How Do Teachers Learn New Skills for Reading Instruction and Transfer Their Learning into the Classroom?

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HOW DO TEACHERS LEARN NEW SKILLS FOR READING INSTRUCTION AND TRANSFER THEIR LEARNING INTO THE CLASSROOM?

A Specialist Project
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Educational Administration, Leadership and Research
Western Kentucky University
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Of the Requirements for the Degree
Education Specialist

By
Patricia Ann Sharp
August 2009
HOW DO TEACHERS LEARN NEW SKILLS FOR READING INSTRUCTION AND TRANSFER THEIR LEARNING INTO THE CLASSROOM?

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HOW DO TEACHERS LEARN NEW SKILLS FOR READING INSTRUCTION AND TRANSFER THEIR LEARNING INTO THE CLASSROOM?

Patricia A. Sharp  Date:  August 2009   Pages: 77  

Directed By:  Dr. Sharon Spall, Dr. Bud Schlinker, and Dr. Jay Fiene  

Department of Educational Administration, Leadership, and Research  

Western Kentucky University  

Third grade teachers participated in a study that examined the ways teachers learn new skills for reading instruction and transfer their learning into the classroom on a daily basis. A review of literature included identification of a purpose for teacher learning, how teacher self-perception influenced use of new knowledge and teacher skills, and improved reading achievement. The teachers discussed challenges and barriers for their learning and implementation of new learning, which included reflection of how each has evolved as a reading teacher. Teachers expressed interests for new learning in reading instruction and self-awareness necessary for improvement in their practice.
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TEACHER LEARNING FOR READING INSTRUCTION

Introduction

Professional development for educators is a mixture of blended ideas, theories, best practices and outcomes, geared toward the improvement of daily instructional practices of the teacher and improved student learning in the classroom. These professional development opportunities and other sources provide a way for teachers to obtain new learning and transfer the new learning skills into the classroom.

Statement of Problem

Professional growth plans exist as a tool for evaluation of teacher practices, yet may not improve teacher learning or student learning. All teachers receive professional development training, but some do not implement new learning and new skills when working with students. This can result in student outcomes in reading that are not at proficiency.

Research Question

How do teachers learn new skills for reading instruction and transfer their learning into the classroom?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to ask reading teachers how they learn and process new skills, and to observe the reading teachers in the classroom during reading instruction. This study improved my understanding of reading instruction, and how teachers use new knowledge to improve reading instruction and increase student learning.
Significance of the Study

This study provided me a close examination of how teachers learned new strategies in reading instruction, included these strategies in daily practice, and then reflected upon the results of this use and practice of the new strategies. I wanted to know more about how to reduce the number of struggling readers and how teachers work with these students in the primary classroom. As a result, my knowledge and understanding of adult learning barriers increased, specifically those related to teaching students how to read. Also, my understanding of student learning barriers in the classroom increased. As an instructional leader, I wanted to know how to help teachers improve their practice as reading instructors by providing what the teachers needed in order to help students. This exploration of learning, from the perspectives of teachers, will enable me in the future to assist reading teachers in practices that improve student learning.

While this study is limited to one grade level and four teachers provided the in-depth information, I took great care to interpret information precisely and developed rapport with these teachers, who have entrusted me to report an accurate account of their daily practices. The 3rd-grade teachers gave extensive time and opportunities for me to gather data about reading instruction and their learning. These teachers answered all questions and provided insight throughout the study.

Literature Review

Educators often enter professional development opportunities with a sense of dread. This apprehension was justifiable considering that many hours of educator time has been misused in workshops, lectures, or with guest speakers who talk, demonstrate, or motivate, but rarely offer tools for the educator that may be used in daily practice. Poor
professional development is a product districts can no longer afford, especially since many districts are struggling to meet the demands for quality teachers in every classroom, due to ever-shrinking budgets. Therefore, what qualities or characteristics constitute effective professional development for educators? How do teachers use new learning and skills in instruction? One must look at the educators as learners and professionals when trying to affect change efforts in schools.

*Identify a Purpose for Teacher Learning*

When schools identify the needs of teachers, students, and staff, the professional development will be focused and effective according to Lambert (1998). Lambert emphasizes the importance of defining needs as “opportunities to learn,” rather than as training. When teachers identify the needs, the learning occurs naturally. “Opportunities to learn” means engagement in shared decision-making, inquiry, dialogue, reflection, community service, peer coaching and mediation, workshops (p. 88). Schools that have adopted the usage of professional development as a learning opportunity often develop a plan for professional development activities that coincides with their overall goal for change within the school. Therefore, the professional development plan provides the focus for growth and learning opportunities for teacher and student.

In a study conducted by Crawford, Fitzharris, and Jones (2008), the analysis of data to support teacher learning occurred when schools and districts provided opportunities for teachers to examine what they know and understand about student assessment data in the area of reading. This study noted a lack of knowledge of what teachers know and how teachers practice teaching reading. Essential to improved primary readers are professionals in every elementary classroom who meet the needs of diverse learners. In
his study, Crawford et al. looked at elementary school teachers, recipients of a reading grant, and determined the staff development necessary to improve teacher-reading skills. Over the course of a school year, the literacy coach provided professional development to the teachers in grade one through three. These sessions examined teacher learning in the content area of teaching reading, and included the purposes of running records, running record symbols and conventions, and the calculation and conversion of accuracy and self-correction rates. Teachers practiced their learning of cuing systems and running records analysis. However, the integral part of the training, involved teachers actually completing records on their students, analyzing the records, and discussing the records with the literacy coach. The teachers learned and practiced their skills as they worked directly with students during reading instruction.

Data analysis provided one method for determining teacher-learning needs. The study by Hayes and Robnolt (2007) offers an example of using data to define opportunities for the kind of teacher learning described by Lambert (1998). According to Hayes and Robnolt, school based data may emphasize the direction for teacher learning. These researchers found a need for effective and explicit teacher instruction designed for increased teacher learning. The desired outcome for teacher learning resulted as increased student learning based on teacher examination of student data results. Likewise, the teacher learning opportunities were effective, explicit, and data driven providing a purposeful use for teachers. Assessments, both formative and summative, directed the daily instruction of teachers implementing new strategies into practice, which were learned in professional development.

Researchers comment that many times schools offer professional development yet
never see improvement (Hayes & Robnolt, 2007). Monitoring teacher daily practices provides an opportunity to see actual improvement in teaching and learning. Student achievement data, observational data compiled through informal classroom observations, and explicit notes of teacher and student behaviors and performance drive professional development decisions in schools that show improvement. Team meetings and discussions of written reflections on implementation of new instructional practices and the data analysis can make the teacher learning opportunities more effective and useful within daily practice (Hayes & Robnolt).

Using the self-study method, Noell, Slider, and Williams (2006) examined practices easy for the teacher to use and found that behavior modification through professional development can provide opportunities to practice and obtain desired results in student behavior improvement. In this study, the researchers address teacher-learning issues by identifying information about existing instructional skills in the classroom. A pre-test was administered to each teacher in the study. Next, the teachers completed various exercises as assigned, including self-reflection upon classroom practices, journaling of methods that work for the individual teachers in the study, including those methods that do not work. After several weeks of trial and error, including teacher reflection upon changes, the teachers took a post-test. Researchers observed teachers in the classroom as a follow-up to the project and used the techniques from the teacher learning exercises. The findings showed that all teachers increased performance in targeted behavior management procedures following training. One teacher exhibited a 6% positive change, while two other teachers exhibited a 33% percent increase in positive change behaviors. This self-study approach to teacher learning or opportunities for learning allowed all
three teachers to improve techniques and proved effective for increasing the quality of classroom management.

When federal mandates such as No Child Left Behind focused on student learning needs, school districts established quality teacher-learning opportunities. Hawkins, Kroeger, Shobana, Barnett, and Ward (2008) pointed out that districts must deliver effective professional development regarding the best practices designed to meet reform initiatives. This professional development must provide models of prevention, effective instruction, and accurate ways to address the needs of all students.

In this study (Hawkins et al., 2008), teacher-learning opportunities focused on field experiences for teachers related to student success in schools in the area of early literacy. Teachers and pre-service teachers learned to reflect on instructional decisions and accommodate individual student learning styles. Teachers learned to design lessons specific for the needs of each struggling student and provided sufficient time for students to practice skills. Experienced teachers worked with trainees in addressing the academic needs of kindergarten students with reading skills deficits using a three-tiered (whole group instruction, small group instruction, and individualized instruction) response to intervention model. Trainees were assigned field experiences and instructed to keep detailed notes. The notes were used to write trainees’ reflections and progress monitoring by university faculty.

Hawkins et al. (2008) felt that teachers needed to become competent using collaboration and consultation practices. Elements of response to intervention models, including evidence-based prevention, instruction, and intervention were needs for training. Data analysis training and inference for student needs were included. Research-
based strategies were implemented, measured, and changes made as necessary. Appropriately using tiered interventions, the problem-solving team was able to help all but one struggling kindergarten student reach or exceed baseline data goals in the area of reading.

Teacher Self-Perception Influenced Use of New Knowledge

Teacher efficacy, according to Bruce and Ross (2007), is defined as “a teacher’s expectation that he or she will be able to bring about student learning” (p. 50). In this study, the researchers found that teacher efficacy at the individual and team levels consistently revealed a host of enabling teacher beliefs, functional teacher behaviors, and valued student outcomes. During a randomized field trial involving elementary schools in a single Canadian district, Bruce and Ross collected data on twelve items on the Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy scale adapted for use with the teachers. The scale included four items regarding teacher learning for engagement, four items for teacher learning of teaching strategies, and four items for teacher learning in student management.

Bruce and Ross (2007) noted that teachers open to new learning had higher efficacy than those in the control group in this study. The results suggested that teacher efficacy improved through participation in the study. The results also suggested that teacher self-perceptions could be a predictor of teacher behaviors in classrooms.

The research revealed individual teacher beliefs about his or her practice in the classroom have a great influence on the effectiveness and use of the new learning received by the teacher. High teacher efficacy from mastery experiences promoted effective professional development and the teacher did implement new instructional practices into daily instruction (Bruce & Ross, 2007). Effective professional development
provided opportunities for active teacher learning through discussion of examples, collaborative activities modeling effective pedagogy, teacher reflection, and feedback to teachers. Material and techniques focused on using content area for teaching reading. The daily practice of teachers changed to include the new knowledge, especially if the teacher perceived themselves as life-long learners (Bruce & Ross).

The approach used by Bruce and Ross (2007) provided the opportunities for teacher learning as described by Lambert (1998) who stated adult learning should include engagement in shared decision-making, dialogue and reflection. Districts can support teachers as learners by providing opportunities for personal growth as teacher leaders and learners. In addition, Bruce and Ross found that teachers scoring higher on teacher-efficacy measures were more likely to try new teaching ideas, particularly difficult techniques that involved risks, and required sharing control with students.

Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran (2007) found teacher collaboration for school improvement was a significant positive predictor of differences among schools in student achievement. Researchers encouraged the teachers to move beyond reliance on their own memories and experiences with schooling and to move toward engagement with others around important questions of teaching and learning. In this study, researchers wanted to know whether teacher collaboration around the fundamental issues of school improvement, curriculum and instruction, and professional development had a positive impact on student and teacher learning. Researchers found those teachers interested in collaboration fostered the learning process, which related to improved instruction. Within this study, teacher collaboration revealed a positive relationship to student achievement. Teachers in the study improved through collaboration with each
other, saw positive results, and considered this a most effective form of professional development.

Individual teacher personality may also play a role in a teacher’s ability to learn new techniques and use them effectively, especially those related to teacher learning in cohorts for special education (Adams, Brownell, Sindelar, Vanhover, & Waldron, 2006). A deeper understanding of how and why general education teachers respond differently to professional collaboration could provide insight for improving their practice. The researchers planned a study on effective teacher collaboration that provided opportunities for learning how to reach and help struggling or disabled students learn as well as regular education students.

Adams et al. (2006) examined how general education teachers work in teacher-learning cohorts to promote collegiality and teacher collaboration. Using the case study methodology, the researchers focused on the promotion of teacher learning cohorts in urban schools in the Southeast. The teacher-learning cohorts were designed as a teacher learning process driven by collaborative problem solving. The researchers collected data focusing on what the teachers felt they needed to change in their current teaching practice in order to address the needs of struggling learners and students with disabilities.

Research-based classroom practices, known to be effective with special needs students and high-risk learners were discussed at group meetings. Some examples included strategies for class-wide peer tutoring, cooperative learning structures, cognitive strategies for reading and writing, positive reinforcement, behavioral contracts, self-monitoring strategies for changing behavior, peer-mediated conflict resolution skills, phonological awareness and fluency building strategies, basic mathematics operations,
curriculum-based measurement, responsive classroom strategies including morning meetings designed to improve students’ social relations. Modeling by the researchers of various practices occurred, so teachers could see and learn by example. Next, all teachers involved in the research study selected practices for implementation. Data collection involved formal and informal classroom observations, teacher and principal interviews, field notes of meetings, debriefing notes from project staff discussions, and documentation of informal conversations with participants (Adams et al., 2006).

Five characteristics influenced teachers’ willingness to adopt strategies learned through professional development during teacher learning cohort meetings (Adams et al., 2006). These were knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy, knowledge and beliefs about managing student behavior, views of teaching and student learning, ability to reflect on students’ learning, and the ability to adapt instruction to meet individual student needs. Teachers were classified as either high adoptees, moderate adoptees, or low adoptees, based upon the inclusion of the five characteristics into daily instructional practice.

High adopters were teachers having the most knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy, knowledge and student-friendly beliefs about managing student behavior, student-focused views of instruction, and the ability for careful reflection upon students’ learning. High adopters changed strategies to meet students’ needs. Moderate adopters included dramatic teacher variations on the five instructional qualities, and low adopters ranked lowest on the five instructional qualities (Adams et al., 2006).

Some results surprised Adams et al. (2006) upon further data analysis. For example, all of the teachers adopted new strategies, but some teachers acquired strategies easier than others. Researchers found that teachers who readily incorporated new practices
differed in important ways from teachers who did not. A strong knowledge foundation combined with excellent communication and classroom management skills were found in high adoptee teachers. These teachers held beliefs closely aligned with the innovations presented in the professional development. High adoptees understood how to adapt novel strategies for their students and were most likely to incorporate usage of new knowledge.

In contrast, teachers that did not put student needs as the priority and who did not believe the value of the new approach struggled in their attempts to use and adapt a strategy. These teachers lacked foundational knowledge to implement the approach successfully. Adams et al. (2006) also found some teachers might benefit very little from well-designed opportunities to learn from each other or try new strategies learned in professional development opportunities. Teachers identified as low adoptees and some moderate adoptees were least likely to reflect new knowledge into their practices. The low adoptee teachers seemed less able or less willing to adjust their practices to address student concerns.

Similar to Adams et al. (2006), Wood (2007) explored the four core themes that sustained teachers’ learning within communities. The themes were as follows: help teachers improve individual instruction, determine purposes for teacher collaboration when learning, track the challenges within the school and district culture, and identify policies that enable or constrain teacher growth. The findings concluded that teaching in many of the district schools improved tremendously by reviewing and assessing student work and by analyzing professional practices. In only two years, great strides toward institutionalization of learning in a community affected overall school culture and school improvement (i.e., teacher learning in groups). Communication and support at all levels,
between teachers, administration, and district personnel, enabled sustained teacher learning in communities.

*Teacher Skills and Improved Reading Achievement*

Due to a lack of funding, many districts address professional development at the school level through creative management of resources (LaChance, Benton, & Klein, 2007). Many schools and districts apply for grants as funding for teacher learning, especially in the areas of reading, math, and the development of professional learning communities within the school. A case study by Gilrane, Roberts, and Russell (2008) of a grant recipient school evaluated the effectiveness of a professional development program intended to support each primary teachers’ development in reading instruction. These primary teachers implemented literacy instruction in grades one through three and designed effective literacy experiences in kindergarten.

Since the overall goal of this professional development plan included support for each teacher, Gilrane et al. (2008) worked with teachers directly. Using the information gained from teacher discussions, researchers worked to develop and build a support team within the school. The researchers became facilitators of change and worked diligently in preparation of teacher opportunities for learning. During the two-year period, open communication provided sufficient data for collection and analysis.

Teachers were exposed to an intense learning experience designed to meet the needs of individual teachers. The overall goal of the learning opportunities was to cause change and improvement in the daily practice of the teachers. The process included reflection by the individual teacher and collaboration with colleagues and researchers throughout the study (Gilrane et al., 2008).
Gilrne et al. (2008) identified the following four conditions necessary for teacher growth, change, and reflection: teacher voice, teacher time and space, administrative support, and student success. In this study, teachers wanted a voice in determining professional development needs. Administrative support in the form of materials, time, space, and encouragement were necessary to enable change. Most importantly, teachers showed growth by observing their students’ successes, having meetings to discuss assessment data, and then celebrations of student improvement. The findings revealed teachers must have a voice in the change process. Supported teachers practiced what they learned, and students improved their learning in reading and literacy.

According to Lutz, Guthrie, and Davis (2006), teacher learning resulted in improved reading comprehension by students when scaffolds of engagement occurred during reading instruction. Scaffold engagement is an instructional approach involving the behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social aspects during instructional activities. Improved reading comprehension resulted from teacher learning when the teacher included activities to promote integration of new knowledge with prior student learning and kinesthetic activities.

Third-grade teachers within two of the classrooms incorporated new learning practices by asking students to answer more high-level questions that required students to integrate their reading with prior knowledge. Teachers extended reading time each day, included peer-to-peer reading, and writing tasks extended over more than a day of time (Lutz et al., 2006).

Teacher learning practices, which directly affected instruction, included the following: daily emphasis on learning and knowledge goals, comprehension instructional strategy
using interesting information and literacy texts, and support for students, both
individually and as a group. The teacher in the other 3rd-grade classroom conducted
traditional reading instruction using basal texts, one day only of instruction per section,
usage of very little reading or writing, and required solitary work. The instruction in this
classroom was designed to foster basic skills rather than complex tasks (Lutz et al.,
2006).

Lutz et al. (2006) revealed that the two classes showed greater comprehension gains
and experienced greater task complexity during observed reading lessons than did
students in the traditional reading classroom. Teachers that used scaffold instruction with
the whole class or group generated more discussion and increased student engagement.
The findings indicated, however, when the teacher directed individual attention toward a
student, the probability the student was highly engaged in reading instruction increased
approximately 76% of the time. When the teacher did not give students individual
attention, the student showed low engagement at approximately 62% in reading tasks.

According to a study conducted by Boulware-Gooden, Careker, Thornhill, and Joshi
(2007), when teachers rethink their instructional practices in reading, student
comprehension rates improve. Reading comprehension is a multifaceted process and
students need to acquire many skills for true reading comprehension to occur. Over time,
students developed a multitude of strategies to learn how to read and comprehend various
kinds of literary materials.

Boulware-Gooden et al. (2007) examined the effectiveness of systematic direct
instruction of multiple metacognitive strategies designed to assist students in
comprehending text. Teacher learning of specific strategies to improve instruction for
reading comprehension and vocabulary achievement was incorporated into 3rd-grade reading instruction.

Reading teachers used their new knowledge by creating lessons containing the five components of reading focused on comprehension and vocabulary building skills. Therefore, each lesson contained teacher introduction, vocabulary webbing, actual reading of story (including silent reading of story by students using think aloud strategies and choral reading as a class), written student story summarization, and student generated questions from their reading (Bouleware-Gooden et al., 2007).

The findings of this five-week study showed a 40% gain in vocabulary retention and a 20% gain in reading comprehension within the 3rd-grade classrooms where teachers applied their new learning and used strategies in daily practice (Bouleware-Gooden et al., 2007). The comparison classroom used traditional methods of instruction without webbing, think aloud strategies, or question generation. While some gains were made within the comparison group, skills gains for comprehension and vocabulary were less than the intervention group.

Summary

Quality professional development offers opportunities for teacher learning. In the studies reviewed, teachers become actively involved in their professional development and learning when given the opportunity to have voice. When teachers identified a purpose for learning, teacher improved instructional skills occurred readily. The development of learning communities within the school community encouraged teacher growth opportunities, and teacher learning could occur.

Teacher learning needs were identified during data analysis, problem solving of
various reading instructional needs, some classroom issues, or through observations. Teacher collaboration opportunities influenced retention of new learning and transference into the classroom as well. When provided with opportunities for sharing information, teachers could establish learning communities to sustain personal growth and practice reflection. Sharing of information was a common theme discussed by the researchers.

Teacher beliefs about self, colleagues, or the teaching practice overall supported the implementation of new learning by the individual teachers. If teachers were provided opportunities for active engagement, for discussion of examples, and to reflect and to obtain feedback from peers, new learning transferred easier into the classroom environment. Teachers were more willing to attempt a new strategy for student improvement and instructional growth when provided opportunities and time to work with peers. Those teachers that did not actively engage with peers or reflect on practices experienced difficulties during collaboration opportunities and the transference of new learning into the classroom.

When teachers were exposed to learning experiences designed to meet the needs and cause change within the schools, gains in targeted areas appeared. These gains were especially apparent during interventions for reading instruction. Supported teachers practiced what they learned, and students improved their learning in reading and literacy.

