Using Culturally Responsive

Pedagogy to Enhance Literacy Instruction

Day 1 Session #1 Agenda

Goal 1: Teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators will begin to build a face-to-face learning community to discuss teacher self-efficacy, culturally responsive pedagogy, urban risk factors, and the effects of poverty on diverse low SES students in urban communities.

Objectives for Session 1	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define self-efficacy • Define culturally responsive pedagogy • Examine beliefs, values, biases, mindset, and behaviors towards other cultures • Explore examples of culturally responsive teaching strategies
8:00 am - 8:10 am	Create a name tent. Write your name and family nationality on the outside of the name tent.
8:10 am – 8:30 am	<p>Introduction and Ice-breaker: Meet and Greet!</p> <p>During introductions, begin with name, what content you teach, years in education, and what grade you teach?</p>
8:30 am – 8:40 am	<p>Establish group norms.</p> <p>The facilitator will state the purpose of the PD workshop sessions: “The purpose of the professional development workshop is to provide explicit culturally responsive information, effective instructional practices, and evidence-based strategies to increase teachers’ sense of self-efficacy, which will ultimately close the achievement gap in literacy skills.”</p> <p>Introduce the goal and objectives for today's PD session.</p>
8:40 am- 9:00 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity 1: Handout Self-efficacy Survey. Participants will individually complete the survey and quick write to answer the following questions: How many of you think you are great teachers? How many of you think you are good teachers? What do you need to feel that you are a great teacher?
9:00 am – 9:20 am	Activity 2: Think-Pair-Share- Participants will Quick-write in

<p>9:20 am – 9:30 am</p>	<p>on paper their definition of self-efficacy. Then participants turn and talk share what they wrote with a partner. Facilitator will call on a few people to share aloud what the other partner stated.</p>
<p>9:30 am – 10:00 am</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restroom Break (10 minutes)
<p>10:00 am - 10:40 am</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show the PPT information about teacher self-efficacy, PD, collaboration, and instructional coaching.
<p>10:40 am - 11:00 am</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion Questions and Reflection • Read Aloud If She Only Knew Me by Jeff Gray and Fletcher Thomas • Discussion Questions and Reflections: Examine beliefs, values, biases, mindset, and behaviors towards other cultures: Turn and Talk
<p>11:00 am – 11:08 am</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question Activity: What is culture? • What is culturally responsive pedagogy? <p>Activity 3: Gallery Walk-Use Post-it Notes and chart paper. Divide the participants into groups of six. Have the participants write individually on a Post-it note their definition of culture and culturally responsive pedagogy. Then as a small group come to a consensus. Each group will write their favorite definition on chart paper and post it on the wall. Participants when be given time to walk around the room to read each poster. After every group has shared their definition aloud with the whole group, the facilitator will ask the whole group to decide on one definition that encompasses all of the smaller groups' ideas. The facilitator will then record the one definition on separate chart paper and display it on the wall to refer back to later.</p>
<p>11:08 am – 11:20 am</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity 4 View the video #1, (7 minutes 43 sec) entitled, "Every Child Deserves a Champion" https://www.ted.com/talks/rita_pierson_every_kid_needs_a_champion Video Speaker-Rita Pierson
<p>11:20 am – 11:40 am</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion and reflection
<p>11:40 am – 11:47 am</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is culturally responsive pedagogy (Show PPT slides) • How does culturally responsive teaching effect student learning? (PowerPoint Slides)
<p>11:47 am – 12:00 pm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion and Reflection/ Recap of 1st session • The facilitator will distribute, discuss the evaluation form, its' purpose for future PD sessions, and allow time for participants to fill out their forms (Professional Development Workshop Day 1 Session #1 Evaluation).

Educator Self-efficacy Survey

Use the following rating scale when marking your response:
5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2= Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

Please answer the questions below:

How many of you think you are great teachers?

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree
5 4 3 2 1

How many of you think you are good teachers?

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree
5 4 3 2 1

What do you need to feel that you are a great teacher?

Quick- Write below the definition of self-efficacy.

Day 1 Session #1 Evaluation Form

Thank you for participating in the Professional Development Day 1 Session #1. Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation below. Your feedback will provide valuable information to the facilitator and help to prepare for future PD sessions.

Use the following rating scale when marking your response:

5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

This professional development session's objectives were clearly stated.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

This professional development session's objectives were met.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

This professional development session helped me better understand teacher self-efficacy.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

This professional development session helped me better understand culturally responsive pedagogy.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

This professional development session has taught me my role as an effective culturally responsive teacher.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

Overall, this professional development session was a successful experience for me.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

List any suggestions you have for improving this professional development workshop.

