LITERACY BLOCK: LITERACY INSTRUCTION AND DIFFERENTIATION; A QUALITATIVE, SUMMATIVE PROGRAM REVIEW

A thesis presented

by

Jennifer Curtis-Whipple

To

The School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

In the field of Education

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
December, 2011

...the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it; it must be aimed not so much at the ripe as at the ripening function

Vygotsky~1934
Abstract

This qualitative summative program review study investigated literacy instruction and differentiation at the first and second grade level. The site of this program review was in a small suburban school with students who are English language learners, special education students, and regular education students. The sample population of teachers and students from grade one and two would be considered a purposeful sample. Student curriculum based assessment measures and staff surveys were collected and analyzed to investigate and answer the following questions:

1. *How does the reorganization of literacy instruction impact teaching and student learning?*

2. *How are teachers impacted by the implementation of professional learning communities with a focus on differentiated literacy instruction at the first and second grade levels?*

This program review will allow the staff at this school to understand if a differentiated literacy block met the needs of diverse learners.

Key findings:

1. The teaching staff perceived that the amount of students placed in various literacy block groups hampered student learning and teacher efficacy.

2. The original grouping plan of Literacy Block may have best met the needs of the students.

3. The staffing of the Literacy Block is crucial to sustaining the initiative, meeting the needs of the diverse learners, and building teachers’ efficacy beliefs.

4. Teachers need to work with students based upon their skills and credentials not solely based on his or her teaching preferences.
5. The staff involved in Literacy Block was hesitant to claim this block of literacy instruction as tier two of a Response to Intervention (RTI) model.

6. The teachers were confident in understanding formative assessment tools and using the data to drive their instruction.

7. Involvement with a Professional Learning Community (PLC) benefitted students and encouraged staff members to look at their own teaching practices and professional development.

Key words: Literacy Instruction, Differentiation, Response to Intervention, Professional Learning Communities, Flexible Grouping
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family for their patience and unwavering dedication in support of my research. Thank you to all of my friends who provided me with verbal support and countless hours of babysitting. I would not have been able to complete my research without their kindness and support. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Dougherty and Nancy Pelletier for the countless hours of meetings and feedback that helped me to broaden my perspective and become a better teacher and leader. Thank you to all of my readers, Dr. Stoskopf and Dr. Cragin, and their valuable feedback that was provided. Lastly, thank you to Rob, Curtis, and Taylor. I know how hard this has been to allow mommy hour upon hour of getting her “homework” done. I thank you for your patience and your love. I hope that this lesson of perseverance will someday serve you well.
# Table of Contents

Abstract  
2

Acknowledgement  
4

List of Tables and Figures  
7

Chapter I: Introduction  
9  
Purpose of the Study  
Statement of the Problem and Significance  
Research Questions  
Theoretical Framework  
Research Design  
Limitations of the Study

Chapter II: Literature Review  
20

Chapter III: Research Design  
53  
Research Questions  
54  
Methodology  
55  
Site and Participants  
64  
Data Collection  
64  
Data Analysis  
68  
Credibility and Trustworthiness  
69  
Protection of Human Subjects  
74

Chapter IV Report of Research of Findings  
76

Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings; Implications for Educational Practice  
131

References  
147

Appendix  
153  
Appendix A Focus Group Questions  
153  
Appendix B Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective School-wide Reading Programs (PET-R)  
155  
Appendix C Table 3.1 Research Questions and Related Themes and Codes  
171  
Appendix D Table 3.2 Research Questions and Data Sources  
173  
Appendix E Table 3.3 DIBELS Reliability and Validity  
174  
Appendix F Table 3.4 DIBELS Research by Sub-Test  
175
List of Tables and Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tables</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1 Research Questions and Related Themes and Codes</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2 Research Questions and Data Sources</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.3 DIBELS Reliability and Validity</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.4 DIBELS Research by Sub-Tests</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1 Grade One Benchmark Goals for Three Assessment Periods</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2 Grade Two Benchmark Goals for Three Assessment Periods</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3 Mean Analysis for Grade One PFS Data</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.4 Mean Analysis for Grade One NWF Data</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.5 Mean Analysis for Grade Two ORF Data</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.6 ANOVA for Grade One PFS Data</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.7 ANOVA for Grade One NWF Data</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.8 ANOVA for Grade Two ORF Data</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.9 Focus Group Questions and Relate Data Sources</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.10 Summary of Transcription Coding Frequency</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.11 Summary of Thematic Reduction of Codes</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figures</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.1 Individual Participant View of Implementation</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.2 Goals, Objective, and Priorities</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.3 Assessment</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.4 Instructional Programs and Materials</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.5 Instructional Time</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.6 Differentiated Instruction, Grouping, and Scheduling 89
Figure 4.7 Administration, Organization, and Communication 90
Figure 4.8 Professional Development 91
Figure 4.9 Group Implementation Percentages 92
Chapter I: Introduction

When I think back to my own childhood days in my first and second grade classrooms, I immediately think about my classroom reading groups. I remember the year I was in the “Robin” group and moved into the “Hawks”. I also remember the countless hours of being read aloud to and loving each moment my imagination was given the chance to soar. Maybe these are the first thoughts that burst into my mind due to my professional passion and fascination with literacy instruction and reading acquisition or it could be the fact the reading was then and still continues to be one of the most debated subjects in educational theory and instruction. With the understanding of the importance of literacy instruction, this researcher chose to delve into the world of literacy and research in a small suburban school and its literacy practice called Literacy Block, at the first and second grade level. Not only is this research eye opening, but it also brings to light the story of one primary school and its goal to improve literacy instruction.

Purpose of the Study

A qualitative summative program review of three years of literacy instruction and assessment data allowed the staff at a small suburban primary school to see if the differentiated instructional initiative called Literacy Block, met the initial goals and produced gains in student learning in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. The Dynamic Indicator of Basic Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assesses students’ literacy skills in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. These five literacy areas have been researched by the National Reading Panel. The National Reading Panel Research is cited in the school’s Literacy Block informational guide as a foundational resource for the design of Literacy Block. Although teachers have reported that students have done better since the inception of this initiative, there had never been a systematic program review to verify these allegations. The
purpose of this summative program review was to help teachers to better understand their practice and the impact of differentiated instruction.

Intellectually, this summative program review adds to the body of research in the area of literacy development, professional learning community collaboration, and differentiation. With the implementation of Response to Intervention initiatives based on the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, it was imperative to research literacy instruction initiatives such as Literacy Block and add to this vast and ever-changing body of knowledge. To initiate this process, it was imperative to have concise, comprehensible and significant research questions leading the way.

**Statement of Problem and Significance**

Learning to read is critical in order to become a productive member of society. Yet, students continue to struggle and teachers continue in not satisfying the reading needs of many learners (Lyon, 2009). Whether it is a lack of pedagogical knowledge, a deficit in assessment skills, or a casualty of curriculum, schools cannot afford to provide inadequate and undifferentiated instruction in the regular education classroom. There is a plethora of literacy literature but a lack of knowledge about how to make sense of and to implement best practices. This lack of differentiation and literacy expertise is a problem in the educational field and impacts students on a daily basis (Lyon, 2009; Walker, 2008).

Students who struggle in the regular education classroom are often referred for special education evaluations. Frequently, these students do not qualify for services. Classroom teachers are left unsure as to how to meet these students’ literacy needs. Even more disconcerting is the rise in special education populations due to over identification. In 2002 the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education reported, “Of those with “specific
learning disabilities, 80% are there simply because they haven’t learned how to read. Thus, many children identified for special education—up to 40%—are there because they weren’t taught to read.” (P. 2). Keith Stanovich (1986) points out; students who are not given accurate reading instruction fall behind and stay behind even when remediation is given after grade two. Reid Lyon (2009) notes, seventy five percent of students who do not receive literacy interventions until the age of nine continue to struggle into adulthood. By understanding the pedagogy of literacy instruction, working collaboratively in professional learning communities, attempting curriculum innovations, and embracing differentiation, schools would be able to confidently provide literacy instruction for all learners consistently and continually.

Uncertainty surrounding best practices and lack of differentiated skilled literacy instruction significantly impacts student acquisition of literacy skills. Catherine Snow explains the importance of understanding best literacy practices and the art of differentiation in Preventing Reading Disabilities in Young Children (1998). This research report notes, 

…effective teachers are able to craft a special mix of instructional ingredients for every child they work with. But it does mean that there is a common menu of materials, strategies, and environments from which effective teachers make choices…, as a society, our most important challenge is to make sure that our teachers have…the knowledge required to use them well. (p. 3)

If students’ literacy needs are not met at an early age, school districts could see high rates of special education referrals, teachers may continue to use undifferentiated ineffective teaching methods, and students may be inaccurately labeled as learning disabled. All of these scenarios financially burden school districts and ultimately impact students’ future occupational success (Lyon, 2009).

Based on 2008-2009 data, the MA special education percentage rate was 17.1, (Massachusetts Department of Secondary and Elementary Ed,
http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student, retrieved on October, 2009). Many local school districts are above this average. An example of this problem is a small Southeastern town in Massachusetts. This town has been above the current state average of 17.1 five times over the six years prior to 2008 data. This high percentage rate negatively impacts school budgets. In fiscal year 2008, this town allocated 22.9% of the total school budget for special education. If teachers were able to meet literacy needs through regular education initiatives, the monies saved from special education costs could be used for improvements such as innovative grouping, differentiation, and research based literacy initiatives. Research into literacy practices and differentiation may decrease referrals and ultimately provide an education that meets the literacy needs of today’s learners for tomorrow’s promising future.

**Research Questions**

1. How does the reorganization of literacy instruction impact teaching and student learning?

   This research question directly relates to the theoretical lens of Lev Vygotsky. The *Zone of Proximal Development* which is essential to understand when looking at student data and literacy instruction. The lens of the ZPD allows for the combination of reactive and proactive teaching methodologies. For example, knowing students’ literacy needs through formative assessment allows for appropriate reactive lesson planning, while at the same time planning lessons that will allow for the students to develop his or her skills with the support of a *More Knowledgeable Other*. Other research to consider is the works of the National Reading Panel (2000), and the Joplin Grouping Plan (Newport, 1967). The National Reading Panel findings and conclusions may inform teachers as to what curriculum should be of significance when reorganizing literacy instruction. The Joplin Grouping Plan involves alternative homogeneous grouping strategies which may support a reorganization that impacts student learning.
2. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of professional learning communities with a focus on differentiated literacy instruction at the first and second grade levels?

Robert Kegan’s adult learning theory lens and the work of Lev Vygotsky guided the investigation into this research question. The process of learning new concepts and skills are supported when using the four progressive stages of the Zone of Proximal Development in conjunction with Kegan’s adult learning stages.

**Theoretical Framework**

To ensure that each and every child receives the best chance of a successful future, teachers must learn to become skilled consumers and practitioners of foundational literacy research, pedagogical practices such as establishing professional learning communities and curriculum differentiation. Research into these problems of practice was guided by one theoretical framework composed of two theories. The first theory was developmental theory and in particular the work of Lev Vygotsky and the Zone of Proximal Development. The second theory used was adult learning theory. Particular attention was paid to Robert Kegan’s adult learning theory research. It should be noted that Robert Kegan’s protocol was not used, but rather his adult learning theory and the stage descriptors that relate to his theory.

**Developmental theory.** As teachers work to guide students’ literacy learning through a gradual release of learning responsibility, they are essentially using the work of Lev Vygotsky and the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD). Vygotsky believed that the development of children was guided by his or her interpersonal relations and culture. These interactions create social beings who learn from *The More Knowledgeable Other* or the MKO. The ZPD consists of four stages. In Stage I assistance is provided by the MKO (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). As the
student begins to be able to complete the academic tasks with more independence, he or she moves into Stage II of the ZPD. This stage does not insinuate that learning has become concretized, but rather the assistance needed by the student is often provided by the student themselves (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). Although Vygotsky focused on children’s’ development and the ZPD, researchers such as Gaillimore and Tharp believe that this stage is evident with adults as they talk to themselves and or assist themselves in learning new concepts. Once a student begins to have automaticity with learning, it can be said that he or she has moved to Stage III of the ZPD. This stage is signified with a student’s ability to independently execute a task in a fluid integrated manner. Gallimore & Tharp (1990), state that Vygotsky described this learning as “fossilized” (p.186). The final stage of the ZPD is Stage IV. At this stage the learner begins going through the ZPD stages again. This stage signifies the de-automatization of skills and the need for the MKO to provide support (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). A learner will need to do this for each new learning experience. This stage is essential when thinking about learning as a life-long process. In *Thought and Language*, Vygotsky states, “…the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it; it must be aimed not so much at the ripe as at the ripening function” (1962, p. 104). This concept of instruction is imperative when looking at literacy skills.

In the setting of the classroom literacy lesson, the MKO can be the teacher or even a student. This social developmental /learning theory allows for the child to learn in a *Zone of Proximal Development*. Learning in the ZPD relies on the knowledge of the MKO. When the MKO is aware and knowledgeable of his/her pupil’s learning needs, the MKO can provide scaffolding that leads the student to new learning experiences. It is imperative that the MKO be practiced at
knowing the actual skill level and the potential level of their students (Miller, 2002). Vygotsky, as cited in Miller (2002, p.378), describes this relationship as follows:

The zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation…The actual developmental level characterizes mental development retrospectively, while the zone of proximal development characterizes mental development prospectively. (2002, p.387)

This theory combines the work of reactive and proactive teaching with the ultimate goal of higher levels of student learning. Understanding that the MKO can be a teacher or even a peer provides a multitude of opportunities for the ZPD with literacy instruction. When teachers are skillful at the art of differentiation, they begin to create opportunities for learners to develop their academic skills through their ZPD. It is the teacher’s role as the mediator or the facilitator that allows for the students to begin their learning journey.