Method

*Rationale for Qualitative Design*

In order to understand the means by which adults, specifically teachers of reading, learn new knowledge and implement the information into daily use, one can seek out and study teachers in their daily environment, the classroom. Qualitative research tends to be
field-focused (Eisner, 1998). The qualitative research approach provides opportunities to
gather personal information from practicing classroom teachers concerning effective
implementation of professional development for improvement in their individual daily
practice of teaching primary students how to read and improve comprehension skills. As
a part of a field focus, the qualitative study is usually non-manipulative; rather it tends to
study situations and objects intact, or in the natural environment (Eisner). My qualitative
action research study was conducted at an elementary school through classroom visits,
teacher observations, and teacher interviews. In other words, the naturalistic setting for
observation of teachers is within their classrooms as they interact with students.
Therefore, this study was field focused in elementary school classrooms.

In this study, I observed teachers working in the classroom setting and teaching
reading, and interviewed teachers at specific times throughout the research process.
Documents collected provided more information about the teaching and learning process
in the classroom.

**Role of the Researcher**

Qualitative research relates to the researcher as an instrument of the study. Our
sensory system is the instrument through which we experience the qualities that
constitute the environment in which we live. The ability to experience qualities requires
more than their presence. Experience is a form of human achievement and as such, it
depends upon an act of the mind. We learn to see, hear, and feel. This process depends
upon perceptual differentiation and the ability to see what is subtle but significant
(Eisner, 1998). My 14 years of experience in education helped me identify qualities of
importance in the classroom. In this study, I observed teachers working in the classroom
setting while teaching reading. I asked questions and listened carefully to the interactions
between teachers and students during reading instruction. My previous professional
experiences enhanced my ability to perceive what was happening in the classroom.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define the role of the researcher as an exploration of the
human as an instrument by looking at specific characteristics that uniquely qualify the
human as an instrument of choice in a naturalistic inquiry. The characteristics are
responsiveness, adaptability, holistic emphasis, knowledge base expansion, process
immediacy, opportunities for clarification and summarization, and the opportunity to
explore atypical or idiosyncratic responses. I observed, interviewed, and became the
research instrument that examined teacher’s roles as teachers and learners.

According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), the researcher’s role may vary in
intensiveness and extensiveness, that is, the amount of time spent in the setting on a daily
basis and the duration of the study. I devoted considerable time early on in developing
trusting relations with the participants of the study. As the study evolved, I watched
teachers teaching reading and students learning. Throughout, I explored and analyzed
events as changes in the relationships within the classroom occurred. I watched
struggling students learn to comprehend their reading: slowly struggling, yet making
great effort. I saw teachers encourage students by pointing out any positive efforts or
gains they saw within those students. I was welcomed into their world, one of
encouragement, great struggle, yet hard working toward improvements in reading.

Action research is unique because sometimes practitioners/researchers are their own
subjects or informants. They are insiders, not outsiders, to the setting under study. In
education, and increasingly in other fields, action research is more often done by
organizational insiders such as teachers, administrators, counselors, or school social workers and psychologists who see action research as a way to deepen their own reflection on practice toward problem posing, problem solving, and professional development. In such cases, the researcher and the practitioner are the same (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007). In this study, I was a member of the school faculty, yet I was conducting the study, and I had to reflect on my professional practices as a faculty member, while doing the research. My role changed throughout the study, yet parts remained constant as I interacted with the 3rd-grade teachers.

Setting and Data Sources

The study was conducted in a Kentucky rural elementary school. This school has grade level teams that meet on a regular basis. The participants in this study were a purposeful sample of experienced reading teachers who could discuss learning situations. The criteria for the selection of participants for the study included: (a) a volunteer team, (b) experienced teachers, and (c) teachers who taught students with reading deficits. The 3rd-grade team of teachers volunteered to participate in the study. All teachers have two or more years of experience and encounter students with significant reading difficulties.

Data Collection Procedures

A practitioner action researcher is trying to accomplish something different from the typical qualitative researcher. Action researchers are trying to analyze problems and cause positive changes through the actual process of obtaining data. According to Anderson et al., (2007), the results of action researchers’ data gathering and analysis fold back into our sites to move the educational setting toward change. My data gathering for this study included observation, interviews, and documents. In the future, this study
included observation, interviews, and documents. In the future, this study will inform my work with reading teachers.

Observation

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the human as an instrument allowed the researcher to observe objects of research in their natural environment. By actually seeing action as it occurred, I interacted with the situations in the classrooms and obtained an authentic viewpoint. Teachers in primary grade three were observed twice during their regular reading instructional times, twice during reading intervention instructional times, and during team meetings. The focus of the observations included teacher interaction with students for reading instruction.

During the observation of each teacher, I entered the classroom and found a seat usually at the back of the classroom or in an inconspicuous area of the room, so as not interfere with instruction. While in the room, I took notes and listened carefully to the reading instruction taking place. Field notes included transitional elements during instruction, whole group and mixed ability grouping of students, interactions in the classroom between the teacher and various students, and actual strategies used to improve reading instruction.

The field notes from the observation of these four teachers were typed and analyzed with the other data. The notes and documents were carded to verify the interview information.

Interview

According to Spradley (1979), ethnographic interviewing involves two distinct but complementary processes, developing rapport and eliciting information. In conjunction
with observation, primary teachers were interviewed using a variety of questions including descriptive questions, structural questions, and contrast questions. No closed-ended or yes/no questions were used, since these provide the least amount of information for the interviewer to answer the research question.

During our professional learning community meetings, I asked the 3rd-grade teachers when they would like to set up their interviews, and let me know the best time to visit. I talked with them about what to expect during the interview, how many questions there were, approximation of time it would take to complete, and how I would need their signatures for consent. I answered all questions the teachers asked. My goal at this point was to build rapport with the teachers by making each feel comfortable, useful, and interested in being a part of the study. I did not give them a copy of the interview questions in advance, even though two asked if they could see the questions. The teachers all replied within a week, and my interview times were established.

I supplied cheesecake or pie at each interview. This was a great icebreaker. I asked each teacher to read, sign, and date the consent form as I explained each section. All teachers commented about how they disliked their voice tape-recorded. When the interview was finished, I thanked each teacher, apologized if we went over the allotted hour, and went home to transcribe the interview. After completing transcription of the interview, I supplied each teacher with a copy to review, and a form to sign if they agreed or disagreed with the transcription. Each teacher returned signed documents stating the transcription of her interview was authentic.

Documents

Artifacts of teacher lesson plans, modeled observations, team meetings, response to
intervention discussions during professional learning community meetings, and
assessment plans/data were collected for use in verification of data. Notes about each
item above have been typed and categorized when specific for teacher learning about
reading or meeting the needs of students in reading instruction.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis occurred using the constant comparative method because the
process is so systematic in nature. First, all transcribed interview data was divided into
segments of independent meaning and attached to index cards. Then, I labeled each card
with consecutive numbers and identification. Next, the cards were organized into
categories, using open, axial, and selective coding.

During open coding, the following major categories developed: evidence of learning;
fears and challenges; people who helped me; new learning sources and strategies to use;
skills development; evidence of not learning-barriers; problems with teaching/learning to
read/needs; experiences; and professional development needs. The open coding process
allowed me to begin data analysis by organizing large amounts of information into a
more manageable format.

During axial coding, similar categories were connected and put together in order to
provide a better answer to the research question. Each major category was re-examined
once again for similarities and differences. New categories emerged and were used to
develop the necessary components for use during selective coding.

Selective coding involves writing a general story from the axial categories that
answers the research question. This step allowed the researcher to construct the paper
with accurate flow and meaning by using the data more effectively. During this step, the
actual draft of the research paper was constructed.

Methods of Verification

According to Anderson et al. (2007), the researcher must holistically ask throughout the study if all the information gathered represents an accurate account of the content and proceedings of the study. Qualitative researchers use planned procedures through a study to build trust in the results. This is called trustworthiness and refers to the extent the findings of the study are credible, believable, and usable. An accurate representation of the people, practices, and setting investigated was established during the qualitative research process. I used the following procedures for trustworthiness in my study: triangulation, journaling, peer debriefing, member checks, and thick description.

Triangulation

Triangulation was the process where three different forms of data were used to verify information. During this study, classroom observations of teachers during reading instruction, teacher interviews, and documents including lesson plans, student assessments, and teacher notes, established a way to triple-check the findings.

Reflexive Journal

From the development of the proposal to the final presentation of findings, entries in the reflexive journal served as my recording of information about myself and the methodological steps of the research process. The term reflexive specifically refers to the self and the relationship of self or the researcher to the unfolding project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, this journal included my thoughts about the study, the method, and the beginning ideas that answer the research question. The journal provided a place to review issues encountered during the study, my new ideas about data, any personal
reflections throughout the study on what happened and the connection of my thoughts/interests, and any sudden insights. This proved very useful because I could not remember all thoughts without a written record (Anderson, et al., 2007).

During the step-by-step methodological progress of the study, the journal was a place to store my information about the study and all the steps of the study including: who I would interview next, why I decided one thing or another about the data, categories I developed during data analysis, and outlines and ideas I would possibly use for writing up the findings. I wrote entries every day of data collection and analysis. This gave me a way to trace and re-track the development of the conclusions from the collected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Anderson, et. al., 2007).

Peer Debriefing

Difficulties occurred during data analysis when my personal bias kept me from looking at some of my data in an impersonal manner. Other classmates and I discussed issues we encountered, and my “critical friends” helped me recognize and eliminate personal bias during writing and research practices (Anderson, et al., 2007). During class meetings, fellow researchers looked over various components of the study, checked for understanding, asked me questions, and interpreted the meaning of my written work. This examination by peers’ new eyes allowed me to clarify items for readers of the study. We also collaborated online and answered questions posed by our mentor and our peers. During individualized meetings, our professor provided immediate feedback and encouragement for the research process.

Member Checks

Often the researcher needs verification of data collected from the source. Imperative to
the researcher is the trustworthiness and validity of data collected, so member checks asks for rereading of written reports from interviews by the interviewee, and include a request for follow up questioning at a later date. Member checks allow the researcher to check for accuracy of the information sources and to keep the research true and valid. I transcribed each interview, and sent a copy, via e-mail, to the teachers, asking them to let me know if they were interpreted correctly. I also asked questions during the transcription process if I did not have a clear understanding of their meaning as stated. I did not get a response for a week from any of the participants, but when they would see me, they would say they would get to it soon. After about a week and a half, I made a photocopy and delivered it to each teacher, along with a letter asking them to please read the transcription and let me know of any changes, corrections, or inaccuracies within the document. The letter required signatures at the end and I asked them to place it into my mailbox. Two were returned by the next day. I had to personally go and ask about the others, which I did obtain when I asked personally. I understood their delay because a lot of activity occurs within the spring semester of elementary school and the teachers were extremely busy.