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm	Lunch
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm	Day 1 Session 2 Agenda
<p>Goal 2: Teachers, ICs, and administrators will develop an understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy and demonstrate application of evidence-based strategies when working with diverse students from low-income families in order to promote student-teacher relationships.</p>	
Objectives for Session 2	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore culturally responsive teaching strategies • Explore the structure of culturally responsive classrooms • Define an effective culturally responsive teacher • Describe urban risk factors • Define poverty • Discuss how poverty affects student learning • Discuss student-teacher relationships (repertoire) 	
1:00 pm – 1:30 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is culturally responsive pedagogy important? Why? or Why not? Participants turn and talk. What are some effective culturally responsive teaching strategies? (PPT slides)
1:30 pm – 1:45 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some urban risk factors? (PPT slides)
1:45 pm- 2:05 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is poverty? (PPT slides) • How does poverty affect student learning? (PPT Slides) • Discuss and share.
2:05 pm – 2:15 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restroom Break
2:15 pm – 2:32 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity 1 : View the video #2, (17 min.) entitled, “How to Fix a Broken School” https://www.ted.com/talks/linda_cliatt_wayman_how_to_fix_a_broken_school_lead_fearlessly_love_hard <p>Video Speaker- Linda Cliatt-Wayman</p>
2:32 pm – 2:52 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion and reflections (Venn Diagram) • Activity #2: Compare and Contrast the learning environment in the video to this campus.

<p>2:52 pm – 3:15 pm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The facilitator will ask questions of the group: • What is a mentor? Why is it important to mentor students? Participants Think- Pair- Share • What is student-teacher repertoire? (Show PPT Slides) • Discuss and share. Quick write
<p>3:15 pm- 3:35 pm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity 3: small group activity using chart paper: List ways to build student-teacher repertoire with low-income students using culturally responsive strategies. Gallery walk, Display ideas around the walls so teachers can walk around and add to the list. • View the video #3 entitled, <i>Gang Member Turned Ph.D Mentors Youth on the Fringe</i>. https://youtu.be/4G3H5qoU_Mo Participants will create a T-chart using paper to list negative influences and events in Rios' life and list positive influences and events that affected his life. Participants will then turn and talk to discuss and compare the video to what they see happening to students in this community (PowerPoint Slide)
<p>3:35 pm – 3:45 pm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recap the 2nd session, Reflections, Questions and Answers
<p>3:45 pm – 4:00 pm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation: The facilitator will distribute, discuss the evaluation form, its' purpose for future training sessions, and allow time for mentors to fill out their forms (Professional Development Workshop Day 1 Session #2 Evaluation).

Day 1 Session #2 Evaluation

Thank you for participating in the Professional Development Day 1 Session #2. Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation below. Your feedback will provide valuable information to the facilitator and help to prepare for future PD sessions.

Use the following rating scale when marking your response:

5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

This professional development session's objectives were clearly stated.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

This professional development session's objectives were met.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

This professional development session helped me better understand my role as a culturally responsive teacher.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

This professional development activity has taught me how poverty affects student learning.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

This professional development session has taught me why I should establish a relationship with my students.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

This professional development session helped me understand the collaboration between the home, school, and community.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

Overall, this professional development session was a successful experience for me.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

List any suggestions you have for improving this professional development workshop.

Increasing Teachers' Sense of Self-efficacy Using Culturally Responsive

Pedagogy to Enhance Literacy Instruction

Day 2 Session #3 Agenda

Goal 3: Teachers will create and apply culturally responsive lesson plans to teach literacy skills using multicultural literature to help them develop their perceived sense of self-efficacy.

Objectives for Session #3	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review self-efficacy • Review culturally responsive pedagogy • Explore a variety of multicultural resources • Demonstrate culturally responsive teaching strategies • Create and apply culturally responsive lesson plans to teach literacy skills • Discuss plans and ideas for ongoing monthly cluster meetings • Explore ideas for culminating end-of-the year school wide diversity project 	
8:00 am - 8:30 am	<p>Ice Breaker: "Name Game" Participants use an adjective to describe their personality starting with the first letter in their first name.</p> <p>Review group norms.</p> <p>The facilitator will state the purpose of the PD workshop sessions: "The purpose of the professional development workshop is to provide explicit culturally responsive information, effective instructional practices, and evidence-based strategies to increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy, which will ultimately close the achievement gap in literacy skills."</p> <p>Introduce the goal and objectives for today's PD session.</p>
8:30 am - 8:50 pm	<p>Activity 1: Review the results of the Self-efficacy Survey.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the overarching purpose for the PD workshop is to increase teachers' sense of self-efficacy so that they will feel more competent when teaching literacy skills to diverse impoverished urban students in order to close the gap in literacy skills. • Recap key points using the PPT information about self-efficacy.
8:50 am - 9:10 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity 2: Watch video: (15 min.) The Shocking Truth about School: Fish are Being Forced to Climb Trees