It is believed that this socio-cultural view to learning can have impact in and outside of the classroom walls. Vygotsky stresses the importance of the role that socializing plays in the learning process. Adults in the educational field, as well as in other fields, often learn from the MKO during collaborative projects, planning sessions, and professional development activities such as professional learning communities. These social based activities can lead to learning experiences, but may also be impacted based on the adults’ developmental learning stages. Like Vygotsky, Robert Kegan, an adult theorist, looks to socialization as a key component in various stages of his adult learning theory.

**Adult learning theory.** Researchers find that developmental levels of adults affect implementation of new school endeavors. As school systems provide professional development to increase teachers’ knowledge in areas such as literacy, the varying stages of adult learning may support or hamper the success of implementation of the professional development activities. Too often, teachers’ developmental learning stages impact their ability to provide the best
instruction for their students. Sadly, the curriculum decisions made may be based on the adults’ needs or developmental levels rather than the literacy needs of the students. This theory needs to be considered when looking at the success of literacy and collaborative learning endeavors within a school system. Success or failure of such initiatives may be due to the adult developmental stages of the teachers involved rather that the pedagogy or curriculum implemented.

In *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (1982), and in *In Over Our Heads: the Mental Demands of Modern Life* (1994), Robert Kegan lays the groundwork for his constructive developmental theory. Kegan also looks to Piaget and believes that learning takes place through social interaction and is impacted by environmental factors (Kegan, 1982). Kegan states:

> Cognitive development, then, is the result of the person’s engagement with the environment in which the person actively organizes and interprets information according to a distinct and developmentally linked interpretive logic. Knowledge is continuously constructed and reconstructed and itself transforms as it is shaped and reshaped by the predictable and increasingly complex organized systems of thought as depicted by Piaget’s developmental scheme. (p.47)

This theory is essential to understand adult learning stages through a constructive developmental lens. Kegan states that adults move through different stages of development to make sense of their daily interactions and activities. In *Helping Teachers Learn* (2004), Eleanor Drago-Severson informs readers about Kegan’s adult learning theory to unveil learning stages that impact implementation of new curriculum endeavors. The three stages that relate to adult learning and are most commonly seen are the instrumental way of knowing, the socializing way of knowing, and the self-authorizing way of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004). Teachers developmentally at the instrumental way of knowing level tend to be very concrete. These teachers are willing to support others, but they tend to need to receive support in return.
Instrumental way of knowing teachers look for rules to follow and need their own interests to be attended to. When disseminating curriculum to these adults it is imperative to be clear and point out the value of the curriculum for that individual teacher. Socializing way of knowing teachers need to be affirmed by their peers and administrators that they are moving in the right direction. These adults look to please others and want to be accepted. When disseminating curriculum to these adults it is important to make them feel part of the group. Having them work with or as grade level leaders will help to make them feel valued and allow for feedback when they fear not meeting expectations. The self-authorizing knower is much less needy when compared to the prior developmental stages. These adults can lead school initiatives through conflicts and help others learn from the differences.

When a principal or school leader understands the adult learning theory stages in which staff members are embedded, they may better help support teacher learning and in turn student learning. Drago-Severson states:

Thinking about development and growth as a movement through periods of stability and change helps in understanding how individuals in schools experience leadership practice aimed at supporting adults learning and other professional development initiatives. (p. 34).

This directly relates to Vygotsky’s MKO. When supports are given, adults and children may be more successful at navigating the often confusing path of literacy learning.

The use of two theories allowed for a thorough and well rounded review of literature and data that addressed the problem of literacy instruction. Understanding Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development and Keegan’s adult learning stages helped this researcher view the data collected
through a development lens. It is imperative to understand how these two lenses inform the research design of this summative program review.

**Research Design**

This doctoral study, took place in a southeastern Massachusetts elementary school, and investigated a program referred to as Literacy Block at the first and second grade level. The impetus for the commencement of this program was a desire for differentiated instruction, decreased special education referrals, improvement of literacy skills with the use of research based practices as noted in the National Reading Panel Meta-analysis, and maximizing quality instruction with limited staffing.

This study was grounded in the qualitative design of a summative program review. Patton, 2002, refers to this type of study as a summative review. He states:

> This is the kind of research we have come to call summative evaluation—summing up judgments about a program to make a major decision about its value, whether it should be continued, and whether the demonstrated model can or should be generalized to and replicated for other participants or in other places. (p. 214)

In a focus group format, teachers were asked to share their views of the differentiated literacy instructional methodological practice called Literacy Block. Looking at student data and teacher assessment data, the program was reviewed to see how the reorganization of literacy instruction impacts teaching and student learning. Also, this program review delved into the practice of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to see how teachers were impacted by a one year implementation of a Professional Learning Community. This PLC had a focus on differentiated literacy instruction and Literacy Block at the first and second grade levels. Carol Weiss, 1998, states that summative program reviews, “…provides information about the effectiveness of the
curriculum to school decision makers...”, (p.31). After a thorough investigation of the initial goals of Literacy Block and the summative data, this researcher was able to tell the story of Literacy Block.

**Limitations of the Study**

Although this study strictly adhered to research guidelines, it should be noted that there are limitations to the study. This summative program review looks at data from one small suburban primary school in Southeastern Massachusetts. Due to the limited scope of subjects, the information gathered is most applicable to that individual school. The information gathered may be informative to other schools, teachers, policy makers or researchers but should be viewed with the understanding that the study was meant to qualitatively tell the story of Literacy Block at the first and second grade level at one school in Southeastern Massachusetts.
Chapter II: Literature Review

It is the intent of this literature review to dig deeply into the literature that investigates professional learning communities, best literacy practices, specifically the work of the National Reading Panel, and the benefits of differentiated instruction in learning models such as Response to Intervention (RTI). A thorough review of the literature will guide this program review and lead future research endeavors. The need for collaboration and solid literacy instruction is imperative if teachers are to provide students with an education that meets the requirements of the twenty first century student.

Today’s schools are often compared to classrooms that existed during the 1900s. The common factory model of education, inspired by the industrial revolution, lives on in many cities and towns throughout the United States of America. In present day United States, schools are educating during a new revolutionary era; the technological revolution. Technology has created a more level academic playing field for students throughout the world. If 21st century teachers want to create learning environments that support the needs of today’s students, they need to break the outdated, isolated teaching and learning practices reminiscent of days gone by. One way to address this crisis is through the use of professional learning communities. The use of professional learning communities can be supported when looking at research from adult learning theorists such as Robert Kegan and developmental learning theorists such as Lev Vygotsky. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many (2006) define professional learning communities as,

Educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators. (p. 217)
If we are to better the educational environment for students, we need to focus on “job-embedded learning for educators” (DuFour et al., p. 217). Using literature based on quantitative research methods, qualitative research methods, mixed methods research, and non-research based resources; it is the intent of this review to unlock the mysteries that surround professional learning communities. What are the suggested steps to begin using professional learning communities and how do these communities enhance student learning and teacher collaboration? Literature that investigates the history, global implementation, challenges and teacher and student outcomes of professional learning communities will be shared and lastly the use of professional learning communities with specific literacy curriculum will be explored.

**History of Professional Learning Communities**

The term “Professional Learning Community” is foreign to many school teachers and administrators. Although professional learning communities, often referred to as PLCs, first began to impact the United States educational environment over forty years ago, is was not until the late eighties and early nineties that PLCs were more common (About PLCs, n.d.). In 1993 Warren, Little and McLaughlin shared their research about characteristics found in effective schools. As cited in *About PLCs: History of PLCs*, the research based common characteristics found were: “1. Shared norms and belief, 2. Collegial relations, 3. Collaborative cultures, 4. Reflective practice, 5. Ongoing technical inquiry regarding effective practice, 6. Professional growth, 7. Mutual support and mutual obligation” (About PLCs, n.d). Although Warren, Little and McLaughlin’s research is sixteen years old, the characteristics that they uncovered, ring true for today’s schools. Essential to the core of PLCs is a focus on student learning. Without this focus, teachers working together can become a procedural task rather than culturally transformative (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Schools can no longer look at teacher “group
work” as a learning community. Rather teacher collaboration needs to focus on dialogue, shared-decision making, distributive leadership, and relationships (Servage, 2008).

Professional learning community theories have been noted in research for decades, but in many school systems the research has failed to enter the schoolhouse doors. To ensure that students and teachers are at their best, it is imperative that research and practice unite. In the next section the implementation of professional learning communities is discussed.

Implementation

Overseas. Many educators have experienced the sense of urgency that begins a new educational venture or as some veteran staff say, a pendulum change. The PLC endeavor needs to be thought of differently if transformative change is to take place. Researchers in Japan, China and numerous other countries have shared implementation strategies and possible learning outcomes. In Japan “lesson study” began in the early 1900s and in China, it is considered the norm that teachers work in teaching research groups (Sargent & Hannum, 2009). Linda Darling-Hammond believes that we can learn from our overseas competitors. We must embrace the knowledge that expert teachers are the fundamental resources that can change the face of education in the United States (Darling-Hammond, 2008). She states:

This lesson has been well learned by societies that top international rankings in education. The highest-achieving countries--Finland, Sweden, Ireland, the Netherlands, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Canada--have been pouring resources into teacher training and support. These countries routinely prepare their teachers more extensively, pay them well in relation to competing occupations and give them lots of time for professional learning. (Paragraph 2)

Tanja C. Sargent and Emily Hannum also found that professional learning communities are common practices even in resource constrained rural China. Their quantitative and
qualitative research study shared data to support that school socioeconomic status does not shape the possibility of PLCs (Sargent & Hannum, 2009). They state:

Our findings suggest that professional learning communities are thriving even in one of China’s most resource-constrained rural regions. Engagement in professional learning communities is associated with strong leadership of the principal as reported by teachers, policy reforms that fully engage the structure of teacher professionalism in dissemination and experimentation of innovations in teaching, and the initiative of teachers themselves. (p.273)

It would seem that the wealthiest country in the world, The United States, should be able to learn that professional learning communities are essential to implement if we desire to complete with global educational systems. President Obama and Vice President Biden have proposed incentives for teachers to collaborate and share best practices in *Blueprint for Change, 2008* (Sargent & Hannum, 2009). For these changes to happen, education departments and supporters need to have clarity about where and how to begin.

**Where to begin: american schools.** The process of implementing professional learning communities cannot be looked at as a linear process. Well functioning, professional learning communities, work in a cyclical manner. Some refer to this process as a cycle of inquiry; “the process of using data to assess student outcomes, to evaluate and adjust instructional practices, and to measure the effects of new practices on student outcomes.”(McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 12). Based on outcomes, the cycle may begin again and again while ultimately continuing to refine practices. This still leaves us with the question of entry points to begin the start of the cycle.

McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) refer to starting point options as entry strategies. They discuss three different entry points; 1. assessment data, 2. students, and 3. subject discipline. Starting at the assessment data entry point may be very comfortable for many teachers. With the
use of local and state testing tools, assessment data is plentiful. The authors believe that using students as an entry point is also a safe place to begin. They state, “Because the focus is on a particular student’s learning, rather than directly on teaching, it provides a safe entry to collaborative practice.” (p. 49). Lastly, using subject discipline as an entry point, allows for subject specific learning with depth and potential to impact student learning. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many, (1997), write about the need for skilled leadership as the starting point for implementing professional learning communities. Without administrative support professional learning community initiatives rarely survive.

Professional learning community literature, addressing suggested leadership styles, seems to be conflicted about beginning with top-down or bottom-up leadership strategies. Hord (1997) states, “…no longer can leaders be thought of as top-down agents of change or seen as the visionaries of the corporation; leaders must be envisioned as a democratic teacher.” (paragraph 9, 1997). In contrast DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many state, “The idea of bottom-up reform is great, but it is unrealistic to assume that one day a group of educators gathered together in a faculty lounge will suddenly begin to re-examine the basic assumptions, beliefs and practices that constitutes the culture of their school.” (DuFour et.al, p. 191) The combination of both ideologies may lead to a best practices start for professional learning communities. Fullan (2007) states:

To recommend employing different leadership strategies that simultaneously and sequentially combine different elements seems like complicated advice, but developing this deeper feel for the change process by accumulating insights and wisdom across situations and time many turn out to be the most practical thing we can do---more practical than the best step-by-step models. For if such models don’t really work, or if they work only in some situations, or if they are successful only for short periods of time, they are hardly practical. (p. 180)
A leader who identifies the need to begin a PLC, and skillfully practices distributive leadership, may be what is needed for 21st century schools.

Another implementation component that is prevalent in the PLC body of literature is the need for a common mission and vision. The focus on mission and vision help to foster shared norms and values (Servage, 2008, p.64). Without this clear focus, it is doubtful that a community of learners will travel along the same learning road. DuFour et al. (2006) believe that the idea of mission and vision need to be separately addressed. DuFour views a PLC mission as a response to why the PLC exists. The mission gives clarity to priorities of the PLC and intensifies their focus. The vision of the PLC gives direction and guides the PLC to understand the need for school evolution in order to accomplish the PLCs purpose.

In contrast when discussing the implementation of PLCs, Hord and Sommers (2008), state:

The first strategy is articulating a shared vision. In this activity, the principal invites staff to engage in conversation about the new practice (in this case, PLC) and discuss why it could be useful to the school or how it will fill some agreed-upon need. (p. 21).

Hord and Sommers do not state the need for a separate mission. In contrast, in 1997, Hord looked to the needs of organizational capacity and shared that Newmann and Wehlage (1995) found that schools with strong organizational capacity begin with a clear well defined school mission. It is clear, that to begin PLCs, clarity about direction and purpose is needed.

Once clarity has been accomplished DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many look to values and goals. Values are defined by DuFour and colleagues as “collective commitments” (p.25). These collective commitments encourage members to move forward in an agreed upon direction. DuFour and his co-writers share, “Policy manuals and directives are replaced by commitments and covenants. As a result, members of the organization enjoy greater autonomy and creativity
than their more rigidly supervised counterparts.” (p.25). In an effort to clarify targets and
timeframes, goals are set. The goals are used to ensure that efforts by the PLC are making a
difference. Measurable and result oriented goals help to sustain the momentum of the PLC.
Without momentum, PLCs risk the possibility of extinction. Kouzes and Posner as cited in
DuFour et. al (2008) state:

The most effective change processes are incremental—they break down big
problems into small, doable steps and get a person to say ‘yes’ numerous times,
not just once. They plan for small wins that form the basis for a consistent pattern
of winning that appeals to people’s desire to belong to a successful venture. A
series of small wins provides a foundation of stable building blocks for change.
(p. 27)

Goals are essential if the PLC hopes to establish priorities for its work.

DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many (2008) look to mission, vision, values, and goals as
the four pillars or building blocks that create cohesive and effective PLCs. This transformation
is not easy and as stated before is not linear. To help schools track their PLC journey,
McLaughlin and Talbert (2006); DuFour and colleagues (2008) provide resources to address
cultural stages and PLC continuums. To ensure that the PLC journey is a life-long commitment,
it is important to track the journey and stop and reflect on the learning scenery.

**PLC Stages.** The implementation of a professional learning community does not ensure
its success or skill level. Like any venture worth taking, there are stages of implementation, and
the developmental levels of the staff involved affect the implementation as well. Kegan, as cited
in *Helping Teachers Learn* by Drago-Severson (2004), uses a constructive developmental theory
to understand adult learning stages. Kegan states that adults move through different stages that
work to make sense of reality. These stages are somewhat parallel to the ZPD stages that
Vygotsky used to frame student learning. The three stages that relate to adult learning are the
instrumental way of knowing, the socializing way of knowing, and the self-authorizing way of
knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004). When a principal or PLC leader understands the adult developmental stage that PLC members are in, it makes it easier to support teacher learning and move the goals of the PLC forward.

McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) address stages of PLC development in *Building School-Based Teacher Learning Communities*. The three stages are novice, intermediate, and advanced. During the novice stage, staff begins to build trust and develop group norms. This stage requires an administrator or an appointed teacher leader to take on more of an authoritative role. This stage aligns with DuFour’s (2006) beliefs about the importance of top-down leadership. The intermediate stage brings the importance of risk taking. The administrator or teacher leader needs to support the PLC as it moves forward with the understanding that failure is a natural part of any learning process (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). The final stage is the advanced stage. During this stage the administrator’s role moves from a leadership position to more of a guide. This shift in position aligns with Darling-Hammond’s (2008) beliefs in a bottom-up change process. It is imperative that the leader works to continue the goals of the PLC. Too often PLCs become complacent and lose focus of their purpose (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) state:

> Significantly, many schools involved in initiatives that aim to develop teacher learning communities do not move from the novice to the intermediate stage, and most do not transition to an advanced stage after several years. They become stuck in a stage of collaborative work that falls short of teacher learning community practice. This reality highlights the need for clearer understanding of the problem of change. (p. 59)

Understanding stages of adult development helps leaders to align their administrative strategies with the needs of the PLC. Knowledge about PLC stages and adult learning theories
provide insight to create a strong foundation for the start and continued progress of the adult learning community.

**Implementation Challenges**

Researchers, educators, and PLC experts have all attempted to make the implementation of professional learning communities clear and doable. Although these efforts are noted in many popular books, challenges are still quite prevalent. Some challenges cited in the literature are competing values of voluntarism and inclusiveness, tension between new teacher collaboration beliefs and veteran teachers’ norms, collective bargaining issues, lack of professional development resources, and pressure from external policy systems (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Sargent and Hannum (2009) found that challenges to PLCs in rural China were often associated with weak administrative skills, attitudes about participating, and lack of funding. Similar to Sargent and Hannum, Rasberry and Mahajan (2008) found that lack of administrative support and skill sets around PLCs often hinder their success (2008). Also, the lack of time during the workday, allowed to attend to PLC work, impedes the classroom PLC commitment balance (Rasberry & Mahajan, 2008).

A more significant challenge is addressed by Servage (2008) in *Critical and Transformative Practices in Professional Learning Communities*. Her research has found that often PLCs do not reach their goal of transformational change. She states:

> They share a strong hope that teachers’ collaborative work can significantly change or even “transform” schools. Yet, what schools are to be transformed into is not really articulated beyond the idea that whatever happens in a PLC should further student learning. The content and purpose of learning and achieving receive little emphasis. (p. 65)

Servage (2008), reports that often PLC work is reformative rather than transformative. This thinking aligns with single-loop and double-loop learning theories in Collinson and Cook in
Organizational Learning, 2007. Single-loop learning only results in a behavioral change while double-loop learning results in a behavioral change resulting from cognitive change. Double-loop learning is much more difficult to attain, but this learning is needed for the work of PLCs to truly be transformative. Marzano, McNulty, and Waters use the terminology first order and second order change to describe the varied levels of change in schools (2006). Second order change is the transformative learning that administrators working with PLCs should aim for (Marzano, et.al, 2006). As stated by PLC supporters, transformative learning is a major goal of PLC work.

**Student Outcomes**

The ultimate goal of all educational work is the success of students. Professional learning communities have offered a window of possibility to providing successful learning opportunities for all learners. As reported by Hord (1997); Lee, Smith and Croninger found that teachers involved in PLC work changed classroom pedagogy. This change in pedagogy led to gains in math, science, history, and reading when compared to students in traditionally organized settings (Hord, 1997.). York-Barr and Duke (2004) researched teacher leadership. Their findings state:

Often mentioned as a reason to promote teacher leadership is the benefit realized by students when adults model democratic, participatory forms of government and communitarian social systems for schooling (Barth, 2001; Hart, 1995). Not only do students observe and experience democratic leadership, but they are, presumably, the beneficiaries of higher teacher morale and better decisions about student life in school because their teachers are more centrally involved in decision making and other forms of leadership (Barth, 2001). Furthermore, it has been posited that only when teachers learn will their students learn (Barth, 2001). (p. 259)

In agreement with this research study, Grunert (2005) found that student achievement closely aligned with collaborative efforts such as PLCs. Grunert reported “This study shows how
student performance in both math and language arts positively correlated with collaborative school culture—places where teacher work together in a collegial climate.” (P. 46).

Research has shown the positive effects of professional learning communities on student achievement. Teachers cannot afford to ignore these data when student success is within their reach.

**Teacher Outcomes**

Just as students benefit from the implementation of PLCs, teachers have the opportunity to reap the benefits as well. DuFour (2006) believes, “Educators who are building a professional learning community recognize that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. Therefore, they created structures to promote a collaborative culture” (p. 8). This collaborative culture creates connections for teachers who traditionally work in a very isolated profession. Sargent and Hannum (2009) found that PLCs lead teachers to ownership, involvement, innovation and leadership (2009). In alignment with Sargent’s and Hannum’s research, Rasberry and Mahajan (2008) found that analysis of school data and the collaborative effort encourage teachers to be “drivers of change” (p.12). These authors recommend that PLC leadership is rotated from meeting to meeting (2008). This rotation allows for teachers to identify with their leadership skills and provides equity among participants. In an educational era where funds are limited and needs are vast, PLCs may provide the support that teachers need to continue with his or her chosen vocation.

**Future Application for Literacy**

In the article, “The Matthew Effects in Reading: Some Consequences of Individual Differences in the Acquisition of Literacy”, Stanovich (1986) reported how students who are not given proper reading instruction fall further behind and stay behind their peers even when
remediation is given after grade two. This research provides evidence that if students reading skills are not remediated by the end of second grade, it is very difficult to close the gap that exists. Knowing this information should sound the alarm for skilled literacy instruction at the first and second grade primary level. It is the job of educators to ensure that students are given all of the tools that they need to take the steps from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” in grades three and on. To further fuel this fire, research has found that classroom pedagogy should include, but not be limited to, instruction in alphabetics: phonemic awareness and phonics, fluency, and comprehension including vocabulary (National Reading Panel, 2000). It is of concern that many educators remain unaware of current research findings. The implementation of a professional learning community could begin to combat this discrepancy. Skilled literacy instruction is imperative and can strengthen student success in reading and in all academic areas.

The implementation of PLCs would allow for teachers to support efforts, share insights, and focus on data to improve instruction. Teachers who participate in PLC endeavors have been found to increase learning in academic areas (Gruenert, 2005). Using MCAS data and data from tools such as Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills would provide an entry point for the implementation of a professional learning community. Reading skills are essential lifelong necessities that need to be addressed. PLCs may be the answer to begin this discussion.

**Effective Literacy Instruction**

For teachers young and old the debate on how to effectively teach reading has been a continuous struggle for many years. The goal to provide students with the appropriate tools to be lifelong readers is the same but strategies used to reach this ambition often cause much controversy. With the goal of ending the great reading debate, in 1997, Congress commissioned
the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to create a national panel. The panel was comprised of fourteen individuals, including (as specified by Congress) “leading scientists in reading research, representatives of colleges of education, reading teachers, educational administrators, and parents.” (Langenberg, et al. 2000, p. 1). This panel was needed to assess researched based knowledge about literacy instruction and the effectiveness of various instructional methodologies. The National Reading Panel (NRP) was thus created. The panel was charged with creating a report that should:

- Present the panel’s conclusions, an indication of the readiness for application in the classroom of the results of this research, and, if appropriate, a strategy for rapidly disseminating this information to facilitate effective reading instruction in the schools. If found warranted, the panel should also recommend a plan for additional research regarding early reading development and instruction. (Langenberg, et al. 2000, p. 1).

Based on this charge the panel, consisting of fourteen members, began their long trek to unveil the myth of literacy.

To begin, the panel used the National Research Council’s Committee work called Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, Burns, Griffin, 1998) to create subgroup topic areas: Alphabetics, Fluency, and Comprehension. To gather further information, the panel held public forums (regional hearings) to hear from teachers, parents, administrators, policy makers and the general public. Many topics were discussed at these hearings, but general themes that were repeatedly expressed were phonemic awareness, phonics, good literature, and how to best integrate varying reading theories. After much debate the following topics were adopted for study: Alphabetics: Phonemic Awareness Instruction and Phonics Instruction, Fluency, Comprehension: Vocabulary Instruction, Text Comprehension Instruction, Teacher Preparation and Comprehension Strategy Instruction, Teacher Education and Reading Instruction, and Computer Technology and Reading Instruction (Langenberg, et al. 2000 P.3).
The National Reading Panel adopted a stringent method of reviewing the literature and approving certain studies for inclusion. This rigorous method included an in-depth search of a minimum of two databases, (ERIC Clearing House System and PsycINFO) (Langenberg & Shanahan, 2000). Using terms such as reading and literacy over 100,000 studies were identified. All 100,000 studies were not read. Articles were screened out if they did not meet the following criteria, “published in English in a refereed journal; focused on children’s reading development in the age/grade range from preschool to grade twelve: and used in experimental or quasi-experimental design with a control group or multiple-baseline method” (Langenburg, 2000, p.5). Studies meeting the prior criteria were then further analyzed.

Due to the stringent method of collecting data the National Reading Panel Report entitled “Teaching Children to Read: An Evidenced-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction”, (NRP Report), has been criticized at great length. By choosing to use only experimental research many professionals feel that valid qualitative studies were ignored. The panel wanted to produce a final report that would show causality in literacy instruction. Shanahan (2000) states the following:

Experimental studies are the only ones that allow you to infer causality and to conclude logically that some practice is effective under certain circumstances. It was not that we did not see the value of qualitative research, but such research could not possibly provide a definitive answer to the questions that Congress rose. They wanted to know what works and research-tested ways school could improve reading ability. Accordingly, we limited our scope to studies that actually tried out the procedure or technique in classrooms under well-described circumstances with appropriate comparison groups. (p.652)

National Reading Panel member Joanne Yatvin is author of The Minority View included in the National Reading Panel Report, and one of the many vocal critics. In Education Week, April 2003, Ms. Yatvin published an article entitled, “I Told You So!, The Misinterpretation and Misuse of National Reading Panel Report”. This article intended to clarify many misconceptions
in the public’s mind about the NRP Report. One of the major assumptions that Ms. Yatvin attempts to clarify is the belief that the NRP determined the five essential components in reading instruction. The five areas that she refers to are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. Ms. Yatvin (2003) states:

Nowhere in its report does the panel assert that the strategies found effective are the “essentials” of reading instruction. That determination was made elsewhere, embodied in the No Child Left Behind Act, and then included in the guidelines for Reading First. Ultimately, references to the “five essentials of reading” appeared in state applications, media commentaries, and promotional literature for various commercial programs. (p.3)

Another misinterpretation is about the terminology explicit and systematic. This terminology has become the newest jargon used in recently published literacy materials. The NRP does endorse explicit and systematic instruction for phonics, but does acknowledge that explicit and systemic instruction in the areas of comprehension, phonemic awareness, and vocabulary is not always needed (Yatvin, 2003). A student’s level of proficiency and skill needs to be the determining factor for method of instruction utilized.

The NRP report has not extinguished the fires of literacy debate, but rather fueled it. Does this mean that all of the efforts of the fourteen panel members should be overlooked and discarded with yesterday’s reading program? That may not be so. Even critic Joanne Yatvin states, “…I believe that its (NRP Report) findings, reported accurately, do provide some valuable guidance for schools and teachers.” (p. 2). Timothy Shanahan, a member of the NRP, believes that educators, administrators, parents, and policy makers should take the time to read the report and draw their own conclusions (Shanahan, 2003). Although the report is not a complete evaluation of all forms of literacy research, it is a step in the right direction. This century has begun a new era of integration of science and education. Educators need to empower themselves
with the proper tools. Joan Sedita, an educational consultant in Massachusetts, believes that to
best meet the needs of our students we need to be knowledgeable about literacy research.

In *The Learning Disabilities Journal*, May 2003 she writes:

…every educator and parent should have an understanding of the basic findings on research-based reading instruction. Administrators need this information so that they can make informed decisions about reading programs, assessment, and training that they will use in their schools. Teachers need this information so that they can provide quality reading instruction so that every child can read. Parents need this information so they can monitor their child’s reading needs and progress, and be knowledgeable participants when intervention plans are considered for children with reading difficulties. (p.17)

To believe that there will be one ultimate resource providing all of the answers for the best literacy instruction would be naive, but to ignore the validity in *Teaching Children to Read*, the NRP report, would be ignorant. As educators we need to look at the reported information and apply what research has shown to be beneficial in the instruction of literacy. For the remainder of this literature review, the following topics will be investigated further:

Alphabets: Phonemic Awareness Instruction and Phonics Instruction, Fluency,
Comprehension: Vocabulary Instruction, Text Comprehension Instruction.