**Thick Description**

According to Anderson et al., (2007), inclusion of descriptive vocabulary enhances the reader’s ability to identify with the research setting. The researcher provided thick or rich description of the people, places, and events of the study. By including vivid analogies and elaboration within the findings, the reader will be able to understand more clearly the results of the research, and decide how much to transfer to another setting.
Results

The study investigated the following research question: How do teachers learn new skills for reading instruction and transfer their learning into the classroom? Based on the findings, the answer is 3rd-grade reading teachers learn new skills from experience and interaction with other professionals; although barriers exist, the teachers incorporate new learning in classroom instruction. This research study was designed to improve my understanding of reading instruction as well as to help me know how teachers use new knowledge and process new skills to improve reading instruction and student learning in the classroom. The following sections describe the context of the study and explain the categories that support the answer to the research question. The categories included teacher learning, reflection on new skills, barriers and challenges in the classroom, and teacher identified needs.

Setting

This study was conducted in a rural, public elementary school in the southeastern United States, approximately seventy miles from two major cities. The largest employer in the county is the school district. Approximately 25,000 people make up the population of the county, and the largest city has a population of 6,500. In this county, only 7% of the population has earned a bachelor’s degree or higher, and 62% of the population has graduated from high school.

Our student sub-population groups consists of approximately 95% Caucasian, 3% African-American, 1% Hispanic, and 1% other minorities. The school employs 20 regular classroom teachers, four special education teachers, a speech therapist, a librarian, one music teacher, and one physical education teacher. Nine instructional assistants in the
building work with all grades. All teachers are certified and teach in their area of certification; the average experience of staff is 15 years. Professional qualifications of the teachers in the school include approximately 13% hold a bachelor’s degree, 46% hold a master’s degree, 42% have a Rank I certification, and one has a specialist degree. The staff also includes the principal, counselor, curriculum coordinator, reading intervention teacher, math intervention teacher, two secretaries, a nurse’s aide, a computer aide, and four special education instructional assistants.

The school has implemented practices of a professional learning community. Teachers meet and share information during common instructional planning times. Scheduled events for the teachers include grade-level teaming of teachers, weekly team meetings, weekly professional learning community meetings, and daily response to intervention modeling. The objective for these events within this professional learning community of teachers is to support their work with struggling learners and provide suggestions to use as daily enrichment for students needing more in-depth instruction.

A school-wide Title I program was implemented for the student population of 438 preschool through fifth grade students. The 3rd-grade teachers work with all third graders during reading instruction, and approximately 48 percent of these students read below grade level. Reading levels were determined by assessments that include the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE), the Test of Primary Reading Outcomes (TPRO), and weekly selection tests from the basal. These teachers try various strategies within their grade level team to improve student reading in the areas of fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. In this study, the 3rd-grade teachers of Team Three are labeled Teacher SS, Teacher AF, Teacher PP, and Teacher DE in the following
The four teachers of Team Three vary in experience. Teacher SS has approximately 15 years of teaching experience, Teacher AF has two years of experience, Teacher PP has 18 years, and Teacher DE has 15 years of teaching experience. These educational professionals discussed learning and application of teaching skills with me or during interviews, because each had experience in the classroom.

Team Three truly expressed behaviors and characteristics embedded within a professional learning community. Each week the 3rd grade teachers discussed and planned for reading instruction during their team meeting. The teachers self-reflected on their practice and shared information during these weekly meetings. During group reflection, the teachers all agreed that the students in 3rd-grade needed more time for just free reading. While Team Three shared planning for instruction and agreed on most items for reading instruction, including weekly skill needs, common vocabulary, and the weekly story in the unit, each teacher implemented instruction in the classroom differently. The following paragraphs developed from observation during reading instruction and from conversations with teachers. These snapshots of each class represent the instructional reading environment in third grade.

Classroom Settings

My first visit with Teacher SS occurred when she used small, mixed-ability groups during reading instruction. The students were grouped by skill need, and each group had to complete a different activity around the common theme of the Statue of Liberty. Strategies used within the groups included using graphic organizers for written expression of the main idea of the story. Students wrote supporting facts, while another
group read a short book of songs about liberty, discussed the story and chose a song to sing aloud in the class. The students in the class obviously enjoyed the activities and shared their findings with the class during whole group time.

During a conversation with Teacher SS, I asked her about the buckets of books along the wall, each labeled with the student’s name. She described her approach to interest students in reading for enjoyment as follows,

> I have what I call self-select reading, that … has not been a requirement, but it has been presented as a fun thing…get your bucket, put your books in, what is interesting to you…and find your own little personal space, find your spot, and read. (SS, #42, 5/19/09)

Teacher SS went on to say how the students in her class participated in the fun, even the struggling readers, and would ask her for extra reading time quite often.

The students in class with Teacher AF were all engaged in the reading instruction, because she made vocabulary into a game for the kids. During this lesson, Teacher AF reviewed sounds and comprehension skills by asking students to use the word correctly, aloud, in a sentence. On a different day of reading instruction, Teacher AF had students all over the classroom in small groups of three or four. Each group of students had a different activity to complete at reading centers. She explained the organization of the reading lesson as follows:

> Like today, one group has a flip chart where they put the story in sequence; one group had a Venn diagram where they compare Jem Mimie, a character in the book, to themselves; one group did reader response in the back to various comprehension questions; and another group worked at the vocabulary center,
using the words in various forms of writing conducted whole group instruction during a vocabulary review over a story in the unit. (AF, # 67, 4/23/09)

In a later conversation, I asked Teacher AF how she met the needs of all students in the class. She reminded me about a group of five students who moved to the front table on one of my visits in the class. She stated that these students needed help with skills and comprehension, and they worked with her until they learned the reading skill. All students rotated on different days to the front table reading aloud with the teacher, where they answered comprehension questions aloud during the oral reading of the story.

On a different day of reading instruction, Teacher AF had students work in small groups in literature circles. The students were grouped according to reading ability levels, but all had the same book within each group. There were six different groups of students with six different books. Each student had a role in the literature circles. Teacher AF stated the literature circles were her favorite new instructional tool for reading this year. She stated the students really enjoy participating as follows:

In our RTI [response to intervention/struggling readers] groups, I use Cam Jansen books, which is right on their level, and we do the detective case file, where they are detectives, and they have to solve the mystery and write a detective case report…They love it! Yeah, they have little detective badges and everything!

(AF, #96, 4/23/09)

On the first day of a new unit, Teacher PP reads the story aloud to students and asks them questions about the story as she moves along. Determined to make connections for the students, she often tells little stories about each new vocabulary word, to create a memory or mental image for students to help in remembering the different meanings.
Teacher PP discussed how students need a purpose for their reading and need to be comfortable in the room when reading. One strategy Teacher PP used during reading instruction was singing, and students created songs using the sounds in the words. She described the process of using music with the vocabulary words as follows:

Singing. I love to sing, so a lot of times my kids and I will write a song and tell what they think it means. We write it on the board, and we continue from there. We come up with music some way or another. Kids have great ideas…Because it's a part of learning, putting words together or rhyming words for example, Uh, I say, we need a word now that it going to go back up and rhyme with another word, or one that means the same thing…I think it helps them. (PP, #42, #43, #44, 5/14/09)

At the beginning of reading instruction, Teacher DE reviewed the essential vocabulary for the reading story and the different jobs at each reading center. She stressed the importance of carefully reading all directions at each center and assigned groups with mixed ability levels in reading. During review of the instruction, I asked Teacher DE what she considered the most important component of reading and she stressed student comprehension. She also pointed out that all parts are necessary for students to learn, even if they cannot make their sounds, the students must know the basics to go on. Teacher DE discussed how the basics (including phonics, vowel sounds, word families, blends, and other items) are so hard for many students to understand. Two items she addressed during reading instruction were how students learn and real-world relation of material for the students. As a real-world example during reading instruction about the Statue of Liberty, Teacher DE asked students to pretend they had just seen the statue for
the first time, and to create a post card to send, describing the experience. She went on and described how people on vacation will often send a post card back home describing what they experienced for those who could not go on the trip.

The above information describes the daily work of the teachers who provided the data for the study. The categories formed from this data follow and include teacher learning, learning needs, learning and reflection, and learning barriers.

**Teacher Learning**

In qualitative research, the question serves as a guide and sometimes, unexpected findings may emerge and relate to the study. At this time, additional information from literature of the field can support the findings. Accordingly, the analysis of the teacher learning literature by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1998) connect and emphasize the findings of this study. In particular, the authors discuss how teachers gain knowledge for practice from daily life in the classroom and school. The authors call this knowledge-in-practice. They also identify knowledge for practice from sources such as other teachers, workshops, experts, and books (pp. 254-272). The teachers in this study also described learning in the classroom and learning from others. Those descriptions follow.

**Learning Through Experience**

Three of the four teachers had more than 14 years of experience while one had only two years of teaching experience. These teachers talked about learning in different ways. All the teachers talked about learning from experience. For example, one teacher stated, “You build skills in teaching just like you build skills doing anything else; you do it by experience and by having different kinds of children” (PP, #6, 5/14/09). Another teacher admitted her comfort level working with students increased over time as she learned
more about how to teach students in a meaningful manner. She stated:

   Experience, experience, experience…when I first got hired, I was 5th and 6th [grade]. And the only reason I got it was because no one else wanted it, but I was tickled to death, tickled to death! But when I look back at that…and I’m thinking, did they learn anything [italics added]? (DE, #1, 5/13/09)

   All teachers agreed some new learning happened by trial and error, and if a technique worked, the team shared with each other to improve student learning in reading comprehension, fluency, or vocabulary. When deeper conversations with each teacher occurred, all discussed how they learned more each year of their teaching career. Teacher DE emphasized the importance of “experience, training, asking, and a lot of hands-on stuff” (DE, #6, 5/13/09). All teachers agreed new learning takes a lot of work and commitment. According to teacher SS,

   A lot of it is just taking it home, and staying late…that, I think, has gotten me to where I am at….over the fifteen years…..because it has gotten me to where I am at, that I still want to keep continuing to learn. (SS, #13, 5/19/09)

   One teacher who has 15 years of experience summed up the importance of learning by doing different things in the classroom when she said, “I don’t think I’m the perfect teacher by any means, but I think every minute, I learn more. I learn more…and get better with time…” (DE, #3, 5/13/09).