<p>9:10 am - 9:30 am</p>	<p>https://www.instagram.com/prince_ea Speaker: Prince Ea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video Discussion Questions and Reflections Activity: Complete the reflections sheet. Do you believe that the learning environment should be updated? Do you agree? Why or Why not? Quick Write Individually, Then Pair and Share, Group share
<p>9:30 am – 9:40 am 9:40 am – 10:20 am</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restroom break 9:30 AM (10 min.) • Activity 3: Ask questions to review the elements of culturally responsive pedagogy. Remind the participants of the Gallery Walk-Using Post-it Notes and chart paper that they engaged in the day before. (Show PPT slides)
<p>10:20 am - 10:40 am</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity 4: Facilitator will Model a Read Aloud: <i>Celebrate! Connections Among Cultures</i> by Jan Reynolds (2006) [informational text] Facilitator will use the book to engage the participants in a discussion about cultural differences.
<p>10:40 am - 10:50 am</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity 5: Explore multicultural resources. Facilitator will review handout. (show PPT slide) • Activity 6: “Quick-Write Pre-Assessment about Culturally Responsive Teaching” and lesson planning. Participants briefly share individually on the handout some of their assumptions, feelings, and thoughts about teaching literacy to promote diversity.
<p>10:50 am – 11:10 am</p>	
<p>11:10 am – 11:30 am</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity 7: Look at the cartoon (show PPT slide). “Table Talk”- Reflect with a partner on how you would handle this situation if this were to happen to you or someone in your classroom.
<p>11:30 am – 12: 00 pm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity 8: Scenarios/ Role-play Activity: Participants will plan together as grade level teams and then prepare to act out or role-play for the whole group to demonstrate culturally responsive teaching strategies. Participant groups will receive one of the five scenarios. They will receive 10 minutes to plan out their scenario, answering the guiding questions. Each group has a different scenario and role-play, giving feedback (10 minutes). Rotations will continue until each group has acted out their specific scenario. • Scenario 1 - You have noticed that several of your ESL students do not participate in reading during class discussion and are quiet when you try to engage them. Their grades are not good and you feel participation has a lot to do with it. What could you do to help build student-

	<p>efficacy? What might this look like in a lesson involving literacy skills?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scenario 2 – A few White students across your class periods are laughing and saying hateful things about an African American girl. They loudly discuss her dirty clothes, her hair being “nappy” and her shoes being too big for her feet. What do you do to address their behavior? How would this look in a lesson involving literacy skills? • Scenario 3 – One African American students seems to be always angry every morning. He is disrespectful towards others and you. He usually calms down right after lunch. How do you attempt to approach this situation? What culturally responsive strategies might you incorporate? How would this look in a lesson involving literacy skills? • Scenario 4 – Juan is new to the school from Puerto Rico. He is extremely overweight for his height. You notice that many of your students are afraid to talk to him. During lunch, he sits by himself. What culturally responsive strategies might you incorporate? What might this look like in a classroom lesson involving literacy? • Scenario 5 - You have a number of students who have complained of celebrating Black History Month or Hispanic Heritage Month. Their parents told them that it is not important because we don't celebrate White Heritage Month. What do you do to promote diversity without hurting others feelings? How could you incorporate culturally responsive strategies? How does this look in the classroom as a lesson? • Wrap up before lunch. Questions and Reflections
12:00 pm- 1:00 pm	Lunch break

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm	Activity 8: Participants will expound on their scenarios to create lesson plans for 60 minutes. Each group will continue to work together as a grade level team to collaborate on standards, ideas, and culturally responsive strategies. The facilitator will provide each group with a lesson plan template. Participants will work as a team to write a working lesson plan that would be relevant and useful in the general classroom. Each lesson plan will incorporate culturally responsive teaching strategies and multicultural resources. Participants are encouraged to use the internet to locate culturally responsive teaching websites and multicultural literature. Each group will act out their lesson plan if time permits. Administrators, Instructional coaches and Master and Mentor Teachers are encouraged to help participants with planning activities, locating websites and various multicultural resources.
2:00 pm – 2:10 pm	Restroom break (10 min.)
2:10 pm – 2:30 pm	Summative Evaluation: The facilitator will analyze lesson plans for culturally responsive teaching strategies. Observe participants level of engagement, creativity, interactions and communication skills.
2:30 pm – 3:30 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitator will discuss schoolwide activities: Participants brainstorm ideas and discuss plans for ongoing monthly cluster meetings throughout the year. (Show PPT) • Participants will meet monthly during cluster for one hour to reflect on culturally responsive lesson plans, ideas, and successes in the classroom. • Participants will explore ideas for interim assessments and culminating end-of-the year school wide diversity projects. (Show outline on PPT)
3:35 pm – 3:45 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recap of Session #3: Reflections, Questions and Answers Activity: “Quick-Write Post-Reflections about Culturally Responsive Teaching” and lesson planning. Participants briefly share individually their assumptions, feelings, and thoughts about teaching literacy to promote diversity. Did your feelings change? Why or Why not? Give details.
3:45 pm – 4:00 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The facilitator will distribute the evaluation forms. Allow time for participants to fill out their forms (Professional Development Workshop Day 2 Session #3 Evaluation).

Additional Multicultural Resources

Begin by reviewing the titles in your library. Note the number of books and the dates of publication. Determine how many books are diverse titles. Access ethnic award winning titles which provide literary and cultural/ ethical criteria, together with lists of books awarded, honored, and commended. These can be the books to begin reading to establish a base in relationship to accurate cultural and ethnic understandings. Focus on books representative of the backgrounds of a group of students in the classroom. Establish a community of readers with parents, students, administrators, and teachers of diverse backgrounds. The collaboration can lead to student growth and lead to increased capacity and confidence for all stakeholders (Quiroa, 2017).