**Alphabets: Phonemic Awareness and Phonics**

**Phonemic Awareness**

The utilization of a phonemic awareness program can be a high predictor of a child’s reading skills. Many mistake the concept of phonemic awareness as being a minute concept of the beginning steps to the readiness of a student’s reading career. Phonemic awareness can be defined as “the awareness of the smallest units of sound in the speech stream and the ability to isolate or manipulate the individual sounds in words” (Birsh, 1999). Often times, phonemic awareness is mistaken for phonics instruction, which involves teaching students how to use letter-sound relations to read or spell words. Phonemic awareness skills include, discrimination,
isolation, blending, segmentation, deletion and substitution (Crumine, 1997). When approaching phonemic awareness it is imperative to realize that it does not include print.

The NRP selected phonemic awareness as a subtopic for review and analysis for several reasons. The panel realized that correlational studies had already identified phonemic awareness and letter knowledge as the two best school-entry predictors of how well children will learn to read during the first two years of instruction (Langenberg, 2000). Marilyn Adams and Joseph Torgeson have done much research on these predictors. The NRP also acknowledged that experimental studies had been carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of phonemic awareness in facilitating reading acquisition. Finally, the panel realized that phonemic awareness is quite the “buzz” among principals, teachers and publishers with much support from research on improving children’s ability to read.

With the understanding of phonemic awareness, the NRP set out to answer two pertinent questions, Does phonemic awareness improve reading? and If so, how is this instruction best provided? The NRP’s results of these two questions were quite comprehensive and impressive:

1. Does phonemic awareness improve reading?

Results: Teaching phonemic awareness to children significantly improves their reading more than instruction that lacks any phonemic awareness. The results of the experimental studies led the panel to conclude that phonemic awareness training was the cause of improvement in students’ phonemic awareness, reading, and spelling following training. The effects of phonemic awareness instruction on reading lasted well beyond the end of training. Phonemic awareness also helped normally achieving children learn to spell, and the effects lasted well beyond the end of training. However, the instruction was not effective for improving spelling in disabled readers.
2. How is phonemic awareness instruction best provided?

Results: The characteristics of phonemic awareness training found to be most effective in enhancing phonemic awareness, reading, and spelling skills included explicitly and systematically teaching children to learn to manipulate phonemes with letters, focusing the instruction on one or two types of phoneme manipulations rather than multiple types, and teaching children in small groups. Phonemic awareness does not constitute a reading program. There are many ways to teach phonemic awareness instruction; teachers need to evaluate the methods they use against measured success in their own students. The motivation of both students and their teachers is a critical ingredient of success.

(Langenberg, p. 7-8)

While the panel did much research in the subtopic of phonemic awareness, its results to many educators did not come as a surprise. In American Educator (2001), Moats states that, “Skillful and direct teaching of phoneme awareness, letter knowledge, sound symbol correspondence, and decoding strategies, applied to reading text, really works” (p.2). In a 1997 informational document for parents, Linda Crumrine states:

While phonemic awareness may seem to come innately to some, those that struggle with it, those that do not naturally perceive that speech is made up of a series of sounds usually experience difficulty learning to read. They often have trouble understanding that the printed word represents sounds in speech. Their lack of sensitivity to the structure of words, especially of phonemes, makes learning to read a challenge. (p.2)

Phonics

Phonics has been a word that has initiated many interesting conversations about early reading acquisition. Some have denounced the term as if it were an expletive, while others praise the word as if it is a magic pill. Judith Birch in Multisensory Teaching of Basic Language
Skills (1991), defines phonics as, “Paired association between letters and letter sounds: an approach to teaching of reading and spelling that emphasizes sound-symbol relationships, especially in early instruction” (p. 499).

The NRP set out to answer specific questions relevant to the topic of phonics. A meta-analysis was conducted. The panel screened seventy-five studies, which resulted in the use of thirty-eight studies from which sixty-six control group comparisons were identified.

The following are the eleven questions and the research results from The Report of the National Reading Panel, 2000:

1. Does systematic phonics instruction help children learn to read more effectively than nonsystematic phonics instruction or instruction teaching no phonics?
   Results: Systematic phonics instruction contributed more to a child’s growth in reading when compared to programs with unsystematic or no phonics component.

2. Are some types of phonics instruction more effective than others? Are some specific phonics programs more effective than others?
   Results: The programs used in the analysis did not statistically differ from each other. The conclusion drawn is that specific systematic phonics programs are more effective than non-phonics programs. More evidence is needed to determine if one program is more effective than the others.

3. Is phonics taught more effectively when students are tutored individually or when they are taught in small groups or when they are taught as classes?
   Results: All three delivery methods proved to be effective methods of phonics instruction with no statistical difference between the three.
4. Is phonics instruction more effective when it is introduced to students not yet reading, kindergarten or 1st grade, than when it is introduced in grades above 1st after students have already begun to read?

Results: Phonics instruction provided early was much more effective than instruction provided after first grade.

5. Is phonics instruction beneficial for children who are having difficulty learning to read? Is it effective in preventing reading failure among children who are at risk for developing reading problems in the future? Is it effective in remediating reading difficulties in children who have been diagnosed as reading disabled and children who are low-achieving readers?

Results: Phonics instruction produced substantial reading growth among younger first grade children at risk of developing future reading problems. Phonics instruction also significantly improved the reading performance of disabled readers. Phonics instruction failed to exert a significant impact on readers grades two through six. This final finding needs to be researched further to see if the finding is reliable.

6. Does phonics instruction improve children’s reading comprehension ability as well as their decoding and word reading skills?

Results: Systematic phonics instruction produced significantly greater growth than non-phonics instruction in younger children’s reading comprehension ability. The effects on children beyond grade one were mixed. Systematic phonics instruction does seem to boost comprehension for reading disabled students.

7. Does phonics instruction have an impact on children’s growth in spelling?
Results: Systematic phonics instruction contributed more than non-phonics instruction in helping kindergartners and first graders apply their knowledge of the alphabetic system to spell words. However, it did not improve spelling in students beyond grade one.

8. Is phonics instruction effective with children at different SES levels?
Results: Systematic phonics instruction helped children at all socio economic status levels make significant gains.

9. Does the type of control group used to evaluate the effectiveness of phonics make a difference?
Results: The conclusion supported by these findings is that the effectiveness of systematic phonics instruction found in the present meta-analysis did not depend on the type of instruction that students in the control groups received. Students taught phonics systematically outperformed students who were taught a variety of nonsystematic or non-phonics programs, including basal programs, whole language approaches, and whole word approaches.

10. Were studies reporting the largest effects of phonics instruction well designed or poorly designed experiments? That is, was random assignments used? Were the sample sizes sufficiently large? Might results be explained by differences between treatment and control groups that existed prior to the experiment rather than by differences produced by the experimental intervention?
Results: The effects of systematic phonics instruction were not diminished when only the best designed experiments were singled out. The conclusion drawn is that the significant effects produced by systematic phonics instruction on children’s growth in reading were
evident in the most rigorously designed experiments. Significant effects did not arise primarily from the weakest studies.

11. Is enough known about systematic phonics instruction to make recommendations for classroom implementation? If so, what cautions should be kept in mind by teachers implementing phonics instruction?

Results: It is important to recognize that the goals of phonics instruction are to provide children with some key knowledge and skills and to ensure that they know how to apply this knowledge in their reading and writing. Phonics teaching is a means to an end. To be able to make use of letter-sound information, children need phonemic awareness. That is, they need to be able to blend sounds together to decode words, and they need to break spoken words into their constituent sounds to write words. Programs that focus too much on the teaching of letter-sound relations and not enough on putting them to use are unlikely to be very effective. In implementing systematic phonics instruction, educators must keep the end in mind and ensure that children understand the purpose of learning letter-sounds and are able to apply their skills in their daily reading and writing activities.

Three important but neglected question areas prime candidates for research: What are the “active ingredients” in effective systematic phonics programs? Is phonics instruction improved when motivational factors are taken into account—not only learners’ but also teachers’ motivation to teach? How does the use of decodable text as early reading material contribute to the effectiveness of phonics programs? (Langenberg, p.2-93-2-98)

Other research such as Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, et al, 1998) is in agreement with the need for phonics instruction with young children. Catherine Snow, a contributing researcher/editor, states that there is converging research that supports
mapping letters, and spellings of words with their sounds (phonics) (Snow, et al, p. 321).

Without this ability, the ultimate goal of comprehension will be impeded. Concurring with the NRP, Snow states that the amount of time and focus of instruction varies upon the needs of the individual child. One size does not fit all (p.321), and teachers need to recognize that the combination of phonics and literature based methodologies is more powerful than either one alone (B. Foorman, et al, 2002).

Classroom instruction needs to incorporate phonics. This is of particular importance for kindergarten, first grade and reading disabled students. For instruction to be clearly grasped, it should be systematic. As a school, administration and teachers need to come to an agreement as to how phonics instruction will be approached at the building level. Clarity at the adult level will help students better attain the needed literacy skills. As stated before, one size does not fit all, but based on the current research, it is evident that phonics is a crucial component of effective literacy instruction.

**Fluency**

Fluency has been a recent hotbed of discussion. It can be defined as, “…the ability to read a text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression” (Langenberg, et al, P.3-5). The definition of fluency has been debated and is often cited to include comprehension in many resources. Often the term automaticity is used interchangeably with fluency, but this is an inaccurate use of the term. Automaticity is a component of fluency, but has its own individualized traits. Dr. Pamela Hook and Dr. Sandra Jones have taken an in-depth look into the world of fluency and automaticity. In *The Importance of Automaticity for Efficient Reading Comprehension*, Perspectives, winter 2002, Hook and Jones explain:
Automaticity is defined as fast, accurate and effortless word identification at the single word level. The speed and accuracy with which single words are identified is the best predictor of comprehension. Fluency, on the other hand, involves not only automatic word identification, but also the application of appropriate prosodic features (rhythm, intonation, and phrasing) at the phrase, sentence, and text levels. (p.9)

The NRP addresses fluency with the questions, “Does guided oral reading instruction improve fluency and reading comprehension? If so, how is this instruction best provided?” (Langenberg, et al, P.3). The following are the findings from the study:

…guided repeated oral reading procedures that included guidance from teachers, peers, or parents had a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across a range of grade levels. These studies were conducted in a variety of classrooms in both regular and special education settings with teachers using widely available instructional materials. This suggests the classroom readiness of guided oral reading and repeated reading procedures. These results also apply to all students—good readers as well as those experiencing reading difficulties. (p. 12)

When interpreting these findings, it is important to note that the panel did not find any multiyear studies regarding the relationship between guided oral reading and the emergence of fluency.

In regard to how fluency instruction is best delivered, the research is clear. There was no positive relationship between independent reading (silent sustained reading) and reading achievement including fluency. This should not be interpreted as a complete abandonment of silent reading time, but rather further research is needed. A positive relationship was found with guided repeated oral reading in word recognition, fluency and comprehension across multiple grade levels when accompanied with support from teachers, peers, or parents. This support relates directly with Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development and the More Knowledgeable Other. Without the support of the MKO, a less positive relationship was found between guided repeated oral reading in word recognition, fluency and comprehension across multiple grade levels.
As stated before, further research is needed in the area of fluency, but based on clinical practices and classroom experience; the following activities could be useful in fluency instruction. At the early level, students can recite the alphabet by chunking it and reciting it in a format different than the usual song approach, ex. ab cdef g h jklmn op qrstu vwxy z. More advanced students can create a “chunking machine” (Hook, 2002). This activity chunks text into syntactic units and feeds the units through a tachistoscope that allows a student to pull the chunked text through the window. This activity is used to increase speed and recognition at the sentence level. Another activity for all ability levels is called scooping. The teacher or the student takes a written passage and creates a scoop mark under portion of text, and the student then reads the text based upon the markings. These activities are a few of many that can be found in commercial products sold for fluency development.

Teachers should also incorporate read alouds on a daily basis. This strategy models fluent reading for students by the MKO, the teacher or an advance peer. When students are reading text for fluency with minimal guidance, the text should be at the student’s independent reading level. The independent reading level is defined as text that is relatively easy for the student with no more than one in twenty words difficult for the student (95% success).

Fluency is an area of literacy that has often been ignored in the classroom. With new research and a multitude of practical application ideas, fluency can no longer be forgotten. As a key component of literacy instruction, it needs to be included in every classroom.

Comprehension: Vocabulary Instruction and Text

Comprehension Instruction

The ability to comprehend is of the utmost importance in literacy instruction. This skill is not only a necessity for the classroom, but also imperative for lifelong learning. With this
understanding the NRP realized the importance of this topic and took into consideration three predominant themes in the research on the development of reading comprehension skills (Langenberg, 2000). The three themes as cited in NRP Report, 2000 are:

First, reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process that cannot be understood without a clear description of the role that vocabulary development and vocabulary instruction play in the understanding of what has been read. Second, comprehension is an active process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text. Third, the preparation of teachers to better equip students to develop and apply reading comprehension strategies to enhance understanding is intimately linked to students’ achievement in this area. (p.13)

The remainder of this section will focus on the two sub-areas of comprehension researched by the NRP.