   **Learning From Others**

   **Peers.** The teacher having the least amount of experience in the classroom discussed the importance of communication with her peers as a source of help in handling instructional situations that arise. For example, she sought help when students
struggled with reading issues as stated below:

‘Cause I sometimes have trouble. Kids can read, but they don’t comprehend it. I didn’t know what to do…So we [the team] talked about comprehension strategies, and reading strategies as they read. It helps… (AF, # 12, 4/23/09)

All teachers in the study mentioned the importance of belonging to a grade-level team. The 3rd-grade teachers conducted a team meeting each Thursday morning at 11:00 o’clock. Teacher SS would have an agenda and conduct the meeting, but all 3rd-grade teachers were free to speak up and interact in discussions about students, processes, learning, or any item relating to instruction and improved student learning. Reading was a frequent topic in these team discussions, particularly the need for more interventions for students struggling in areas of vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Brainstorming occurred weekly, and these teachers tried various new strategies to see if any improvement in these areas of student need happened.

Teamwork helped the teachers try new instructional approaches with students during reading instruction time. Teachers discussed the importance of communication and sharing of ideas with brand new teachers on a particular grade level team or new to the teaching profession. Regarding an experienced teacher who had not taught in third grade previously, one teacher said:

When DE came to third grade, we all met and told her the different strategies that we use, such as graphic organizers, Study Island…we all use smart board activities, to get students to read at that grade level. (AF, # 115, 4/23/09)

Also, we got out the curriculum, and looked to see…what’s most important, what’s not important, to realize we need to teach the essential things…not
The third grade teachers described various methods of how each learned new skills for reading instruction. However, all four teachers agreed that the preferred way to learn necessary skills was for others to model the new skill for them. Teacher PP emphasized this when she stated:

There’s lots of ways, but for me, I like to see that modeling in that room and see how those kids react to what that teacher’s teachin’ and watch them do it. I want to try it, but I wanna know for sure that I know what I’m doing before I try it out.

(PP, #63, 5/14/09)

As another teacher explained,

You can give me a power point, you can give me a list of resources that you think are great but to take it back to my classroom, I really prefer to have seen it in action. That way, I could’ve have applied it to where I thought I needed to. That’s the big thing, right there. (SS, #81, 5/19/09)

All third grade teachers discussed shared information between coworkers as opportunities for growth and new learning. Of importance to the teachers was any information obtained from experts during professional development opportunities or conferences. Those who do not get to attend often think of creative ways to learn and return to share with their team. One teacher explained the importance of modeling as a method for sharing new learning with others, “I observed good teachers that I have heard and I took it back… [to the classroom]” (AF, # 2, 4/23/09). Teacher AF went on to say, “HB brought back secret stories, and she brought back a copy for us to view, and then she did one with DP in our meeting, and that got more people interested and we thought,
Hey, you know, we can really do this!” (AF, #103, 4/23/09). Other suggestions and the importance of such sharing and learning were represented in the following statement:

I think each grade level needs to work as a team to present those ideas to help other teachers say, “Hey, I CAN [capitals added] do that, I CAN [capitals added] boost that up, say it was a first grade level, I CAN [capitals added] boost that up to a third grade level or onto my grade level…like doing running records…Other teachers brought back secret stories from the reading conference, and demonstrated in our meeting. That got people more interested and we thought, “Hey, you know, we CAN [capitals added] really do this!” (AF, # 103, #110, 4/23/09)

_Mentors._ All teachers in this study mentioned the value of mentors for providing guidance and assistance as needed, including large amounts of encouragement. As teacher, SS stated,

The rude awakening was when you was [were] actually in the classroom… [for the first time as a new teacher]. Having that mentor was the biggest thing…to know what I needed, who I could go to for what I needed, extra guidance. (SS, # 8, 4, 5/19/09)

The presence of a mentor enriched the first years of teaching, as one veteran recalled with the following statement, “But, as the year went on, and the other third grade teachers helpin’ me, and they’re getting me to where I needed to be…my mentor really helped me” (SS, # 12, 5/19/09).

More experienced teachers discussed the importance of being a guide and mentor to new teachers, often because they had mentors who helped their learning and transference
process as well. Teacher SS pointed out how she tried to mentor others because she had needs when she first entered the classroom. The least experienced teacher on the team described how Teacher SS mentored her, as follows:

SS is really good at drawing inferences, really good, so I went and asked her … what would you do? Mine [students] cannot seem to understand how to draw inferences, or draw conclusions, so, we talked about it and came up with a graphic organizer. (AF, # 75, 4/23/09)

One experienced teacher commented how their intern teacher provided a source of new strategies and ideas for instruction, for use within the classrooms. An example of such learning from a mentee, the student teacher, was illustrated in the following statement:

Literature circles…never done before…they read it first and then they all do their jobs, and after that, what’s neat, and I learned this from TD, my student teacher, she puts their jobs in different order, so one person does not get the same job every time. Staple it and they really like that…and then at the end of the week, they can put it back in their book…I learned that…from her… (DE, # 37, 5/13/09)

Experts. The teachers discussed other avenues for their learning. Several ways mentioned for new learning included conferences and professional development attendance, teachers within the district in other schools, professional literature such as books, journal articles, and Internet site information, curriculum documents, and observation of instruction in other schools. The newest member of the team discussed how she used other sources of information to help her learn, “The first thing I done [did] was read Harry Wong, *The First Days of School*. And, I got uh, a lot of really good ideas from him” (AF, # 1, 4/23/09).
Often, new learning took the shape of reading material relevant to the problem the teacher has tried to solve within her classroom. Research-based strategies and intervention models were mentioned as relevant for instruction in reading, including mixed-ability groups for differentiation and literature circles. Individual teachers searched for reading skills in other ways including visiting Internet websites for useful tools. As 15-year veteran Teacher SS pointed out, teaching is a life-long learning process:

I’m always lookin’ for something, always. I mean, whether it’s professional development, whether it’s resources, websites, I’m always thinkin’ there’s gotta’ be something out there…to help me help the kids. (SS, # 55, 5/19/09)

Teacher AF commented that she searched books for new ideas,

I just read. I read any book that I could find to help with the kid’s learning in reading…I read a lot…and then …that’s what I did. (AF, #3, 4/23/09)

Learning and Reflection

Evidence of new teacher learning existed in the conversations, observations, and shared discussions, which demonstrated the practice of reflecting with team members about students. The teachers reflected about the progress of each student and their own learning as teachers. The 3rd-grade teachers met each week and discussed students needs, each other’s needs in problem areas, and offered suggestions as an approach to overall improvement in their daily instructional practice. These teachers used a variety of assessments in this reflective process. Teachers shared daily instructional practices, self-reflection, and data from weekly student assessments. Lively discussions occurred during professional learning community meetings and regular team meetings about strategies for improving reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary for 3rd-grade students.
Teachers searched the Internet, books, and journals, found new strategies and shared with each other. Eventually, teachers moved outside their team for additional models of learning and shared with other coworkers in the building. New learning gained through this reflective inclusive practice was evident in the following statement:

Data boards...we look at comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, and we have four different colors-green is on level, red is strategic, yellow is below, and blue is above, and we get their selection tests each week and we monitor their comprehension and vocabulary on that...If we see that the student did not meet that data, we go back, we develop as a third grade team...we talk...and we look at the whole test and then we pretest again. (AF, # 26, #6, 4/23/09)

Teachers also discussed the use of assessments to monitor student learning and apply the information to classroom instruction. A variety of formative and summative assessments occurred to check for understanding of comprehension, vocabulary, and improved fluency. Teacher learning became apparent during teacher discussions, during team meetings, and in classroom instruction where the transfer of important reading vocabulary occurred daily. In my observations of teachers, I saw and heard that the teachers in Team Three had begun to use the terms comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency, as discussed in team meetings, with their students. This transfer of common terminology into daily work of the classroom indicated that teachers used the new learning in the classroom setting. During one interview, the teacher also used with ease the reading vocabulary to describe this monitoring:

Of course, we check their [students] fluency rate every week. [We use] Tests. We [Team 3 teachers] are constantly giving formative assessments, summative
assessments, constantly it seems like. Of course, running records, observations, reading with them, I could go on…lots. (DE, # 12, 5/13/09)

Data analysis, student improvement, and monitoring were discussed at meetings each week. These discussions indicated that teachers used and integrated the new learning information into their daily work. Over time, Team Three had become a professional learning community that discussed data, monitored student progress, and reflected on daily practices.

*Teachers' Learning Needs*

The 3rd-grade teachers all discussed different learning needs and preferences for obtaining new learning. All grade three teachers preferred modeling of lessons by others prior to implementation in the classroom. In addition, Teacher AF preferred professional development opportunities having resources to hand out for her to explore later on by reading and trying it out. Teachers SS, DE, and PP wanted an activity involving active engagement using hands-on instruction.

The 3rd-grade teachers wanted school visits for observation of lessons in reading instruction. These teachers suggested vertical team discussions with grade levels above and below grade three about the most critical needs for individual students in the area of reading. The teachers commented that specific research-based methods for targeting comprehension and vocabulary building skills would be valuable for improvement of student reading levels.

Teachers identified the need to learn more about reading intervention strategies and specialized skills because students need help. The needs of students inspired teachers to learn more in order to help students. One teacher looked for more help, “So, it’s just
what’s out there as far as intervention strategies? Whatever it may be to get kids to comprehend more” (SS, # 66, 5-19-09).

Most teachers felt more development was needed school wide in the areas of differentiation and response to intervention instruction models. When school-wide improvement needs were discussed, one teacher pointed out the importance of school development as a professional learning community. She said:

Everybody needs to be open-minded; everybody has to be willing to put their 100% in…back to what we’ve talked about, you know, as far as PLC…it’s a learning process; it’s a learning community. (SS, # 83, 82, 5/19/09)

Other teachers within Team Three echoed the need for all teachers within the team and the entire school to work together, as a unit, for reading instruction to improve student learning. As another teacher stated:

Students will get more reading out of that [encouragement] if they know their teachers believe in them, believe that they can [italics added] read…Confidence, teachers need to give students confidence [in their learning] and let the students know they can [learn to] read. (AF, # 58, # 59, 4/23/09)

Learning Barriers/Challenges

The teachers identified several barriers in obtaining new learning and transference of that learning into the classroom. Items teachers discussed at length included training or understanding of how to teach reading, especially for beginning teachers, resource needs for teaching reading and teacher commitment. Time management issues and poor professional development opportunities also were considered challenges. One veteran teacher raised possible reasons for new teacher learning issues with the following
statement, “You know. I think it’s just the personality of that person” (SS, #90, 5/19/09).

Teacher SS elaborated more on the subject when asked why some teachers are eager to learn new skills and easily transfer the new learning into the classroom. She pointed out her personal observation that often teachers are unwilling to get out of their comfort zone and try something new or different. A different teacher also expressed the opinion along a similar vein when she stated, “I think they’re [teachers] set in their old ways. They’ve always done it this way, and they think this way works, and they’re not willing to change it…to learn” (DE, #58, 5/13/09).