Websites for Blogs

- *American Indians in Children's Literature*, americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com
- *De Colores: The Raza Experience in Books for Children*, decoloresreviews.blogspot.com
- *Latinxs in Kid Lit*, latinosinkidlit.com
- *The Open Book* by Lee & Low Books, blog.leeandlow.com
- *Reading While White*, readingwhilewhite.blogspot.com
- *Rich in Color*, richincolor.com
- *Worlds of Words*, wowlit.org

Ethnic Awards and Other Helpful Sites

African & African American, American Indian, and Asian American Themes

- Children's Africana Book Awards
- Coretta Scott King Book Awards
- John Steptoe New Talent Award
- American Indian Youth Literature Award

- Asian/ Pacific American Award for Literature
- South Asia Book Award
- Americas Award
- Pura Belpre' Award
- Thomas Rivera Award
- Jane Adams Peace Association Children's Book Awards
- Teaching Tolerance
- National Jewish Book Award
- Sydney Taylor Book Award

International Books

- The Database of Award-Winning Children's Literature. Which features titles from Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United States
- Hans Christian Anderson Award
- Mildred L. Batchelder Award (Quiroa, 2017).

Here is the links to the book lists for African American books and Hispanic American books:

Top 120 African American books

<https://aalbc.com/books/children.php>

Top Hispanic American Books

<https://www.amazon.com/Best-Sellers-Books-Childrens-Hispanic-Latino/zgbs/books/3098>

Quick-Write Pre-Assessment
Culturally Responsive Teaching

What key points about culturally responsive teaching resonated with you? What are your feelings about culturally responsive teaching and lesson planning? Please briefly think about and write down some of your assumptions, feelings, and thoughts about teaching literacy to promote diversity.

Quick-Write Post-Reflections
Culturally Responsive Teaching

What are your feelings about culturally responsive teaching and writing lesson plans?
Briefly think about and describe what things resonated with you during the PD. Write down some of your assumptions, feelings, beliefs, and thoughts about culturally responsive pedagogy to promote diversity. What do you plan to take back to your reading classroom? What are your strengths and limitations in developing a culturally responsive classroom?

Day 2 Session #3 Evaluation Form

Thank you for participating in the Professional Development Day 2 Session #3. Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation below. Your feedback will provide valuable information to the facilitator and help to prepare for future PD sessions.

Use the following rating scale when marking your response:

5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

This professional development workshop's objectives were clearly stated.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

This professional development workshop's objectives were met.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

This professional development workshop helped me better understand what culturally responsive teaching means.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

This professional development workshop helped me explore culturally responsive strategies and multicultural resources.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

This professional development workshop has taught me how to create effective culturally responsive lesson plans.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

Overall, this professional development workshop was a successful experience for me and increased my sense of self-efficacy.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5 4 3 2 1

List any suggestions you have for improving this professional development workshop.

Appendix B: Participant Invitation to Participate Letter Middle School Teacher

Dear Middle School Teacher:

I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree, and I would like to invite you to participate. In addition to being a doctoral candidate at Walden University, I am also employed as an elementary teacher within Surfside School District. However, my role as a researcher is separate from my role as a teacher. I believe that the results from this study may benefit your current instructional practices as they relate to literacy.

The purpose of this study is to gather teachers' needs, experiences, perceptions, and best instructional practices concerning literacy and professional development. The result of this project study may be essential to find ways to address the lack of literacy skills and knowledge related to literacy instruction which has the potential to prepare teachers to teach more effectively thereby equipping students with the practical skills necessary to increase student performance on state mandated test.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to: (a) complete an electronic demographic survey with a questionnaire that will take a maximum of 10 minutes to complete and return via email to vivian.means@waldenu.edu. (b) allow me to become a non-participatory observer within your classroom for one 60 minute class period; (c) participate in a one-on-one interview, lasting no longer than 60 minutes, with me about your perceptions regarding various topics, such as your best instructional practices and professional development; (d) provide a sample of your current school year's lesson plans, student learning objectives (SLOs) for the current year, and a list of current school

year's completed professional development/training whether formal or informal; (e) review the transcription of the interview, recorded observation, and review the final study results to provide feedback for change or clarify any misconceptions to ensure accurate representation of your experiences and perceptions.

You may feel uncomfortable answering some questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. Participation is voluntary and confidential. Your identity will not be revealed. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Taking part in this study is your decision. Only I will know whether you choose to participate. Please note that not everyone who completes the demographic survey/questionnaire will be selected to participate in the study.