**Vocabulary Instruction**

As identified in *Putting Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read Kindergarten Through Grade Three*, (September 2001):

Vocabulary refers to the words we must know to communicate effectively. In general, vocabulary can be described as oral vocabulary or reading vocabulary. Oral vocabulary refers to words that we use in speaking or recognize in listening. Reading vocabulary refers to words we recognize or use in print. (p. 34)

There are four main types of vocabulary. The four types are, listening vocabulary, speaking vocabulary, reading vocabulary, and writing vocabulary. Each type is very important in the development of literacy skills with special regard to comprehension. Research suggests that students need to add at least 2,000 to 3,000 words to their reading vocabularies each year (First Grade Teacher Reading Academy, 2002). When beginning school, students from low socio-economic backgrounds know about 6,000 words less than their middle-class peers (Hart&
Risley, 1995). With this knowledge in hand, the instruction of vocabulary takes on a more important role than some educators have given it in the past.

In researching vocabulary, the NRP sought out to answer the following questions: Does vocabulary instruction improve reading achievement? If so, how, is this instruction best provided? The NRP identified forty-seven studies that met their scientific requirements. Seventy-three grade level samples were included. Out of the seventy-three, fifty-three included distributions from grade three to grade eight. The NRP research 2000 finding results of vocabulary instruction are the following:

1. Computer vocabulary instruction shows positive learning gains over traditional methods.
2. Vocabulary instruction leads to gains in comprehension.
3. Vocabulary can be learned incidentally in the context of storybook reading or from listening to the reading of others.
4. Repeated exposure to vocabulary items is important for learning gains. The best gains were made in instruction that extended beyond single class periods and involve multiple exposures in authentic contexts beyond the classroom.
5. Pre-instruction of vocabulary words prior to reading can facilitate both vocabulary acquisition and comprehension.
6. The restructuring of the text material or procedures facilitates vocabulary acquisition and comprehension, for example, substituting easy for hard words. (p.3-4)

The NRP 2000 also found the following research results in regards to implications for reading instruction:

1. There is a need for direct instruction of vocabulary items required for a specific text.
2. Repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary items are important. Students should be given items that will be likely to appear in many contexts.

3. Learning in rich contexts is valuable for vocabulary learning. Vocabulary words should be those that the learner will find useful in many contexts. When vocabulary items are derived from content learning materials, the learner will be better equipped to deal with specific reading matter in content areas.

4. Vocabulary tasks should be restructured as necessary. It is important to be certain that students fully understand what is asked of them in the context of reading, rather than focusing only on the words to be learned. Restructuring seems to be most effective for low-achieving or at-risk students.

5. Vocabulary learning is effective when it entails active engagement in learning tasks.

6. Computer technology can be used effectively to help teach vocabulary.

7. Vocabulary can be acquired through incidental learning. Much of a student’s vocabulary will have to be learned in the course of doing things other than explicit vocabulary learning. Repetition, richness of context, and motivation may also add to the efficacy of incidental learning of vocabulary.

8. Dependence on a single vocabulary instruction method will not result in optimal learning. A variety of methods were used effectively with emphasis on multimedia aspects of learning, richness of context in which words are to be learned, and the number of exposures to words that learners receive.(p.4)

K. Wixson is in agreement with the NRP finding of the positive effects of explicit vocabulary instruction and reading comprehension improvement, but Wixson as cited in
Promoting Vocabulary Development: Components of Effective Vocabulary Instruction, (2002), also offers some caution to educators:

First, teaching vocabulary as students read can, under certain circumstances, distract them from the main ideas of the text. Second, teaching words that are not important to understanding the text leads students to focus on the individual word meanings rather than on the overall meaning of what they read. The more effort students expend focusing on word meanings, the less effort they will have available to recall information that is important to comprehension. (p.20)

Gina Biancarosa, et al, in Walking With Rosie: A Cautionary Tale of Reading Instruction (2003), offers another caution when focusing on vocabulary instruction. Biancarosa’s research found that teachers become so engrossed with the decoding of the vocabulary words that they pay less attention to the meaning. To remedy this imbalance, she recommends a vocabulary instructional approach called anchored word instruction. This instruction calls attention to a word from a text that is being read aloud with the students. The vocabulary word of choice is printed on an index card. The teacher devotes some time to the letter sound relationship within the word, but then uses the context of the text to build the meaning around the printed vocabulary word. By using the text as a vocabulary resource tool, the student is provided with an “anchor” for vocabulary development. Based on this research, Biancarosa believes that for significant oral language development, read alouds are not enough. The students need to have active engagement with the text such as anchored vocabulary development (2003).

Text Comprehension and Instruction

Comprehension is the ability to derive meaning from text while taking part in intentional, problem solving thinking processes. By dissecting the term “comprehension”; the term text comprehension rises to the surface. There is heavy evidence that text comprehension is highly effective when the reader relates the ideas represented in print to their own personal knowledge
and experiences. With this in mind the NRP addressed two questions in regard to the effectiveness of text comprehension instruction:

**Does comprehension strategy instruction improve reading?**

**Results:** The rationale for the explicit teaching of comprehension skills is that comprehension can be improved by teaching students to use specific cognitive strategies or reason strategically when they encounter barriers to understanding what they are reading. Readers acquire these strategies informally to some extent, but explicit or formal instruction in the application of comprehension strategies has been shown to be highly effective in enhancing understanding. The teacher generally demonstrates such strategies for students until the students are able to carry them out independently. For the most effective results in text comprehension, a combination of techniques is the most effective. If so, how is this instruction best provided?

**Results:** There are multiple strategies found effective for text comprehension instruction. The following types of instruction are helpful when used alone, but many are more effective when used as part of a multiple-strategy method:

* Comprehension monitoring, where readers learn how to be aware of their understanding of the material;

* Cooperative Learning, where students learning reading strategies together;

* Use of graphic and semantic organizers (including story maps), where readers make graphic representations of the material to assist comprehension;

* Question answering, where readers answer questions posed by the teacher to receive immediate feedback;

* Question generation, where readers ask themselves questions about various aspects of the story;
*Story structure, where students are taught to use the structure of the story as a means of helping them recall story content in order to answer questions about what they have read;

and

*Summarization, where readers are taught to integrate ideas and generalize from the text information.

More information is necessary to teach teachers how to use such proven comprehension strategies. The literature also suggests that teaching comprehension in the context of specific academic areas can be effective.

As cited in *Put Reading First, The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*, good readers think actively as they read. To make sense of what they read, good readers engage in a complicated process. Using their experiences and knowledge of the world, their knowledge of vocabulary and language structure, and their knowledge of reading strategies (or plans), good readers makes sense of the text and know how to get the most out of it. They know when they have problems with understanding and how to resolve these problems as they occur.

Effective literacy instruction is not complete without the text comprehension piece. After all, isn’t comprehension the reason one reads? If a student can read the words, but not understand what they are reading, the drive to read will only wither with time.

Dating back to the origination of the English Alphabetic System, the debate on how best to approach literacy instruction began. In 1959, Jeanne S. Chall began work to end the great reading war. This effort was founded by the Carnegie Foundation and resulted in *Learning To Read: The Great Debate*. In *Beginning To Read: Thinking and Learning About Print*, Marilyn Jager Adams summarizes much of Chall’s research. Adams states (1990):

The data she (Chall), collected seem to suggest that – as a compliment to connected in meaningful reading - systematic phonics instruction was a valuable
component of beginning reading instruction. Its positive effects appear to be both strong and extensive. (p.8)

Although Chall’s research on effective literacy instruction was conducted nearly half a century ago, it echoes the same results of current alphabetic research. It is evident in this literature review that effective literacy instruction must begin by arming administrators, teachers, and parents with valid and reliable research. This in turn will empower them to review the literature themselves and enable them to choose the appropriate method for their diverse learners. The National Institute for Literacy has begun another research initiative to look at the findings of the National Reading Panel and the newest research to again flesh out the best and newest ways to meet the literacy needs of all learners. Once completed, this new report will hopefully add to the limited research in the areas of technology and teacher training. It is clear by commissioning the National Reading Panel that Congress has not ceased the great reading debate, but they have aided in bridging the gap between science and the schoolhouse door. It is now the responsibility of the educators to answer this call.

Using the lens of Lev Vygotsky and Robert Kegan this researcher investigated historical data in regard to a practice called Literacy Block. Current research was investigated on differentiated teaching practices and the inclusion of PLCs related to Vygotsky’s More Knowledgeable Other and the Zone of Proximal Development. The research on literacy instruction and the attainment of literacy skills consistently discussed the need for early intervening instruction and systematic and direct teaching methodologies. These findings informed this researcher’s research design and directly related to the following research question:

1. How does the reorganization of literacy instruction impact teaching and student learning?
Research findings in the area of professional learning communities and their impact on student learning and teacher efficacy informed this researcher’s research design and directly related to the following research question:

2. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of professional learning communities with a focus on differentiated literacy instruction (Literacy Block) at the first and second grade levels?

DuFour (2006) believes, “Educators who are building a professional learning community recognize that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. Therefore, they created structures to promote a collaborative culture” (p. 8). This collaborative culture creates connections for teachers who traditionally work in a very isolated profession.

A thorough review of the research about PLCs revealed a gap in regard to the impact of an adult’s learning stage, based on Kegan’s adult learning theory, and the consequences this may have on curriculum implementation or the implementation of ideas that emerge from the work of the PLC. Sargent and Hannum (2009) found that PLCs lead teachers to ownership, involvement, innovation and leadership (2009). In alignment with Sargent’s and Hannum’s research, Rasberry and Mahajan (2008) found that analysis of school data and the collaborative effort encourage teachers to be “drivers of change” (p.12). These researchers may be accurate when looking at adults at an advanced developmental level, but do less developmentally savvy adults become “drivers of change”? This researcher’s theoretical lens may help to fill this research void.

The literature investigated supported the research questions and the summative program review that was conducted. The following section will explain in detail the research design of the doctoral study.
**Chapter III: Research Design**

This Doctoral study, took place in a southeastern Massachusetts elementary school, and investigated a program referred to as Literacy Block at the first and second grade level. The impetus for the commencement of this program was a desire for differentiated instruction, decreased special education referrals, improvement of literacy skills with the use of research based practices as noted in the National Reading Panel Meta-analysis, and maximizing quality instruction with limited staffing.

This study was grounded in the qualitative design of a summative program review. Patton, 2002, refers to this type of study as a summative evaluation. He states:

> This is the kind of research we have come to call summative evaluation—summing up judgments about a program to make a major decision about its value, whether it should be continued, and whether the demonstrated model can or should be generalized to and replicated for other participants or in other places. (p. 214)

In a focus group format, teachers were asked to share their views of the differentiated literacy instructional methodological practice called Literacy Block. Looking at student data and teacher assessment data, the program was reviewed to see how the reorganization of literacy instruction impacts teaching and student learning. Also, this program review delved into the practice of Professional Learning Communities to see how teachers were impacted by a one year implementation of a Professional Learning Community with a focus on differentiated literacy instruction and Literacy Block at the first and second grade levels. Carol Weiss, 1998, states that summative program reviews, “…provides information about the effectiveness of the curriculum to school decision makers..”, (p.31). After a thorough investigation of the initial goals of Literacy Block and the summative data, this researcher was able to tell the story of Literacy Block. With the use of data triangulation the following research questions were thoroughly explored and answered.
Research Questions

The analysis of research is essential when completing a doctoral research project. For the purpose of this project qualitative program review examples best fit the design needs of the following questions:

1. How does the reorganization of literacy instruction impact teaching and student learning?

   This research question directly relates to the theoretical lens of Lev Vygotsky. The Zone of Proximal Development is essential to understand when looking at student data and literacy instruction. The lens of the ZPD allows for the combination of reactive and proactive teaching methodologies. For example, knowing a student’s literacy needs through formative assessment allows for appropriate reactive lesson planning, while at the same time planning lessons that will allow for the student to develop his or her skills with the support of a More Knowledgeable Other. Other research to consider is the works of the National Reading Panel (2000), and the Joplin Grouping Plan (Newport, 1967). The National Reading Panel findings and conclusions may inform teachers as to what curriculum should be of significance when reorganizing literacy instruction. The Joplin Grouping Plan involves alternative homogeneous grouping strategies which may support a reorganization that impacts student learning.

2. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of professional learning communities with a focus on differentiated literacy instruction (Literacy Block) at the first and second grade levels?

   Robert Kegan’s adult learning theory lens and the work of Lev Vygotsky will guide the investigation into this research question. Kegan’s and Vygotsky’s learning stages both look to the importance of socialization in relation to learning. These two lenses provided a well rounded look into the use of PLCs and differentiated literacy instruction.
Methodology

A qualitative summative program review design was best suited for this study. Patton (2002) believes that program reviews/summative qualitative protocols,

… serve the purpose of rendering an overall judgment about the effectiveness of a programs, policy or product for the purpose of saying that the evaluand (thing being evaluated) is or is not effective and, therefore, should or should not be continued, and has or does not have the potential of being generalizable to other situation. (p. 218)

The data collected was collected from varying sources and triangulated. “Triangulation is a powerful solution to the problem of relying too much on any single data source or method and thereby undermining the validity and credibility of findings because of the weaknesses of any single method.” (Patton, 1987, p. 61). The data collected was from standardized assessments (DIBELS), likert rating scales (PET-R), and focus group administered open ended questions. The DIBELS assessment is the Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills. This tool was created by Roland H. Good, III, and Ruth Kaminski. As noted on the University of Oregon’s DIBLES information webpage,

The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills from kindergarten through sixth grade. They are designed to be short (one minute) fluency measures used to regularly monitor the development of early literacy and early reading skills. DIBELS were developed to measure recognized and empirically validated skills related to reading outcomes. Each measure has been thoroughly researched and demonstrated to be reliable and valid indicators of early literacy development and predictive of later reading proficiency to aid in the early identification of students who are not progressing as expected. When used as recommended, the results can be used to evaluate individual student development as well as provide grade-level feedback toward validated instructional objectives. https://dibels.uoregon.edu/dibelsinfo.php, retrieved on January 15, 2011

The PET-R, Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs – Revised, is a likert type rating scale created by Edward J. Kame’enui, Ph.D. and Deborah C.
Simmons, Ph.D.. It is a tool that is used to benchmark school performance in the area of reading. It can be used to gather current data and for planning purposes assessing school wide practices and beliefs in the area of reading. Lastly, the use of open ended questions allowed this researcher to gather data about how classroom teachers view the practice of Literacy Block.