All teachers in this grade level considered the process of change difficult, and therefore, the resistance to change inhibits learning. These teachers indicated a major failure for many professional educators included the lack of understanding needed to make positive change occur within the daily instruction of reading. The following statement made on observations by the newest teacher into the profession offered suggestions on why change is difficult for many teachers in the building:

I also think sometimes teachers use their basal readers too much—they don’t go outside [of the text], all they do is stay in that book…they don’t get leveled readers, they [the teachers] don’t bring in other stories from outside resources…so those kids don’t know what it’s like to have different areas of reading going. They [the students] don’t know what below level is…they just don’t know… (AF, #123, 4/23/09)

All teachers in the study cited time management issues as a barrier for new learning to occur and transference into the daily instruction during reading time. Differences were revealed in teacher perceptions of each other during frank team conversations where
planning for instruction and trying new strategies was the topic of discussion. Teachers DE and PP lamented about the lack of time each had for doing any planning or trying anything new, because the actual learning/teaching process was time consuming. The other two teachers pointed out how to make time for trying new items during reading instruction, even if a lot of planning was necessary in the beginning. Even the willing teachers expressed reservations and concerns about why new learning and transfer was difficult for many in the profession with the following:

I think sometimes we can be just overwhelmed…and that’s not to say we are not open to new ideas…but let’s put it at a pace that we all know what [it is] that we all are doing. So we don’t have half doing it, and half is like…oh my gosh, I don’t have a clue what’s going on. (SS, # 109, 5-19-09)

Another teacher alluded to scheduling as a possible issue when she said, “So, I think the biggest barrier is the time limit that we have with out kids, weekly; we just have so many breaks…it’s hard to give it an hour and forty minutes for reading each day…” (PP, #74, 5/14/09).

The time management issue for Teachers SS and AF also alluded to scheduling issues when they discussed the amount of actual class time spent reading and the desire for more reading instructional time. These two teachers considered interference into personal family time a necessary sacrifice for preparation and learning new strategies, including time for reflection of how the new learning actually transferred into daily instruction. Teachers SS and AF quickly realized the necessity of sharing resources, collaboration, and data discussions as tools for improved time management and student learning. Their improved planning process occurred each Friday after school, and alleviated several
of their issues with time management.

Team Three teachers mentioned the importance of having interesting guest speakers and professional development for improved new teacher learning. One teacher commented, “PD…it has to be something we know is real. It has to be something we know we can use” (DE, # 46, 5/13/09).

Teacher DE went on to describe some professional development she and colleagues had experienced over the years with the following:

You hear some stuff and you know, we’re [teachers] like, there’s no way! And, so you make up your mind right away whether you want to do it or not. And activities, you don’t like to sit and just listen all day, but you like to be up and doing, ‘cause I have to do something. [For example] You can tell me all day how to do the Think Link, but unless I am doing it, moving….forget it. (DE, #47, 5/13/09)

Another teacher addressed how poor professional development was considered a waste of her time when she said, “One [A PD] that you just hand out papers or show me a film, or discuss it with me…just goes right over me. I think I’m a lot like the children--you have to keep me interested” (PP, # 57, 5/14/09).

Another barrier teachers commented about during this study was the attitude of the individual teacher. Team Three teachers stressed the importance of personal attitude and growth, a need of initiative to learn new strategies or interventions and the courage to try these in the classroom. An experienced teacher emphasized the importance of life-long learning as part of being a teacher and growing as a professional with the following, “One thing, any teacher, no matter how smart they think they are, or how many ideas they
got, they will learn” (PP, # 67, 5/14/09).

Another factor considered by some to be a learning barrier was age. Team Three teachers mentioned that age may or may not influence the willingness to learn new things through experiences as indicated by the following statement, “...there are some that are my age that are still willing to learn...and then there are some, you know, younger than me, and I’m thinking…put a little fire under’em!” (SS, #89, 5/19/09). Teacher SS went on to say, “On the other hand...Find out what they [new teachers] can bring. Then with what you have and with what you hope that they bring, then you both can work it out…and learn together” (SS, # 100, 5/19/09).

Summary

The preceding paragraphs present the context and the categories that support the research question. After a description of the context, the categories were teacher learning, learning and reflection, teacher’s learning needs, and learning barriers and challenges.

Team Three teachers were straightforward in their answers and discussion of practices especially about learning new ideas and transferring the learning back into the classroom. These teachers offered several suggestions of how teachers learn, why barriers exist for teacher learning, and various ways personal reflection on daily and weekly practices have helped each teacher. The teachers reflected individually and within Team Three.

While collaboration helped these teachers overcome a few of their learning barriers, the practice of reflection influenced their new learning in many more ways. For example, the teachers shared new strategies and together looked for more ways to improve reading instruction practices. However, the actual experience of doing the work with the students in the classroom, and then bringing back information to peers for group reflection,
provided more learning for the teachers.

Discussion

Findings and the Literature

The findings of this study primarily relate to the literature reviewed in two primary areas: how teachers learn and teacher identified learning needs. In this study, teachers learned through experience in the classroom, through talking and sharing with peers, and through other professional avenues, which include conferences, workshops, graduate coursework, and professional development opportunities. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1998) reached similar conclusions in a review of teacher education research. These authors identified knowledge in practice as classroom experience and knowledge for practice as information from other sources. While these authors also identified inquiry as knowledge of practice, the teachers in this study did not participate in formal inquiry and did not conduct formal inquiry projects.

The findings in this study and in the literature indicated teachers were willing to try strategies with different students. One teacher commented how teacher learning occurs by having different kinds of kids in the classroom. Another teacher stated she was always looking for anything to help her students improve in reading. Similarly, Adams et al. (2006) found that some teachers varied instruction for student needs, and had the ability to self-reflect on that new learning in the classroom. Those teachers and the teachers in this study often changed strategies to meet students’ needs, and were unafraid of trying new learning.

Teachers in this study and findings in the literature discussed the importance of communication with peers to collaborate for student improvement. All 3rd-grade teachers
in this study mentioned the importance of belonging to a grade-level team. The teachers improved practices through collaboration with each other and saw positive results in student achievement and teacher learning. According to Goddard et al. (2007), Wood (2007), Bruce and Ross (2007), teacher collaboration for school improvement was significant for school improvement. Wood (2007) also indicated that teaching in many schools improved tremendously by reviewing and assessing student work and analyzing professional practices together. Communication of peers within the teacher learning communities affected the overall school culture and enabled sustained teacher learning. Team Three teachers emphasized as well as practiced reflection. Teachers reflected together on daily teaching practices and shared insights to improve their work with students during reading instruction.

Another area that relates to the research reviewed and this study is analysis of student learning to identify teacher-learning needs. Teachers in this qualitative study analyzed student needs for learning and identified their own learning needs for practice during the process. Lambert (1998) emphasized the importance of defining needs as opportunities to learn, rather than as training. According to Lambert (2008), when teachers identify the needs, the learning occurs naturally. Third grade teachers in this study engaged in problem solving when they identified that struggling readers needed more strategies and interventions.

Team Three teachers in this study indicated the need for full participation of faculty in learning and growing together as a professional learning community to analyze school needs. Team Three teachers had similar needs as the teachers in a study by Hayes and Robnolt (2007), which supported desired teacher learning by showing that teachers
needed effective, explicit and data driven learning opportunities to provide a purpose for their learning. In understanding a purpose for new learning, according to Hayes and Robnolt, teachers were inclined to sustain and use new knowledge. Teachers in the literature reviewed and in this study used data analysis of formative and summative student assessments for information needed for changes to daily practice. Through data analysis and discussion of the findings, teachers in the study, as in the literature, were able to provide individualized student instruction for student learning and school improvement.

According to the findings of this study, Team Three teachers wanted specific assessment methods for targeting student needs in reading instruction in the areas of comprehension and vocabulary building. Others also expressed a need for training on assessing general reading skills. Similar needs were found in the literature reviewed when Crawford et al. (2008) described how to analyze such reading achievement skills and maintain running records. Specifically, the authors showed how teachers practiced new learning and conducted analysis of student growth. The teachers in this study and in the literature learned assessment and record keeping, and applied their new learning directly to students.

*Findings and My Professional Practice: Application*

This study allowed me to examine how teachers solve problems that arise within the classroom in the area of reading instruction. My background was primarily secondary; I taught high school biology and chemistry for thirteen years. During my fourteenth year as an educator, I served as a curriculum coordinator for an elementary school. In this role, I needed and wanted to know what was going on in the classroom with elementary teachers
and how they work in teaching reading. I wanted to know how to reduce the number of struggling readers in the primary classroom. I wanted to know how teachers learn new strategies in reading instruction, include these in daily practice, and reflect upon the results. I wanted to know what factors influence the differences between readers and nonreaders in the primary classroom. By examining the instructional practices of 3rd-grade reading teachers using observation and interview techniques, my understanding of the differences in teachers, including their methods for obtaining and transference of new learning in teaching reading has increased.

*My Learning Through Qualitative Research*

Throughout this study, I spent a great deal of time listening, observing, and examining teachers in their daily work. My learning through the usage of these qualitative research methods allowed me to become an active participant within the study. Teachers openly shared information with me and modeled for me the practices necessary to teach reading. Throughout my learning, I formed personal and professional relationships with these teachers and gained insight about their inquiry process and reflection methods. Areas of importance for my learning included content information, actual reading instruction through demonstrations, and teacher analysis of student results used by these teachers in their reflection on classroom practice.

*Elementary reading content information.* As a secondary school teacher, I did not know or care about how students learned to read. I just knew some students could read well, while others could barely sound out words. I did not understand how students could complete eight or nine years of their education and enter high school barely reading. In my mind, those elementary teachers were not doing their jobs to get all the students
reading. My approach for working with this issue was to locate various types of material for students to read other than the text, use some vocabulary building strategies, and pair the student with a strong reader for in-class reviews. In this way, the struggling students would learn something and earn credit.

As the curriculum coordinator for an elementary school, I soon discovered that the two most important subjects were reading and math. I also realized that if the students did not learn to read well early on, they were doomed to struggle their entire school career. The teachers were working hard with students daily, and the subjects I heard discussed repeatedly were reading and math.

Data analysis of assessment scores was part of my responsibility, and when I looked at 3rd-grade data for reading, I was shocked. Approximately 48% of the third graders were not on level in reading. I knew from books I had read those students were future high school dropouts. After digging around some more, I realized the second grade group of students had serious reading issues as well.