If you feel you would like to express interest in participation, please email me directly at vivian.means@waldenu.edu. You may also contact me at any time to answer questions or to address concerns by email at vivian.means@waldenu.edu or by phone at (864) 921-3580.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Vivian Means, Walden University Ed.D. Candidate

Appendix C: Participant Invitation to Participate Letter Administrator/Coach

Dear Administrator/ Instructional Coach:

I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree, and I would like to invite you to participate. In addition to being a doctoral candidate at Walden University, I am also employed as an elementary teacher within Surfside School District. However, my role as a researcher is separate from my role as a teacher. I believe that the results from this study may benefit professional educators' instructional practices as they relate to literacy.

The purpose of this study is to gather administrators' and teachers' needs, experiences, perceptions, and best instructional practices concerning literacy and professional development. The result of this project study may be essential to find ways to address the lack of literacy skills and knowledge related to literacy instruction which has the potential to prepare teachers to teach more effectively thereby equipping students with the practical skills necessary to increase student performance on state mandated test.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to: (a) complete an electronic demographic survey with a questionnaire that will take a maximum of 10 minutes to complete and return via email to vivian.means@waldenu.edu. (b) participate in a one-on-one interview, lasting no longer than 60 minutes, with me about your perceptions regarding various topics, such as your best instructional practices and professional development; (c) review the transcription of the interview and review the final study results to provide feedback for change or clarify any misconceptions to ensure accurate representation of your experiences and perceptions.

You may feel uncomfortable answering some questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. Participation is voluntary and confidential. Your identity will not be revealed. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Taking part in this study is your decision. Only I will know whether you choose to participate. Please note that not everyone who completes the demographic survey/questionnaire will be selected to participate in the study.

If you feel you would like to express interest in participation, please email me directly at vivian.means@waldenu.edu. You may also contact me at any time to answer questions or to address concerns by email at vivian.means@waldenu.edu or by phone at (864) 921-3580.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Vivian Means

Walden University Ed.D. Candidate

Appendix D: Letter of Cooperation

Surfside School District
Mr. X, Executive Director of Surfside School District
October 5, 2015

Dear Vivian Means,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled Improving Literacy for Diverse Low SES Middle School Students in an Urban District within the Surfside School District. As part of this study, I authorize you (referred to as 'the researcher' within this letter) to:

Become a non-participatory observer within the literacy teachers' classrooms for one class. The observation will occur during an agreed upon date and time.

Have access to prospective participants via district e-mail system including the middle school site principals, assistant principals, literacy teachers, and literacy instructional coaches informing them of the study and inviting them to participate in the study by completing a questionnaire and/or participate in an interview about their experiences and perceptions regarding their instructional practices and professional development. The audio-recorded interview will not take place during classroom instructional time and will not exceed 60 minutes. The interview will be conducted at an agreed upon time and location by the researcher and participant. Following the interview, the researcher will review the audio to accurately transcribe and analyze the audio file which will be stored electronically in a password-protected file for 5-years per Walden University protocol.

Request each participant to review the transcription of the interview, recorded observation, and review the final study results to provide feedback for change or clarify any misconceptions to ensure accurate representation of each participant's experiences and perceptions.

Receive documents from each volunteering literacy teacher: (a) sample current school year's lesson plans, (b) a list of current school years completed professional development/training whether formal or informal, and (c) student learning objectives (SLOs) for the current year. All identifiable data will be removed from the documents. The documents will be kept secure by being stored securely in the researcher's home desk for 5 years per Walden University protocol.

Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: access to prospective participants via district e-mail system including middle school site principals, assistant principals, teachers, and literacy instructional coaches who have volunteered to

participate in this project study. Observations and interviews may take place at the school site during, before, or after school hours or via telephone located at the school site during, before or after school hours. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Mr. X, Executive Director of Surfside School District

Contact Phone Number:



Contact Email Address: fcrawford@legacycharter.org

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email, or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).

Appendix E: Interview/ Questionnaire Consent Form

Dear Administrator or Instructional Coach:

You are invited to take part in a research study of administrators' and teachers' needs, experiences, and perceptions to better understand professional development training for best instructional practices in the content area of literacy for middle school teachers and students in this southeastern urban school district. The primary criteria for selecting the participants will be as follows: (a) Participants must have taken part in TAP professional development training in Surfside School District, and (b) participants actively participate in annual planning for Surfside School District's literacy professional development trainings. You were invited to participate in this study because you are an educational professional with experience in literacy instruction, literacy content, and professional development training for literacy development for middle school students. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Vivian Means, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. Vivian Means is employed as an elementary teacher within the School District. However, Vivian Means is assuming the role of the researcher within this study, and this role is separate and unrelated to the elementary teacher position within the school district.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to gather teachers' needs, experiences, perceptions, and best instructional practices concerning literacy and professional development. The result of this project study may be essential to find ways to address the lack of literacy skills and knowledge related to literacy instruction which has the potential to prepare teachers to teach more effectively thereby equipping students with the practical skills necessary to increase student performance on state mandated test.