Qualitative research intends to tell a “story”. In this case, the story of Literacy Block and the implementation of Professional Learning Communities is essential to understanding the program being reviewed. Miles and Huberman (1994) state:

Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people’s lived experiences are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives: their perceptions, assumptions, prejudgments, presuppositions, and for connecting these meanings to the social worlds around them. (p.10)

It is also imperative to understand the limit of time that participants may have when participating in this study, (Patton, 2002). Careful consideration must be given to the wording of each question prior to the interview process, (Patton 2002). One method that Patton suggests to ensure that the data collection process is credible and legitimate is the use of standardized open-ended questions (2002). This questioning format is supported by Patton by the following four major reasons:

1. The exact instruments used in the evaluation are available for inspection by those who will use the findings of the study.

2. Variation among interviewers can be minimized where a number of different interviewers must be used.

3. The interview is highly focused so that interviewee time is used efficiently.

4. Analysis is facilitated by making responses easy to find and compare. (p.34)

Based on Patton, the teacher interview questions for this program review were formatted using the following sentence stems, “How do you feel about…?”, “What is your opinion of…?”, and “What do you think of…?”, p. 354. Patton states, “The truly open-ended question permits those
being interviewed to take whatever direction and use whatever words they want to express what they have to say.” (2002, p. 354).

The following questions and introductory script was used to interview the focus group made up of teachers and adult Literacy Block participants.

**Focus Group Questions**

An introductory script was used to initiate the focus group questions. The introductory script ensured that all participants were starting with the same historical framework. It should be noted that based on Kegan’s adult learning theory each individual may have answered the questions from a lens based upon their current adult learning developmental stage. The following section is the introductory script that was read and the focus group questions that were asked.

**Introductory Script:**

Literacy Block was created based on the research of the National Reading Panel and the Joplin Plan grouping research. The intention of the initiative was to differentiate instruction, reduce the number of special education referrals, provide focused skill based lessons based on student assessment data, and using benchmarking periods and progress monitoring data; students would be regrouped at least three times a year. The overall goal of the initiative was to better meet the reading needs of all learners, while simultaneously maximizing quality instruction with limited staffing. Also, in 2009, a Professional Learning Community was created with the goal of collaboration and the betterment of Literacy Block. Now that I have shared the foundation and goal of this initiative, I would like this focus group to candidly share their thoughts in regard to the following focus group questions.

1. How do you feel about Literacy Block?
2. What do you think the benefits of Literacy Block are?
3. What do you think is not beneficial about Literacy Block?

4. What kind(s) of changes (if any) did you notice with students skills during the implementation of Literacy Block?

5. What is your opinion about the Professional Learning Community focused on Literacy?

6. Do you think the PLC is “working”? Why or why not?
   a. Describe the implementation of the PLC and the impact it has had on you in conjunction with the literacy block.
   b. What impact, if any, has the PLC had on student learning in conjunction with the literacy block?

7. Do you feel that students that are above grade level have received differentiated literacy instruction during Literacy Block to meet their needs?

8. Do you feel that students below grade level have received differentiated instruction during Literacy Block to meet their needs?

9. Proponents of Literacy Block as a Response to Intervention Model, say it can help improve schools on two fronts – both with early intervention and appropriate assessment/placement in special education. Has Literacy Block affected the process of referring students to receive special education services at Ralph Talbot? If so, can you give examples?
   a. Probe: Do you refer students to receive special education services more frequently, less frequently, or just as frequently as you did before the implementation Literacy Block? Can you explain?
10. Is there anything that we haven’t talked about with regard to the Literacy Block or the Professional Learning Community that would be important to know? (Patton, 2002, p. 379)

a. Probe: What information does the progress monitoring give you? Does this information change instructional practices?

b. What are your reactions to our grade level meetings to discuss the results of progress monitoring and the RTI implementation?

Appendix A

A number of the prior interview questions were adapted from a study conducted by Barnhardt (2009). Also, it should be noted that this researchers included additional probing questions based on the participants’ responses or as needed for clarification.

In conjunction with the teacher interview questions, historical DIBELS data results from 2007-2010 were used. This data was analyzed to tell the story of literacy block and uncover themes that emerged from triangulation. All data points were investigated to see if common themes emerged. The teachers also completed a likert type rating scale (Appendix B) called Planning and Evaluation Tools for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs- Revised (PET-R). The focus group recording was transcribed and checked by group members for accuracy. The focus group transcription was then coded using the MAX-QDA 10 software.

Using the lens of Lev Vygotsky, it was imperative to look and listen for key terms that correlated with his Zone of Proximal Development theory. Such terms included, but were not limited to, learning by doing, scaffolding, guided reading, leveled libraries, gradual release of responsibility, smart goals, collaboration, and data informed instruction. It was crucial to be
aware of key terminology when telling the story of Literacy Block through the lens of Vygotsky’s work.

When conducting the focus group interview, this researcher listened for terminology related to Kegan’s adult learning stages. Some key words included, but were not limited to, collaborative teaching, support from peers, compliance, PLC, time management, efficacy and leadership. The usage of these terms helped the researcher identify the learning stages of the participants during the time when Literacy Block was implemented.

Coding is a highly organized way of grouping data to look for themes, patterns, relationships and discrepancies. Miles and Huberman (1994), state “Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study.” (p. 56). The use of codes allows researchers to organize and retrieve information from data collections, (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Based on Miles and Huberman, 1994, there are three types of codes, descriptive, interpretive and pattern. To begin the process of coding, Miles and Huberman suggest a start list of codes. This list can be created by looking at the proposed research questions, the researchers’ hypothesis and or the conceptual framework (p. 58).

When reviewing Table 3.1, the research questions are listed and grouped with the associated theme and the corresponding coding. For example, research question one is associated with seven identified themes and the related code is numbered in relation to the corresponding theme and the abbreviated code. The listing 1-1. LBD stands for Research Question 1, theme 1. Differentiation and Literacy Block Differentiation. Each theme was then broken down into subtopics that may emerge within a main theme. For example, the listing 1-1. LBD stands for Research Question 1, theme 1. Differentiation and Literacy Block Differentiation, but this theme was then continued with sub-thematic codes 1-1 LBDP (Literacy Block Differentiation
Planning), 1-1 LBDR (Literacy Block Differentiation Resources), 1-1 LBDPD (Literacy Block Differentiation Professional Development). It should be noted that this numerical coding system was not needed once the transcription was entered into the MAXQDA 10 program, but the table was useful for this researcher to quickly refer to for question and coding correlations.

Table 3.1

Research Questions and Related Theme and Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How does the reorganization of literacy instruction impact teaching and student learning?</td>
<td>1. Differentiation 2. Grouping 3. Achievement 4. Decline academics 5. Goals 6. Assessment 7. Communication</td>
<td>1-1.LBD (Literacy Block Differentiation) 1-1 LBDP (Literacy Block Differentiation Planning) 1-1 LBDR (Literacy Block Differentiation Resources) 1-1 LBDPD (Literacy Block Differentiation Professional Development) 1-2.LBG (Literacy Block Grouping) 1-2 LBGD (Literacy Block Grouping Dynamics) 1-3.LBA (Literacy Block Achievement) 1-4.LBDA (Literacy Block Decline in Academics) 1-5.LBGC (Literacy Block Goals Clear) 1-5 LBGU (Literacy Block Goals Unclear) 1-6.LBAS (Literacy Block Assessment) 1-7. LBCC (Literacy Block Communication Colleagues) 1-7 LBCP (Literacy Block Communication Parents/Guardians)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of professional learning communities with a focus on literacy instruction at the</td>
<td>1. Time management 2. Collaboration 3. Student Academic Growth 4. Leadership Role</td>
<td>2-1.PLCTM (Professional Learning Community Time Management) 2-2.PLCC (Professional Learning Community Collaboration) 2-2. PLCCS (Professional Learning Community Self-Improvement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first and second grade levels?</td>
<td>5. Professional Development</td>
<td>Community Collaboration (Structured)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Resources</td>
<td>2-2. PLCCU (Professional Learning Community Unstructured)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Group Dynamics</td>
<td>2-3. PLCSAG (PLC Student Academic Growth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-3. PLCSAGI (PLC Student Academic Growth Increase)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-3. PLCSAGD (PLC Student Academic Growth Decline)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-4. PLCLR (PLC Leadership Role)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-4. PLCLRT (PLC Leadership Role Teacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-4. PLCLRP (PLC Leadership Role Principal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-5. PLCPD (PLC Professional Development)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-6. PLCR (PLC resources)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-7. PLCGD (PLC Group Dynamics)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: adapted from Myles and Huberman, 1994, p.56 Appendix C

When thinking about coding, Patton suggests reading one’s interview notes several times to generate a starting list of codes (2002). This researcher transcribed and reviewed the focus group notes to find themes. Also, this researcher entered data into the MAXQDA 10 program (http://www.maxqda.com). This program was utilized to assist with the coding of the focus group data and the storage of data. Patton, (2002) notes, “Qualitative software programs facilitate data storage, coding, retrieval, comparing, and linking – but human beings do the analysis.” (p. 442). Although Patton and Miles and Huberman differentiate as to when to begin the coding process, it is the belief of this researcher that the combination of each protocol allowed for a more accurate coding method resulting in a more thorough review of the open ended data.

Using the lens of Lev Vygotsky, it was also imperative to look and listen for key terms that correlated with his Zone of Proximal Development theory. Such terms included, but were not limited to, learning by doing, scaffolding, guided reading, leveled libraries, gradual release of
responsibility, smart goals, collaboration, and data informed instruction. It was crucial to be aware of key terminology when telling the story of Literacy Block through the lens of Vygotsky’s work.

When conducting the focus group interview, this researcher listened for terminology related to Kegan’s adult learning stages. Some key words included, but were not limited to, collaborative teaching, support from peers, compliance, PLC, time management, efficacy and leadership. The usage of these terms helped the researcher identify the learning stage of the teacher during the time when Literacy Block was implemented.

Table 3.2 depicts research questions, data and the source associated with each question.

Triangulation of all data sources increased credibility of this program review.

Table 3.2

Research Question and Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How does the reorganization of literacy instruction impact teaching and student learning?</td>
<td>Assessment Results, Teacher questionnaire/Focus Group Interview</td>
<td>Teachers (Grade one and two and special education), Student DIBELS data, PET-R (Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective School-wide Reading Programs) data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of professional learning communities with a focus on literacy instruction at the first and second grade levels?</td>
<td>Focus Group Interview</td>
<td>Teachers (Grade one and two and special education), Principal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix D
Site and Participants

The site for this research project was a primary school in Southeastern Massachusetts. The sample population of teachers and students from grade one and two would be considered a purposeful sample (Patton, 2002). Due to the nature of a qualitative Program Review, this sampling strategy was well suited. The participants and historical data were accessed during the 2010-2011 school year. The teaching staff consisted of three first grade teachers, three second grade teachers, one kindergarten teacher who had been teaching second and first grade during the time that the Literacy Block data was analyzed, an ELL teacher, two special education teachers, one speech and language pathologist, and one principal. It should be noted that the researcher was also a member of the school staff and was embedded in the Literacy Block program due to her prior teaching role, but did not partake in the PET-R likert rating scale, or as a contributing member of the focus group. This researcher did administer all focus group questions and facilitated all meetings.

Data Collection

In this qualitative summative program evaluation study, data was collected using a variety of qualitative methods. Which include the following: focus group open ended interview questioning, likert scales, and historical formative assessment data (DIBELS).

Focus group interview. The primary means of data collection was through open ended focus group interview questioning techniques. This procedure was chosen over individual interviews due to the use of historical data. The focus group format assisted participants to remember details and trigger responses from participants that may not have surfaced in individual interviews. Also, this format allowed for teachers to express their ideas to a group and hear themes that may emerge. A standardized interview protocol was used as noted in Appendix A.
Based on Patton, the teacher interview questions for this program review were formatted using the following sentence stems, “How do you feel about…?”, “What is your opinion of…?”, and “What do you think of…?” (2002, p. 354). Patton states, “The truly open-ended question permits those being interviewed to take whatever direction and use whatever words they want to express what they have to say.” It was hoped that this researcher would be able to learn how the reorganization of literacy instruction and the implementation of a PLC impacts student learning and instruction.

**PET-R.** Another instrument that was used to evaluate the effectiveness of Literacy Block and PLCs is the Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs-Revised (PET-R). This evaluation tool has been grounded in research by Sugai, Horner and Todd (2000), Effective Behavior Support: Self-Assessment Survey. This tool is a Likert rating scale consisting of thirty-eight questions and uses a zero to three rating scale. The Questions are broken into seven specific categories. The following are the seven specific categories and how they relate to the research questions driving this study as noted on the PET-R:

1. **Goals/ Objective/ Priorities:**
   Goals for reading achievement are clearly defined, anchored to research, prioritized in terms of importance to student learning, commonly understood by users, and consistently employed as instructional guides by all teachers of reading. (PET-R, 2003, p.4)

This relates to research question number one and how the reorganization of literacy instruction impacts teaching and instructional practices. It also relates to Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development and the research based instruction that is utilized to meet the needs of diverse learners. This section addresses the teachers understanding of literacy instruction. The teacher would be considered the MKO and is critical to the instructional guidance of each and every learner. The MKO is essential to guiding the student through their ZPD.
2. Assessment:
Instruments and procedures for assessing reading achievement are clearly specified, measure essential skills, provide reliable and valid information about student performance, and inform instruction in important, meaningful, and maintainable ways. (PET-R, 2003, p.5)

This evaluation criteria relates to research question one and how the reorganization of literacy instruction based on formative evaluations such as the DIBELS data is used by the MKO to facilitate student learning.

3. Instructional Practices and Materials:
The instructional programs and materials have documented efficacy, are drawn from research-based findings and practices, align with state standards and benchmarks, and support the full range of learners. (PET-R, 2003, p.7)

This evaluation criterion relates to research question one and two. Teachers reflect on the reorganization of literacy block and the materials used by the MKO to differentiate instructional needs.