I began asking many questions and reading more research material about elementary reading instruction, interventions, and such, while formulating an action plan to help the teachers work with students more effectively. When I asked the tough questions about why these kids could not read and were promoted to the next grade level, I really irritated some people through my ignorance. However, the 3rd-grade teachers were asking similar questions as they tried to figure out how to help the students become more successful at reading. They were concerned about how to meet the needs for so many of their students that were not on grade level in reading, and at the same time address the needs and new learning for the other students in their classes.
Elementary reading procedures: Instructional matters. When I began reading some research on reading instruction, I was not understanding the meaning clearly. Most of the research contained vocabulary that needed further explanation. I started asking the teachers the meaning of the words and to show me, thorough examples and non-examples, the process for the meanings. For example, I did not understand fluency, phonemic awareness, or word formation. Nor did I understand the connections between fluency, phonemic awareness, vocabulary building and comprehension.

As I listened, I quickly realized that at the elementary level, the teachers must show the students how to make the connections between these items, so they can begin to read. I noticed struggling readers were the students that are lacking phonemic awareness skills. This inability to connect sounds and letters caused problems with vocabulary and comprehension and fluency. Actually observing the teachers during their reading instruction and talking with them afterwards helped me to understand what the reading process entailed for these teachers and the students.

During informal conversations with teachers, I found many felt not equipped to handle struggling students in reading at the third grade. The numbers of students needing help were overwhelming for the teachers; I realized the teachers really do try, and they care about helping all their students learn to read. However, they can only do so much with each child, each day, without much help in the form of interventions. I began to search for ways to help these teachers with strategies, someone to model lessons, and overall assistance any way I possibly could.

As I observed, asked, and listened, my respect for elementary reading teachers increased. I learned there are many factors that influence the process of learning to read.
Maturity of students, home environmental issues, instructional strategies, prior instruction in reading, and ability levels of students are just a few factors. Successful reading teachers do not accept excuses but try to work with each child based on his or her needs. I began to appreciate the efforts of elementary reading teachers and gained understanding of how students progress to high school without knowing how to read very well.

**Application for Educational Leadership**

From the findings and experiences of this qualitative study, I can transfer and apply to my leadership in schools. The following sections include the primary influences from completing this project.

*Providing learning resources.* By listening and observing the classroom teachers during reading instruction, I learned teachers shared similarities with the students because each had a preferred source for obtaining new learning and transferring it into the classroom. All the third grade teachers preferred modeling of instruction. Yet, each had other ways of learning they used, such as reading or using the Internet. This knowledge will help me during professional development training of teachers in my role as an associate principal. I will be certain to adjust instruction for the teachers by using a variety of activities that incorporate modeling during their training. I also will suggest teachers model for each other a particular lesson or activity that has helped improve instruction in the classroom.

*Building relationships in the school community.* By listening and asking the teachers questions, I formed relationships with the teachers. Listening was probably the most important skill I used to build relationships with the teachers in this study. Each knew I was sincere in my efforts to help them any way necessary in their practice. In my
professional development as an administrator, I will continue to listen, observe, and ask questions, to help teachers the best way I can, and I will continue my learning about the process. I have learned that teachers and most adults respond well when someone listens, and then provides assistance.

*Helping teachers identify barriers.* By observing and listening to teachers during this study, I learned many times teachers do not realize the barriers that exist in their learning. Sometimes the teachers think they are completing a process correctly when they are not. Others just do not want to try new things and resist change. I learned teachers often feel stressed and frustrated by their work, which can be a barrier for improvement. Often teachers do not recognize barriers because they stay busy and may not take the time to reflect upon their professional practice.

As an instructional leader, I will observe and listen to teachers, and try to understand their needs. I will discuss with individual teachers items of concern for them and create an action plan with the teacher to help resolve the issue. Of necessity, administrators must provide opportunity for improvement and suggestions for improvement to facilitate teacher growth. I will work with teachers to show them how to identify and solve problems within their classrooms by working with them through the process of change necessary to improve. Removal of barriers can be accomplished by setting goals and creating action plans for the teachers to work through, as part of the process for change. As an administrator, I would provide support for removing barriers during all stages of growth.

*Developing growth opportunities.* Many teachers have not reached their full potential as instructional leaders or team members within the school setting. My learning from this
project will guide me to establish an official mentoring program for new teachers and those having three years of experience or less. Teacher mentoring was mentioned by all teachers within this study as an important item for their personal growth. As an administrator, I must encourage all teachers and help them reach their potential through best practices and professionalism.

Veteran teachers need support as well, and I will endeavor to help those successful teachers be even better by providing opportunities for personal growth. Again, establishment of an official mentoring program will provide an opportunity for these veteran teachers to share information and new learning with their less experienced colleagues. Other opportunities may open through professional development, service on school committees, by joining professional organizations, and attending their conferences.

Due to this research project, my knowledge and understanding of adult learning barriers has increased, specifically those related to teaching students how to learn to read. I learned teachers try to change and try new learning in the classroom, if provided support and voice during the process. Working with the adults in this study established an opportunity for my professional growth as an instructional leader as well as provided an opportunity for the teachers to gain new knowledge and practice reflection with me and others.

**Summary**

A team of 3rd-grade teachers in a rural Kentucky elementary school provided the information for this qualitative action research study, which approached teachers as learners and investigated how teachers transfer new learning into the classroom. This
study investigated the following research question: How do teachers learn new skills for reading instruction and transfer their learning into the classroom?

Third grade reading teachers learn new skills from experience and interaction with other professionals; although barriers exist, the teachers incorporate new learning in classroom instruction. The teachers also reflected upon their daily practice as individuals, within the team during weekly meetings, and with peers throughout the building. As an instructional leader within a school, the information gleaned from these teachers provided insight into how adult learners prefer to receive training and professional development opportunities, and how teachers differed when transferring new learning back to the classroom.

The purpose of this study was to ask reading teachers how they learn and process new skills, and to observe the reading teachers in the classroom during reading instruction. Through this study, my understanding of reading instruction and how teachers use new knowledge to improve reading instruction and increase student learning has greatly improved.
References


Retrieved September 20, 2008 from Wiley Periodicals, Inc. database.


classroom management professional development in a brief self-study format.


Appendix A.

Human Subjects Review Application and Approval Letter
APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF INVESTIGATIONS INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

PLEASE TYPE OR USE A WORD PROCESSOR

Submit to the Office of Sponsored Programs, 301 Potter Hall, by the first working Monday of the month for screening prior to the HSRB meeting. Please add additional space between items as needed to describe your project.

The human subjects application must stand alone. Your informed consent document(s), survey instrument, and site approval letter(s) should be attached to the application and referred to in your write up of the appropriate sections so that reviewers may read them as they read your application. Thesis proposals or other documents that are meant to substitute for completing the sections of the application will not be read and should not be attached.

1. Principal Investigator's Name: _Patricia A. Sharp
   Email Address: ___patricia.sharp341@wku.edu
   Mailing Address: ___239 Rock Creek Road, Clarkson, KY 42726
   Department: _Edu. Admin., Lead. & Research   Phone: _270-589-7275

   Co-Investigator:

   __________________________________________________________
   Email Address: ____________________________________________
   Mailing Address: ___________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   Department: _____________________  Phone: ____________

2. If you are a student, provide the following information:

   Faculty Sponsor: _Dr. Sharon Spall  Department: _Edu. Admin., Lead.& Res.
   Phone: 270-745-5190
   Faculty Mailing Address: _1906 College Heights, Bowling Green, KY 42101
   Student Permanent Address (where you can be reached 12 months from now):
   _239 Rock Creek Road, Clarkson, KY 42726

   Is this your thesis or dissertation research?      Yes __    No_X : Specialist Degree

3. Title of project: How Do Teachers Learn New Skills for Reading Instruction and Transfer Their Learning into the Classroom

4. Project Period:     Start     upon HSRB approval  End   __June 30, 2009
   ___________________________ month, day, year
Note: Your project period may not start until after the HSRB has given final approval.

5. Has this project previously been considered by the HSRB? Yes ____ No_X

If yes, give approximate date of review:

6. Do you or any other person responsible for the design, conduct, or reporting of this research have an economic interest in, or act as an officer or a director of, any outside entity whose financial interests would reasonably appear to be affected by the research? Yes ______ No __X

If "yes," please include a statement below that may be considered by the Institutional Conflict of Interest Committee:

7. Is a proposal for external support being submitted? Yes ____ No_X

If yes, you must submit (as a separate attachment) one complete copy of that proposal as soon as it is available and complete the following:

a. Is notification of Human Subject approval required? Yes _____ No _____

b. Is this a renewal application? Yes _____ No _____

c. Sponsor's Name:

d. Project Period: From: To:

8. You must include copies of all pertinent information such as, a copy of the questionnaire you will be using or other survey instruments, informed consent documents, letters of approval from cooperating institutions (e.g., schools, hospitals or other medical facilities and/or clinics, human services agencies, individuals such as physicians or other specialists in different fields, etc.), copy of external support proposals, etc.

9. Does this project SOLELY involve analysis of an existing database? Yes ____ No _X

If yes, please provide the complete URLs for all databases that are relevant to this
application, then complete Section A and the signature portion of the application and forward the application to Sponsored Programs:

If the database is not available in an electronic format readily available on the internet, please provide evidence that the data were collected using procedures that were reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board, then complete Section A and the signature portion of the application and forward the application to Sponsored Programs.

10. Have you completed the Citi Program Training? Yes _X_ No______
    Found at www.citiprogram.org Date __April 2, 2009

In the space below, please provide complete answers to the following questions. Add additional space between items as needed.

I. PROPOSED RESEARCH PROJECT

A. Provide a brief summary of the proposed research. Include major hypotheses and research design. The purpose of this study is to examine how reading teachers learn and process new skills for reading instruction and transfer their learning into the classroom. This is a qualitative action research project. Four third grade reading teachers will be interviewed about their learning and processing skills in reading instruction as they have evolved as learners.

B. Describe the source(s) of subjects and the selection criteria. Specifically, how will you obtain potential subjects, and how will you contact them? The subjects must be teachers who teach reading, must have a wide range of achievement levels in student reading scores, and must have a wide range of experience levels in teaching reading. When asked for volunteers for this study, the third grade group fit the above criteria.

C. Informed consent: Describe the consent process and attach all consent documents. The school principal and district superintendent will be asked permission for conducting the research project in the school. Each third grade teacher will be contacted to obtain cooperation and participation in this project. At the time of the interview, each will sign a consent form regarding participation. Each person will be asked to give permission to review all records for this project.

D. Procedures: Provide a step-by-step description of each procedure, including the frequency, duration, and location of each procedure.
   1. Obtain permission from school administration.
   2. Describe for the third grade teachers a general overview of the entire research process for this project.
3. Ask the teachers to volunteer who would be willing to be observed and interviewed.
4. Obtain consent from volunteers.
5. Plan a time to observe each teacher two hours during reading instruction.
6. Observe, take field notes, and analyze data for one teacher.
7. Conduct interviews, collect data, examine assessment records as necessary for one teacher. Analyze data
8. Repeat steps 6 and 7 for other three teachers.
9. Analyze all qualitative data.
10. Write final report.
11. How will confidentiality of the data be maintained? (Note: Data must be securely kept for a minimum of three years on campus.)