Procedures:

If you agree to be a participant in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete and return an electronic demographic survey with a questionnaire that will take a maximum of 10 minutes to complete and return via email to vivian.means@waldenu.edu. The questionnaire will provide the researcher with the background information of the potential participants along with their consent to participate.
- Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher about your perceptions regarding various topics, such as instructional practices and professional development. The interview will be conducted during a time and at a location that

we have both agreed upon, and will last no longer than 60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded so that the researcher can accurately record, transcribe, and reflect upon the discussion. Only the researcher will review the audio to accurately transcribe and analyze the audio file. Following the researcher's transcription, the audio recording will be destroyed leaving only a digital recording and transcription, which will be stored electronically in a password-protected file for 5-years per Walden University protocol.

- Review the transcription of the interview to provide feedback for change or clarify any misconceptions. Your review of these data will be to ensure accurate representation of your experiences. This should take 15-30 minutes.
- Review the final study results to ensure accurate representation of your experiences.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one in the School District will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study and withdraw at any time without penalty of any kind. If you feel uncomfortable during the study, you may stop at any time. You may also skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as such as fatigue or stress. The risks are minimal and the information will be gathered with confidentiality. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

The study's potential benefits include providing important insights pertaining to professional development and subsequent literacy instruction to benefit school districts nation-wide.

Compensation:

No compensation is being offered in order to ensure objectivity.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name, the school district name, or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure in a locked location at the researcher's home. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via cell phone: (864) 921-3580 or by email at Vivian.means@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is (612) 312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 05-13-16-0360453 and it expires on May 12, 2017.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form for your records.

Obtaining Your Consent:

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, reply to this invitation with an email stating "I consent to participate" and include a copy of the completed questionnaire. The Executive Director will send a reminder email to everyone who was initially invited, and if you have already contacted me you may disregard the email.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Vivian Means
Walden University Ed.D Candidate

Appendix F: Observation/ Interview/ Questionnaire Consent Form

Dear Middle School Teacher:

You are invited to take part in a research study of literacy teachers' needs, experiences, and perceptions to better understand professional development training for best instructional practices in the content area of literacy for middle school teachers and students in this southeastern urban school district. The primary criteria for selecting the participants will be as follows: (a) Participants must have taken part in TAP professional development training in Surfside School District, and (b) participants actively participate in annual planning for Surfside School District's literacy professional development trainings. You were invited to participate in this study because you are an educational professional with experience in literacy instruction, literacy content, and professional development training for literacy development for middle school students. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Vivian Means, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. Vivian Means is employed as an elementary teacher within the School District. However, Vivian Means is assuming the role of the researcher within this study, and this role is separate and unrelated to the elementary teacher position within the school district.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to gather teachers' needs, experiences, perceptions, and best instructional practices concerning literacy and professional development. The result of this project study may be essential to find ways to address the lack of literacy skills and knowledge related to literacy instruction which has the potential to prepare teachers to teach more effectively thereby equipping students with the practical skills necessary to increase student performance on state mandated test.

Procedures:

If you agree to be a participant in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete and return an electronic demographic survey with a questionnaire that will take a maximum of 10 minutes to complete and return via email to vivian.means@waldenu.edu. The questionnaire will provide the researcher with the background information of the potential participants along with their consent to participate.
- Allow the researcher to become a nonparticipatory observer within your classroom for one 60 minute class. The observation will occur during an agreed upon date and time. The descriptive and reflective fieldnotes written during the

observation will be electronically loaded into the computer and analyzed. Electronic data will be kept secure by being stored in password-protected files on the researcher's home computer and all non-electronic data will be stored securely in the researcher's home desk. Data will be stored for 5 years per Walden University protocol.

- Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher about your perceptions regarding various topics, such as your instructional practices and professional development. The interview will not take place during classroom instructional time. Rather, the interview will be conducted during a time and at a location that we have both agreed upon, and will last no longer than 60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded so that the researcher can accurately record, transcribe, and reflect upon the discussion. Only the researcher will review the audio to accurately transcribe and analyze the audio file. Following the researcher's transcription, the audio recording will be destroyed leaving only a digital recording and transcription, which will be stored electronically in a password-protected file for 5-years per Walden University protocol.
- Provide three documents to the researcher: (a) a sample of current school year's lesson plans, (b) a list of current school year completed professional development/training whether formal or informal, and (c) student learning objectives (SLOs) for the current year. These data will be triangulated with the interview and observational data. All identifiable data, such as names of teachers and schools, will be removed from the documents. The documents will be kept secure by being stored securely in the researcher's home desk for 5 years per Walden University protocol.
- Review the transcription of the interview and recorded observation to provide feedback for change or clarify any misconceptions. Your review of these data will be to ensure accurate representation of your experiences. This should take 15-30 minutes.
- Review the final study results to ensure accurate representation of your experiences.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one in the School District will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study and withdraw at any time without penalty of any kind. If you feel uncomfortable during the study, you may stop at any time. You may also skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as such as fatigue or stress. The risks are minimal and the information will be gathered with confidentiality. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

The study's potential benefits include providing important insights pertaining to professional development and subsequent literacy instruction to benefit school districts nation-wide.

Compensation:

No compensation is being offered in order to ensure objectivity.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name, the school district name, or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure in a locked location at the researcher's home. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via cell phone: (864) 921-3580 or by email at Vivian.means@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is (612) 312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 05-13-16-0360453 and it expires on May 12, 2017.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form for your records.