4. Instructional Time:
A sufficient amount of time is allocated for instruction and the time allocated is used effectively. (PET-R, 2003, p.8)

As the MKO looks back at planning and time management strategies, he or she is able to reflect on their use of instructional time. Also during PLC meetings the MKO shares insight with other teacher learners as how to best meet time management needs. Hence, this evaluation criterion aligns with research question one and two.

5. Differentiated Instruction/Grouping:
Instruction optimizes learning for all students by tailoring instruction to meet current levels of knowledge and prerequisite skills and organizing instruction to enhance student learning. (PET-R, 2003, p.9)

This evaluation criterion relates to research question number one and two and how the reorganization of literacy instruction and the implementation of a PLC impact teaching and instructional practices. The MKO needs to be aware of current levels of knowledge when
planning instruction for learners. Also, the PLC needs to understand that teachers participating in the PLC enter the group with varied backgrounds and learning experiences. Vygotsky’s and Kegan’s developmental lenses are essential when looking at how differentiation is approached within the classroom and the PLC meetings.

6. Administration/ Organization/ Communication:
Strong instructional leadership maintains a focus on high-quality instruction, organizes and allocates resources to support reading, and establishes mechanisms to communicate reading progress and practices. (PET-R, 2003, p.10)

This evaluation criterion solely focuses on the following research question number two:

3. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of professional learning communities with a focus on differentiated literacy instruction (Literacy Block) at the first and second grade levels?

The implementation of a PLC as an organization and communication tool/forum allows teachers to adequately assess this criterion. The socialization aspect of the PLC relates to the lens of Vygotsky and Kegan.

7. Professional Development:
Adequate and ongoing professional development is determined and available to support reading instruction. (PET-R, 2003, p.11)

As teachers share experiences and questions at the PLC, this acts as a form of professional development. This relates to research question two.

https://dibels.uoregon.edu/docs/pet_r_form_user.pdf

**DIBELS.** This research study is qualitative, and it was necessary to look at the DIBELS data using a qualitative lens. The DIBELS data helped the researcher and the participants tell the Literacy Block Story and analyze if the original goals of this literacy initiative were met. Rossman (1984), Wilson (1991), Greene (1989), Caracelli (1989), Graham (1989), Firestone
(1987) and Sieber (1973) are all in agreement that the usage of qualitative and quantitative methods together can be beneficial to enhance a research study and fully tell a story. Rossman and Wilson suggest triangulation, elaboration and the ability to begin new ways of thinking are some of the reasons to link the various research methods together (1991). With the intent to fully analyze the DIBELS data, an analysis of variance was done on each year that historical data has been collected. The DIBELS formative assessment tool is given three times during the school year. Data from 2007-2008, 2008-2009, and 2009-2010 were analyzed.

Data Analysis

An analysis was done with DIBELS 6th edition, the PET-R, and open ended focus group questions. The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills from kindergarten through sixth grade. The PET-R, Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs – Revised, is a likert type rating scale created by Edward J. Kame’enui, Ph.D. and Deborah C. Simmons, Ph.D.. It is a tool that is used to benchmark school performance in the area of reading. It can be used to gather current data and for planning purposes assessing schoolwide practices and beliefs in the area of reading. Lastly, the use of open ended questions allowed this researcher to gather data about how classroom teachers viewed the practice of Literacy Block and the implementation of a PLC.

DIBELS. This research study was qualitative, it was necessary to look at the DIBELS data using a qualitative lens. The DIBELS data helped this researcher and the participants tell the Literacy Block story and analyze if the original goals of this literacy initiative were met.
(1987) and Sieber (1973) are all in agreement that the usage of qualitative and quantitative methods together can be beneficial to enhance a research study and fully tell a story. Rossman and Wilson suggest triangulation, elaboration and the ability to begin new ways of thinking are some of the reasons to link the various research methods together (1991). With the intent to fully analyze the DIBELS data, an analysis variance was done on each year of a three year period that historical data has been collected. The DIBELS formative assessment tool was given three times during the school year and used to group students based upon their assessment data.

This researcher analyzed a minimum of two data points over a three year period for each subtest area that addresses the literacy skills of phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. The first benchmark assessment of each data set (fall data) provided a baseline data point for each school year. Spring data was used as summative data for each school year. An analysis of variance was used to statically analyze the data over a three year period (Salkind, 2010). The researcher looked for a standard deviation from yearly baseline data to yearly ending data for each year of the three year period. In addition to the prior analysis, the winter data was also analyzed in comparison to the fall and spring data to see if there was any statistically significant growth between each testing period. This allowed the researcher to look for patterns and thus a trend analysis.

Through the use of multiple data sources and data triangulation, it was believed that the DIBELS data, focus group open ended interview data and likert rating scale data would lead to the emergence of themes that could be used to help tell the story of Literacy Block and the implementation of a PLC.

**Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Triangulation of data is essential when validating final results. Denzin as cited in Patton (1987) notes four basic types of triangulation. The four types are as follows; data triangulation,
investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. To create trustworthiness, triangulation in the areas of data and methodology were included in this program review. Using data triangulation to ensure the validity and credibility of this program review, multiple sources of data were compiled and reviewed. Data, such as, student assessment results, survey results, and focus group questions were used. The use of multiple measures supported the trustworthiness of this program review.

Trustworthiness. To enhance trustworthiness, this researcher asked all interviewees to review interview transcript data for accuracy. Simultaneously, this researcher highlighted key terminology such as guided practice, collaboration, differentiation, independent, communication, formative assessment, peer support, and probed participants to see if they were aware of their response connections to key terms such as ZPD, PLC, and adult learning theory. This allowed the researcher to further understand if teachers were aware of the various theoretical viewpoints that were essential to this summative program review. Also, this metacognitive awareness allowed the teachers to better interpret the data of this study and holistically view the study. Lincoln and Guba refer to this process as “member checking” (1985). This review process provided opportunities for participants to ensure that the collection of data was accurate with their intended responses. It also provided an opportunity for the members of the focus group to clarify any misunderstandings.

Also, the trustworthiness of the data was increased due to the level of comfort of the focus group with the researcher. Patton (1990) notes the importance of research members being comfortable with the researcher to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected. The researcher was a classroom teacher at the research site and has established a level of professional
trust with the focus group members. Multiple measures were used to ensure the trustworthiness of this summative program review.

**Credibility.** Based on Lincoln and Guba (1985), having confidence in the truth of research findings is creating credibility. When completing qualitative research it is imperative to look for credibility of data sources. To do this, this researcher incorporated a peer review, kept reflective memos throughout the study, and looked to the DIBELS curriculum based measures. A sample of the reflective memos is included in appendix I. A peer review was completed by a colleague with a similar research interest. This peer reviewed this researcher’s data collection, analysis and findings. The inclusion of reflective memos allowed this researcher to have a complete audit trail for review. Also, to ensure credibility, this researcher shared the overall findings of this study with the focus group participants. This was done through an e-mail and allowed for member checking and feedback. The focus group participants concurred with the data and did not ask for adjustments to be made. To further build credibility, this researcher arranged two separate meeting times to discuss the data in person with the participants. It was the hope of this researcher to clarify any misinterpretations and ensure that the data collected was reflective of the focus group.

The DIBELS tools consist of multiple measures that assess early literacy skills. The tool is a nationally normed-referenced test and has been studied for validity and reliability. The types of reliability and validity based on Good, Wallin, Simmons, Kame’enui and Kaminski 2002, are noted in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 looks at the reliability and validity measures that have been used to build and support credibility and trustworthiness for the DIBELS measure. Concurrent validity is a measure of how well a particular test correlates with a previously validated measure. Alternate
form-reliability looks at how reliable assessment results are when using alternate forms of the measure. The alternate forms of the DIBELS measures are called progress monitoring and benchmarking tools. Predictive validity looks at how well a tool predicts future performance. The following table explains which validity and reliability forms have been used to validate the multiple measures.

Table 3.3

**DIBELS Reliability and Validity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Validity Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Sound Fluency</td>
<td>Alternate-form reliability, Concurrent criterion validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoneme Segmentation Fluency</td>
<td>Alternate-form reliability, Concurrent criterion reliability, Predictive validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsense Word Fluency</td>
<td>Alternate-form reliability, Concurrent criterion reliability, Predictive validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Naming Fluency</td>
<td>Alternate-form reliability, Median criterion validity, Predictive validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Reading Fluency</td>
<td>Median alternate form reliability, Concurrent validity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix E

The following data in Table 3.4 is cited from the DIBELS home web site at [https://dibels.uoregon.edu/](https://dibels.uoregon.edu/) and includes the references of work cited. This data elaborates on the reliability and validity of the DIBELS assessment tool. It looks at the predictive validity based on other measures such as the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery and Curriculum Based Measures (CBM). These two cited tools are commonly used at the primary school level with students in grades one and two.
### Table 3.4

**DIBELS Research by Sub-Tests**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Validity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)</td>
<td>*(Kaminski &amp; Good, 1996).</td>
<td>The PSF measure has been found to be a good predictor of later reading achievement</td>
<td>The two-week, alternate-form reliability for the PSF measure is .88*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>**(Good et al., 2004).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The DIBELS Initial Sound Fluency (ISF)</td>
<td>*(Kaminski &amp; Good, 1996, 1998; Laimon, 1994)</td>
<td>assesses a child's ability to recognize and produce the initial sound in an orally presented word</td>
<td>The predictive validity of OnRF with respect to spring-of-first-grade reading on CBM ORF is .45, and .36 ** with the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery Total Reading Cluster score. This test repeated 4 times results in an average reliability of .91***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(The ISF measure is a revision of the measure formerly called Onset Recognition Fluency (OnRF).)</td>
<td>**(Good et al., 2004)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>***(Nunnally, 1978)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)</td>
<td>Marston and Magnusson (1988) (Good et al., 2004).</td>
<td>Assesses a child's ability to name as many upper and lower case letters on a given page in 1 minute</td>
<td>The predictive validity of kindergarten LNF with first-grade Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-Revised Reading Cluster standard score is .65 and .71 with first-grade CBM reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*(Kaminski &amp; Good, 1996).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)</td>
<td>*(Good, Kaminski, Shinn, Bratten, Shinn, Laimon, Smith, &amp; Flindt, 2004)</td>
<td>test of the alphabetic principle - including letter-sound correspondence in which letters represent their most common sounds and of the ability to blend letters into words in which letters represent their most common sounds</td>
<td>The one-month, alternate-form reliability for NWF in January of first grade is .83 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>**(Good et al., 2004).</td>
<td></td>
<td>The concurrent criterion validity of DIBELS NWF with the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-Revised Readiness Cluster score is .36 in January and .59 in February of first grade **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The predictive validity of DIBELS NWF in January of first grade with (a) CBM ORF in May of first grade is .82, (b)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CBM ORF in May of second grade is .60, (c) Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery Total Reading Cluster score is .66 (Good et al., 2004).

| DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) | *(Tindal, Marston & Deno, 1983). **(Good & Jefferson, 1998). | The number of correct words per minute from the passage is the oral reading fluency score. Test-retest reliabilities for elementary students ranged from .92 to .97; alternate form reliability of different reading passages drawn from the same level ranged from .89 to .94. *Criterion-related validity studied in eight separate studies in the 1980's reported coefficients ranging from .52 to .91. ** |

| Retell Fluency (RTF) | The purpose of the RTF measure is to (a) prevent inadvertently learning or practicing a misrule, (b) identify children whose comprehension is not consistent with their fluency, (c) provide an explicit linkage to the core components in the NRP report, and (d) increase the face validity of the ORF. Preliminary evidence indicates for students to be on track with comprehension, they should meet both of the following criteria: 1) meet the oral reading fluency benchmark goal, and 2) have a retell score of at least 25% of their oral reading fluency score. Retell Fluency should be administered to students who are reading at least 40 words per minute. |

The asterisks note the research study in column two and the relation to the validity information in column four.
*(Kaminski & Good, 1996), **(Good et al., 2004), *** (Nunnally, 1978)
Appendix F

**Protection of Human Subjects**

This research project is a summative program review. Three years of historical data was analyzed and reported on. To ensure that the teachers, staff and parents that participate in the survey questions were protected, their forms were coded and submitted without names. The name of the school, students or staff members were not included in this final doctoral project.
report. The intent of this program review was to report on the overall effectiveness of the Literacy Block program not the effectiveness of single individuals.
Chapter IV: Report of Research Findings

Background

This summative program review was completed during the 2010-2011 school year. The site for this study was a small suburban primary school in Southeastern Massachusetts. The teachers and students were involved in a practice called Literacy Block at the first and second grade level for several years, but a summative program review of the initiative had never been initiated or completed. During the 2009-2010 school-year, many staff members wanted to begin looking deeply into their Literacy Block practice so in turn, a professional learning community (PLC) focusing on Literacy Block had been created and met before school hours. It should be noted that this researcher taught second grade at the site during the 2009-2010 school year and led the PLC initiative. Beginning the 2010-2011 school year, this researcher was no longer a staff member at the school and the PLC was not continued.

To begin to tell the Literacy Block story, a purposeful sample was chosen to participate in a focus group, complete The Planning and Evaluation Tool For Effective Schoolwide Reading Program- Revised (PET-R), and this researcher used three years of historical Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) student assessment data to tell the story of Literacy Block. Twelve staff members who had first hand working knowledge with Literacy Block chose to participate in the study. There were three grade one teachers, three grade two teachers, three special educators, one kindergarten teacher who had previously taught grades one and two, one English as a second language teacher, and one principal who participated in the focus group interview and completed the PET-R instrument. Approval to conduct the study was provided by the Superintendent of Schools as well as the building principal. In the midst of the study the
Superintendent of Schools passed away and the Internal Review Board asked for this researcher to gain consent from the interim Superintendent. This request was successfully carried out.