   Data will be given to my faculty sponsor and kept for three years in a locked cabinet. The teachers’ names will not be used in the study or information written in such a way that the names can be determined.

12. Describe all known and anticipated risks to the subject including side effects, risks of placebo, risks of normal treatment delay, etc.

   At this time there are no known risks. The individuals will be assured that this project cannot reflect on their daily practices or be used in any way for evaluation purposes of their practice. The individuals will be asked if there are any concerns and steps will be taken to prevent any discomfort or harm. The individuals will be told they can withdraw at any time from the study.

13. Describe the anticipated benefits to subjects, and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result.

   The individuals will have an opportunity to participate in a qualitative action research project. The individuals will have an opportunity to learn how to use the findings of this project to improve individual learning and transfer their learning into the classroom. The project will inform my work as an instructional leader within schools and guide my planning of learning opportunities for teachers.

H. List of references (if applicable):

Additions to or changes in procedures involving human subjects, as well as any problems connected with the use of human subjects once the project has begun, must be brought to the attention of the HSRB as they occur.
II. SIGNATURES

A. I certify that to the best of my knowledge the information presented herein is an accurate reflection of the proposed research project.

___________________________________   _____________  
Principal Investigator   Date

___________________________________   _____________  
Co-Investigator      Date

B. Approval by faculty sponsor (required for all students):

I affirm the accuracy of this application, and I accept the responsibility for the conduct of this research, the supervision of human subjects, and maintenance of informed consent documentation as required by the HSRB.

___________________________________   _____________  
Faculty Sponsor      Date

C. Approval by Department Head is not required (Some departments require approval by the Department Head. Please verify with your department head if their signature is required). If PI is a director or department head, then the PI's immediate superior should sign.

I confirm the accuracy of the information stated in this application. I am familiar with, and approve of the procedures that involve human subjects.

___________________________________   _____________  
Department Head (or immediate superior)   Date

D. Advising Physician*:

I certify that I am a duly licensed physician in the State of Kentucky and that, acting as advising physician, I accept the procedures prescribed herein.

___________________________________   _____________  
Physician’s Name and Signature    Date

*Physician signature is needed only if the project involves medical procedures and the investigator is not a licensed physician.
Project Title: _How Do Teachers Learn New Skills for Reading Instruction and Transfer Their Learning Into the Classroom?

Investigator: ___Patricia Sharp, Department of Educational Administration, Leadership, and Research, Sharon Spall-faculty sponsor, 745-5190
.include name, department and phone of contact person

(HSRA Determination:)

Exempt from Full Review (  )  Expedited Review (  )  Full HSRB Review (  )

(  ) Disapproval

(  ) Approval  (  ) Above minimal risk  (  ) Minimal risk

a. approval, subject to minor changes

b. approval in general but requiring major alterations, clarifications or assurances

c. restricted approval

Date of review: _____________________

Comments:

______________________________________   _________________
Human Subjects Review Board Chair       Date

______________________________________   _________________
Compliance Manager       Date

If you have questions regarding review procedures or completion of this HSRB application, contact the Office of Sponsored Programs: Director -- Dr. Phillip E. Myers, Human Protections Administrator, (270) 745-4652
E-mail: phillip.myers@wku.edu
Compliance Coordinator -- Mr. Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator, (270) 745-2129
E-mail: Paul.Mooney@wku.edu

Project Title: _How Do Teachers Learn New Skills for Reading Instruction and Transfer Their Learning into the Classroom?

Investigator: _Patricia Sharp, Department of Educational Administration, Leadership, and Research, Sharon Spall-faculty sponsor, 745-5190
(include name, department and phone of contact person)

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University (and -- if applicable -- any other cooperating institution). The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask him/her any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:** The purpose of this project is to determine how teachers learn new skills for reading instruction and then transfer their learning into the classroom.

2. **Explanation of Procedures:** You will be observed during classroom reading instruction for two hours over a period of time. You will be asked interview questions regarding how you learn new skills, how you learned to teach reading and how you have evolved as a reading teacher. The interview will take no more than one hour and will be at your convenience.

3. **Discomfort and Risks:** At this time there are no known risks.

4. **Benefits:** The research process may give you the opportunity to reflect upon daily practices and skill transference, and may guide my practice as an instructional leader in the development of learning opportunities for teachers.

5. **Confidentiality:** Your name and the names of your students will never appear with the interview information. No information will be included that would enable
anyone to know your name in any written reports or articles. The results of the interview may be published but your name and student names will be withheld. You will be given a copy of the final draft to review.

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** You may withdraw at any time.

Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

I, ____________________________, understand that the interview will be audio recorded.

I give you permission for this researcher to examine assessment records.

________________________________________  _____________
Signature of Participant     Date

*You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks. Your signature indicates you are giving permission to be observed, interviewed, and for the information to be recorded and transcribed.*

__________________________________________ _______________
Signature of Participant      Date

__________________________________________ _______________
Witness        Date

**THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD**

Paul Mooney, Compliance Coordinator

TELEPHONE: (270) 745-4652
Patricia R. Sharp
c/o Dr. Spall
Educational Administration, Leadership, & Research
WKU

Patricia R. Sharp:

Your revision to the research project, *How Do Teachers Learn New Skills for Reading Instruction and Transfer Their Learning into the Classroom*, was reviewed by the HSRCB and it has been determined that risks to subjects are: (1) minimized and reasonable; and that (2) research procedures are consistent with a sound research design and do not expose the subjects to unnecessary risk. Reviewers determined that: (1) benefits to subjects are considered along with the importance of the topic and that outcomes are reasonable; (2) selection of subjects is equitable; and (3) the purposes of the research and the research setting is amenable to subjects’ welfare and producing desired outcomes; that indications of coercion or prejudice are absent, and that participation is clearly voluntary.

1. In addition, the IRB found that you need to orient participants as follows: (1) signed informed consent is required; (2) Provision is made for collecting, using and storing data in a manner that protects the safety and privacy of the subjects and the confidentiality of the data. (3) Appropriate safeguards are included to protect the rights and welfare of the subjects.

   This project is therefore approved at the Expedited Review Level until June 30, 2009.

2. Please note that the institution is not responsible for any actions regarding this protocol before approval. If you expand the project at a later date to use other instruments please re-apply. Copies of your request for human subjects review, your application, and this approval, are maintained in the Office of Sponsored Programs at the above address. Please report any changes to this approved protocol to this office. A Continuing Review protocol will be sent to you in the future to determine the status of the project. Also, please use the stamped form that accompanies this letter.

Sincerely,

Paul J. Mooney, M.S.T.M.
Compliance Manager
Office of Sponsored Programs
Western Kentucky University

cc: HS file number Sharp HS09-214

The Spirit Makes the Master
Office of Sponsored Programs | Western Kentucky University | 1306 College Heights Blvd, #1102 | Bowling Green, KY 42101-1026
phone: 270.744.602 | fax: 270.744.4211 | e-mail: paulmooney@wku.edu | web: http://www.wku.edu/research/compliance/human_subjects/

Approved 4/1/10 to 4/30/07
Date Approved 4/1/09
Project Title: How Do Teachers Learn New Skills for Reading Instruction and Transfer Their Learning into the Classroom?

Investigator: Patricia Sharp, Department of Educational Administration, Leadership, and Research, Sharon Spall-faculty sponsor, 745-5190
(include name, department and phone of contact person)

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University (and -- if applicable -- any other cooperating institution). The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask him/her any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:** The purpose of this project is to determine how teachers learn new skills for reading instruction and then transfer their learning into the classroom.

2. **Explanation of Procedures:** You will be observed during classroom reading instruction for two hours over a period of time. You will be asked interview questions regarding how you learn new skills, how you learned to teach reading and how you have evolved as a reading teacher. The interview will take no more than one hour and will be at your convenience.

3. **Discomfort and Risks:** At this time there are no known risks.

4. **Benefits:** The research process may give you the opportunity to reflect upon daily practices and skill transference, and may guide my practice as an instructional leader in the development of learning opportunities for teachers.

5. **Confidentiality:** Your name and the names of your students will never appear with the interview information. No information will be included that would enable anyone to know your name in any written reports or articles. The results of the interview may be published but your name and student names will be withheld. You will be given a copy of the final draft to review.
6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** You may withdraw at any time.

Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

I, ______________________________________, understand that the interview will be audio recorded.

I give you permission for this researcher to examine assessment records.

_________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of Participant                          Date

*You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks. Your signature indicates you are giving permission to be observed, interviewed, and for the information to be recorded and transcribed.*

_________________________________________  __________________________
Signature of Participant                          Date

Witness

_________________________________________  __________________________
Witness                                            Date

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD
Paul Mooney, Compliance Coordinator
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-4652
Appendix B.

Data Collection Sheet and Interview Questions
### Observation Field Notes

#### Research Question Guide:
How do teachers learn new skills for reading instruction and transfer their learning into the classroom?

**Date:** ____________  
**Number of Students in Class:** ________________

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Project: How Do Teachers Learn New Skills for Reading Instruction and Transfer Their Learning Into the Classroom?

Teacher: _____________________________

1. Think back to when you first began teaching. How did you develop skills as a teacher?

2. How did you get an answer to instructional problems you encountered?

3. Now, think from your beginning teaching to the present. How did you build the skills you now have as a teacher? Please give me an example of each, if several steps.

4. Describe the steps you think necessary to teach a child to read.

5. What signs do you look for to know the child is learning to read?

6. How do you know if a child is making continuous progress?

7. How do you explain the differences in students who learn to read and do not learn to read?

8. Describe the greatest challenges you face as a reading teacher.
9. What are some approaches you feel are the most effective with helping students learn reading skills?

10. What ways do you manage the differences in reading achievement in your classroom?

11. Explain how you increase your skills in teaching reading.

12. Describe the latest time you have learned something new that has helped you teach reading more effectively.

13. How do you incorporate new learning into your daily practice of teaching reading?

14. What professional development do you think teachers in your team now need in the area of teaching reading?

15. What type of professional development works best for teachers to obtain new learning so teachers will transfer it into the classroom?
16. Describe to me the steps you see necessary for creating the best way to help teachers learn new reading skills and transfer these into the classroom?

17. If there was a new third grade teacher coming to your team, what steps should we take to develop his/her skills as a reading teacher?

18. Presently, what do you see as the greatest barrier teachers face in learning new skills and using them in the classroom?