Obtaining Your Consent:

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, reply to this invitation with an email stating "I consent to participate" and include a copy of the completed questionnaire. The Executive Director will send a reminder email to everyone who was initially invited, and if you have already contacted me you may disregard the email.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Vivian Means Walden University Ed.D Candidate

Appendix G: Demographic Survey with Administrator Questionnaire

Dear Middle School Administrator,

Completion of the following demographic survey and questionnaire will indicate consent should you choose to participate in the study. Please place an X below indicating your choice to participate in the study. By completing the questionnaire, you are acknowledging that you read and understand the consent form. You may answer all or skip questions. You may contact me at any time if you have questions or concerns by email at vivian.means@waldenu.edu or by phone at (864) 921-3580.

_____ Yes, I consent to participate. _____ No, I do not consent to participate.

Demographic Information:

What is your gender? _____ Male _____ Female

What is your highest level of education?

_____ Bachelor's Degree

_____ Master's Degree

_____ Doctorate Degree

_____ How long have you been certified as a professional educator? _____

Experiences and Perceptions of the Administrator Questionnaire:

Please share your experiences and perceptions as an administrator by giving your responses to the following items. Your responses will be kept confidential.

Return this questionnaire via email to vivian.means@waldenu.edu within seven days.

If I have not received your response to this email within seven days, I will resend this email or call you to confirm receipt of this email. Please reply to each item.

1. What is your role in the district?
2. How many years have you served in this role?
3. What are your duties as an administrator?
4. How many district professional development sessions pertaining to literacy and/or instructional coaching have you attended?
5. How often do you meet for professional development with the middle school teachers?
6. Do you feel the professional development has been effective in improving instructional practices for teaching literacy skills to diverse low SES middle school students in this urban school district? Why or why not?

Thank you for your support. I look forward to meeting with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Vivian Fowler Means

Appendix H: Demographic Survey with Middle School Teacher Questionnaire

Dear Middle School Teacher,

Completion of the following demographic survey and questionnaire will indicate consent should you choose to participate in the study. Please place an **X** below indicating your choice to participate in the study. By completing the questionnaire, you are acknowledging that you read and understand the consent form. You may answer all or skip questions. You may contact me at any time if you have questions or concerns by email at vivian.means@waldenu.edu or by phone at (864) 921-3580.

_____ Yes, I consent to participate. _____ No, I do not consent to participate.

Demographic Information:

What is your gender? _____ Male _____ Female

What is your highest level of education?

_____ Bachelor's Degree

_____ Master's Degree

_____ Doctorate Degree

_____ How long have you been certified as a professional educator? _____

Experiences and Perceptions of the Middle School Teacher Questionnaire:

Please share your experiences and perceptions as a literacy teacher by giving your responses to the following items. Your responses will be kept confidential.

Return this questionnaire via email to vivian.means@waldenu.edu within seven days.

If I have not received your response to this email within seven days, I will resend this email or call you to confirm receipt of this email. Please reply to each item.

1. How many years have you been a professional educator?
2. What subjects do you teach?
3. How long have you taught literacy (Close Reading comprehension skills and Writing) within the district?
4. How often do you meet for professional development and/or with collaborative learning groups?
5. How often do you personally meet with the instructional coach and /or Master teacher to discuss literacy strategies for teaching literacy content?
6. Has the professional development sessions been effective in helping you improve instructional practices when teaching literacy skills to diverse low SES students in this urban community? Why or why not?

Thank you for your support. I look forward to meeting with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Vivian Fowler Means

Appendix I: Demographic Survey with Instructional Coach/ Master Teacher

Dear Middle School Teacher,

Completion of the following demographic survey and questionnaire will indicate consent should you choose to participate in the study. Please place an **X** below indicating your choice to participate in the study. By completing the questionnaire, you are acknowledging that you read and understand the consent form. You may answer all or skip questions. You may contact me at any time if you have questions or concerns by email at vivian.means@waldenu.edu or by phone at (864) 921-3580.

_____ Yes, I consent to participate. _____ No, I do not consent to participate.

Demographic Information:

What is your gender? _____ Male _____ Female

What is your highest level of education?

_____ Bachelor's Degree

_____ Master's Degree

_____ Doctorate Degree

_____ How long have you been certified as a professional educator? _____

Experiences and Perceptions of the Instructional Coach/ Master Teacher Questionnaire:

Please share your experiences and perceptions as a literacy Instructional Coach and/or Master teacher by giving your responses to the following items. Your responses will be kept confidential.

Return this questionnaire via email to vivian.means@waldenu.edu within seven days.

If I have not received your response to this email within seven days, I will resend this email or call you to confirm receipt of this email. Please reply to each item.

1. What is your job title and how would you describe your role and responsibilities?
2. How long have you worked as a literacy instructional coach/ master teacher in the target school district?
3. How many teachers do you serve?
4. How often do you meet with middle school literacy teachers for professional development and/or to collaborate about literacy instructional practices?
5. How has the instructional coaching/ master teacher experiences been effective in helping you contribute to improving instructional practices?

Thank you for your support. I look forward to meeting with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Vivian Fowler Means

Appendix J: Email to Schedule an Observation and Interview with Teacher

Dear Middle School Teacher,

Thank you for returning the demographic survey and the questionnaire for this doctoral study. This email is designed to schedule the next part of the study, the observation and interview. As stated previously, your participation in this project is voluntary and confidential. I am very appreciative of your assistance in this doctoral assignment. Attached is a copy of the interview questions for your review. The interview and observation will each take approximately 60 minutes. The classroom observation date will occur prior to the interview. The observation and interview cannot occur on the same date. Please reply promptly with the following contact information so that we can schedule an observation and interview date, time, and location. In addition, a copy of the consent form will be emailed to you so that you may print or keep a copy of the consent form for your records:

Name: _____ Phone Number (s): _____

Preferred Email: _____

Date choices for **classroom observation**: _____

Time choices for observation: _____

Classroom location: _____

Date choices for **interview**: _____

Time choices for interview: _____

Location choices: 1) Local library
 2) School's Conference Room
 3) Participant's Classroom/ Office

Can your interview be tape-recorded? ___ Yes ___ No

Appendix K: Email to Schedule an Interview with Administrator or Literacy Coach

Dear Administrator,

Thank you for returning the demographic survey and the questionnaire for this doctoral study. This email is designed to schedule the next part of the study, the interview. As stated previously, your participation in this project is voluntary and confidential. I am very appreciative of your assistance in this doctoral assignment. Attached is a copy of the interview questions for your review. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Please reply promptly with the following contact information so that we can schedule an interview date, time, and location. In addition, a copy of the consent form will be emailed to you so that you may print or keep a copy of the consent form for your records:

Name: _____ Phone Number (s): _____

Preferred Email: _____

Date choices for **interview**: _____

Time choices for interview: _____

Location choices: 1) Local library
 2) School's Conference Room
 3) Office

Can your interview be tape-recorded? ___ Yes ___ No

Appendix L: Interview Protocol

To maintain alignment with the central research questions and sub question, the following interview questions were used to guide the study.

Central Research Questions:

In order to address the lack in literacy performance in Surfside School District, this research is paramount for examining existing teachers' needs, experiences, and perceptions related to the existing professional development framework and how it has prepared them with instructional strategies for teaching reading and writing to diverse low SES middle school students. The research questions that will be explored in this study focus on students identified as diverse low SES and consist of the following:

RQ1- How do teachers and site administrators perceive the literacy professional development has supported their personal knowledge and skill development in instructing diverse students in Reading/ ELA content in an urban middle school?

RQ2-What successful and not successful teaching practices have site administrators and instructional coaches observed in Reading/ ELA following the TAP professional development training?

Sub question 1: What additional supports or resources are needed to support Reading/ ELA skill development of diverse low SES students in an urban middle school?

Interview questions:

- How do you feel regular professional development affect teacher and student learning and literacy achievement?

- How does teacher collaboration influence your instructional practices, specifically when teaching Reading comprehension skills?
- How does professional development influence your instructional practices, specifically when you are using or want to use literacy strategies?
- Following a professional development cluster, how does the cluster affect you in planning upcoming lessons focused on teaching a literacy strategy or skill?
- What do you feel are the most effective instructional strategies used to teach Reading/Comprehension skills to underperforming low SES diverse students at the middle school?
- Other than teacher collaboration and professional development...
 - What instructional supports (ex. literacy coach) do teachers perceive they need to effectively influence instructional practices, specifically when teaching literacy (Reading/ ELA) content to low diverse students?
 - What are some barriers that may influence your instructional practices when teaching literacy (Reading/ ELA) content to low SES diverse students?
 - What experiences have influenced your decisions to use or not to use instructional coaches/ master teachers? How valuable is the relationship to you? Specifically, how has your experience been helpful?

Potential Interview Probes:

- Please give me an example.
- Please tell me more about...
- Please describe your process.

Conclusion:

- Do you have any additional comments regarding your work as an instructional coach/ administrator/ educator in improving teacher practices? Or is there anything else you would like to share that I did not specifically ask you about?

Final Comments to Participant:

Thank you for your time. I will prepare a transcript of your interview and send it to you to review for accuracy within one week of the interview date. In addition, an executive summary of the full report, which would briefly discuss the research questions, the purpose, number of participants, data collection, and data analysis will be emailed to you at the conclusion and approval of my final study. Again, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions or concerns.

Appendix M: Observation Protocol

Project: Improving Literacy for Diverse Low SES Middle School Students in an Urban

District

Teacher#: _____ School: _____ Grade Level: ____ 6 ____ 7 ____ 8

Date of Observation: _____

Length of Observation: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

- **Describe below the observed lesson including student learning objective**

(SLO) and explicit literacy and reading comprehension strategies taught:

- **Describe how the teacher measures for student comprehension of the lesson:**

TIME	DESCRIPTION OF LESSON/ACTIVITIES	REFLECTIVE NOTES