Throughout the study, this researcher recorded notes and memos in a log to provide a reference document and ultimately an audit trail of the study. Sample entries of the reflective memos can be found in Appendix I. Once the data had been analyzed, participants were given an opportunity to read the results and respond with their thoughts and/or clarifications. Also, multiple meetings were held to allow the participants to speak with the researcher and share any information that he or she may have had for inclusion in the final report. It should be noted that this researcher was a former teacher at the primary school and due to her professional relationships with the staff members, the participants reported that they felt at ease throughout the study.

**Initial Meeting**

Once Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was received, this researcher met in May of 2011 with the purposeful sample of educators to see if they would agree to participate. At this meeting, the study was explained, and if the participant chose to be part of the research study, he or she completed the PET-R on-line likert type rating scale. The participants were asked to complete the PET-R with a restricted viewpoint of literacy that only included Literacy Block. This researcher wanted the data to reflect the views of Literacy Block, not the perception of any other literacy instructional time. The participants understood the task and completed the on-line rating scale. The results were printed, coded to remain unidentifiable, and saved for analysis. Future meeting dates for focus group meetings were discussed and scheduled. The following section will explain in detail the results of the PET-R rating scale.
Theoretical Lens

This summative program review about Literacy Block was guided by one theoretical framework comprised of two theories. The first theory was developmental theory and in particular the work of Lev Vygotsky and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The second theory used was adult learning theory. Particular attention was paid to Robert Kegan’s adult learning theory research. It should be noted that Robert Kegan’s protocol was not used, but rather his adult learning theory and the stage descriptors that relate to his theory.

Developmental Theory

As teachers work to guide students’ literacy learning through a gradual release of learning responsibility, they are essentially using the work of Lev Vygotsky and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky believed that the development of children was guided by his or her interpersonal relations and culture. These interactions create social beings that learn from The More Knowledgeable Other or the MKO. The practice of Literacy Block using assessment data to lead the way, allows teachers to place students in literacy groupings that focus on foundational literacy skills. These skills then need to be cultivated by the MKO. Often the MKO is the Literacy Block teacher, but it should also be noted that the MKO may be a peer who is guiding his or her Literacy Block classmate in building his or her phonemic awareness skills, fluency skill and other foundational literacy skills. The use of DIBELS as a formative assessment tool aligns with Vygotsky’s developmental theoretical views. As Literacy Block teachers differentiate instruction to meet individual students’ needs, they are scaffolding the instruction and leading the first and second grade students through the four levels of Vygotsky’s developmental theory.
This lens was also helpful when looking at how the staff learned from each other during the Professional Learning Community meetings. The MKO may have been the meeting moderator or a participating staff member that shared his or her expertise with the PLC.

**Adult Learning Theory**

Researchers, such as Robert Kegan, find that the developmental levels of adults can affect the implementation of new school endeavors. It is imperative for school leaders and administrators to understand the potential impact that the adult members of a staff may have on school initiatives. Considering and understanding these stages may result in successful implementation of new initiatives. Kegan’s three stages that relate to adult learning and are most commonly seen are *the instrumental way of knowing, the socializing way of knowing, and the self-authorizing way of knowing* (Drago-Severson, 2004). Teachers developmentally at the instrumental way of knowing level tend to be very concrete. These teachers are willing to support others, but they tend to need to receive support in return. Instrumental way of knowing teachers look for rules to follow and need their own interests to be attended to. When disseminating curriculum to these adults it is imperative to be clear and point out the value of the curriculum for that individual teacher. Socializing way of knowing teachers need to be affirmed by their peers and administrators that they are moving in the right direction. These adults look to please others and want to be accepted. When disseminating curriculum to these adults it is important to make them feel part of the group. Having them work with or as grade level leaders will help to make them feel valued and allow for feedback when they fear they are not meeting expectations. The self-authorizing knower is much less needy when compared to the prior developmental stages. These adults can lead school initiatives through conflicts and help others learn from the differences.
When a principal or school leader understands the adult learning theory stages in which staff members are embedded, they may better help support teacher learning and in turn student learning. Drago-Severson states:

Thinking about development and growth as a movement through periods of stability and change helps in understanding how individuals in schools experience leadership practice aimed at supporting adults learning and other professional development initiatives. (p. 34)

This directly relates to Vygotsky’s MKO. When supports are given, adults and children may be more successful at navigating the often confusing path of literacy learning.

The use of one theoretical lens composed of two theories allowed for a thorough and well rounded review of literature and data that addressed the problem of literacy instruction. Understanding Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development and Kegan’s adult learning stages helped this researcher view the data collected through a development lens. It is imperative to understand how these two theories inform the research design of this summative program review.

**Research Questions**

1. How does the reorganization of literacy instruction impact teaching and student learning?

   This research question directly relates to the theoretical lens of Lev Vygotsky. The *Zone of Proximal Development* is essential to understand when looking at student data and literacy instruction. The lens of the ZPD allows for the combination of reactive and proactive teaching methodologies. For example, knowing a student’s literacy needs through formative assessment allows for appropriate reactive lesson planning, while at the same time planning lessons that will allow for the student to develop his or her skills with the support of a *More Knowledgeable Other*. To thoroughly answer this research question information was gathered from the focus group interview, the PET-R, and three years of historical DIBELS data.
2. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of professional learning communities with a focus on differentiated literacy instruction (Literacy Block) at the first and second grade levels?

Robert Kegan’s adult learning theory lens and the work of Lev Vygotsky guided the investigation into this research question. Kegan’s and Vygotsky’s learning stages both look to the importance of socialization in relation to learning. These two lenses provided a well rounded look into the use of PLCs and differentiated literacy instruction.

Data from the focus group interview was examined to see how teachers were impacted by the implementation of professional learning communities with a focus on differentiated literacy instruction (Literacy Block) at the first and second grade levels.

Table 3.2 in the Appendix provides a visual resource connecting research questions to data sources.

**Data Analysis**

**PET-R**

The PET-R, Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs – Revised, is a likert type rating scale created by Edward J. Kame’enui, Ph.D. and Deborah C. Simmons, Ph.D. It is a tool that is used to benchmark school performance in the area of reading. It can be used to gather current data and for planning purposes assessing school wide practices and beliefs in the area of reading. This evaluation tool has been grounded in research by Sugai, Horner and Todd (2000), Effective Behavior Support: Self-Assessment Survey. This likert type rating scale, consists of thirty-eight questions and uses a zero to three rating scale. The questions are broken into seven specific categories/elements. The following are the seven specific categories:
1. Goals/Objective/Priorities:
Goals for reading achievement are clearly defined, anchored to research, prioritized in terms of importance to student learning, commonly understood by users, and consistently employed as instructional guides by all teachers of reading. (PET-R, 2003, p.4)

2. Assessment:
Instruments and procedures for assessing reading achievement are clearly specified, measure essential skills, provide reliable and valid information about student performance, and inform instruction in important, meaningful, and maintainable ways. (PET-R, 2003, p.5)

3. Instructional Practices and Materials:
The instructional programs and materials have documented efficacy, are drawn from research-based findings and practices, align with state standards and benchmarks, and support the full range of learners. (PET-R, 2003, p.7)

4. Instructional Time:
A sufficient amount of time is allocated for instruction and the time allocated is used effectively. (PET-R, 2003, p.8)

5. Differentiated Instruction/Grouping:
Instruction optimizes learning for all students by tailoring instruction to meet current levels of knowledge and prerequisite skills and organizing instruction to enhance student learning. (PET-R, 2003, p.9)

6. Administration/ Organization/ Communication:
Strong instructional leadership maintains a focus on high-quality instruction, organizes and allocates resources to support reading, and establishes mechanisms to communicate reading progress and practices. (PET-R, 2003, p.10)

7. Professional Development:
Adequate and ongoing professional development is determined and available to support reading instruction. (PET-R, 2003, p.11)

https://dibels.uoregon.edu/docs/pet_r_form_user.pdf
PET-R Results

Twelve participants completed the PET-R rating scale. The PET-R data was organized by category/element and the mean was calculated for each individual category. A cumulative rating for the entire PET-R battery was calculated individually for each of the twelve participants and lastly a composite mean score for the entire battery was calculated to express as a whole how the participants perceived the practice of Literacy Block. Figure 4.1 displays the overall implementation rating for the entire PET-R Instrument. The highest scoring category/element was Assessment and the lowest scoring category/element was Professional Development.

The twelve participants’ scores for the implementation of all criteria noted in the PET-R ranged from 52.82% to 80.54%; with a mean score of 68.9%. Five categories/elements that emerged as relative strengths with higher ratings than the overall mean were: Goals, Objectives, Priorities with
an implementation rating of 74%, Assessment with an implementation rating of 77%, Instructional Time with an implementation rating of 76%, Differentiated Instruction, Groupings, Scheduling with an implementation rating of 70%, and Administration, Organization and Communication with an implementation rating of 72%. Two categories/elements that fell below the mean score of 68.9% were Instructional Practices and Materials with an implementation rating of 60%, and Professional Development with an implementation rating of 50%. It should be noted that there was great variability among the participants, responses. For example there was a 27.72 % difference from the highest score to the lowest score for the overall implementation based on the PET-R. This could be due to developmental stages of the adult participants, individual perceptions, and or how long teachers had been participants in the Literacy Block initiative. To better understand the results of the PET-R, the following section will delve deeper into the results of each individual category/element.
Goals, objectives, and priorities. The following Figure 4.2 depicts the PET-R results in the area of Goals, Objectives, and Priorities:

Figure 4.2

![Bar chart showing goals, objectives, and priorities scores](chart.png)

Under the category/element of Goals, Objectives, and Priorities, out of fourteen possible implementation points, participants’ scores ranged from a low of 7 points to a high of 14 points. The mean score for all participants was 10 points. Overall the participants perceived that the Goals, Objectives and Priorities of Literacy Block were implemented at 74%. This overall percentage score is above the overall mean score by 5.1%. Variability was seen in these results with a 57.14% difference between the highest rating and the lowest rating.
**Assessment.** The following Figure 4.3 depicts the PET-R results in the area of *Assessment*:

![Assessment /20](image)

Under the category/element of *Assessment*, out of twenty implementation points, participants’ scores ranged from a low of six to a high of eighteen. The mean score for all participants was 15.5%. Overall the participants perceived that the *Assessment* of Literacy Block was implemented at 77%. This overall percentage score is above the overall mean score by 8.1%. Variability was seen amongst these responses with a 60% percent difference between the highest and lowest rating.
**Instructional programs and materials.** The following Figure 4.4 depicts the PET-R results in the area of *Instructional Programs and Materials*:

Under the category/element of *Instructional Programs and Materials*, out of twenty-two implementation points, participants’ scores ranged from a low of 5 to a high of 20. The average score for all participants was 13.4. Overall the participants perceived that the *Instructional Practices and Materials* of Literacy Block were implemented at 60%. This overall percentage score is lower than the overall mean score by 8.9%. This difference implies that this is an area of concern for the participants in this study. Variability was seen amongst these responses with a 54.4% percent difference between the highest and lowest rating.
Instructional time. The following figure 4.5 depicts the PET-R results in the area of Instructional Time:

Figure 4.5

![Graph showing Instructional Time/14 for participants]

Under the category/element of Instructional Time, out of fourteen implementation points, participants’ scores ranged from a low of 5 to a high of 14. The mean score for all participants was 10.75. Overall the participants perceived that the Instructional Time of Literacy Block was implemented at 76%. Variability was seen amongst these responses with a 68.18% percent difference between the highest and lowest rating. This percentage score is higher than the overall mean score by 7.1%.
Differentiated instruction, grouping, and scheduling. The following Figure 4.6 depicts the PET-R results in the area of *Differentiated Instruction, Grouping, and Scheduling*:

Figure 4.6

Under the category/element of *Differentiated Instruction, Grouping, and Scheduling* out of a possible 10 implementation points, participants’ scores ranged from a low of 5 to a high of 9. The mean score for all participants was 7. Overall the participants perceived that the *Differentiated Instruction, Grouping, and Scheduling* of Literacy Block was implemented at 70%. Variability was seen amongst these responses with a 40% percent difference between the highest and lowest rating. This overall percentage score is higher than the overall mean score by 1.1%.
Administration, organization, and communication. The following Figure 4.7 depicts the PET-R results in the area of Administration, Organization, and Communication:

Figure 4.7

Under the category/element of Administration, Organization, and Communication out of a possible 12 implementation points, participants’ scores ranged from a low of 4 to a high of 12. The mean score for all participants was 8.6. Overall the participants perceived that the Administration, Organization, and Communication of Literacy Block was implemented at 72%. This overall percentage score is higher than the overall mean score by 3.1%. Variability was seen amongst these responses with a 58.34% percent difference between the highest and lowest rating.
**Professional development.** The participants’ results for professional development are depicted in Figure 4.8.

Under the category/element of Professional Development out of a possible 8 implementation points, participants’ scores ranged from a low of 2 to a high of 6. The mean score for all participants was 4. Variability was seen amongst these responses with a 50% percent difference between the highest and lowest rating. Overall the participants perceived that the Professional Development of Literacy Block was implemented at 50%. This overall percentage score is lower than the overall mean score by 18.9%. This difference indicates and area of concern for the participants in this study.
PET-R Summary

Figure 4.9 depicts the mean score of all participants responses for the seven elements/categories that the participants were asked to rate.

The PET-R data revealed that the participants believe *Instructional Programs and Materials* and *Professional Development* were areas of weakness when analyzing the practice of Literacy Block. Looking at the percentage scores in the category or element *Instructional Programs and Materials*, there is significant scatter. This could be due to individual teachers having more curriculum materials than others, a more comprehensive understanding of literacy instruction, or varied developmental levels based on Kegan’s adult learning theory. All but one participant scored *Professional Development* at a score of five or below out of eight possible
points. This indicates that all but one participant sees professional development as an area of weakness. The data also revealed a perception that five categories or elements were strengths with their overall percentage scores at 70% or higher. The five categories/elements are Goals, Objectives, and Priorities, Assessment, Instructional Time, Differentiated Instruction, Grouping, Scheduling, and Administration, Organization and Communication. The highest ranking category/element was Assessment. This result was not surprising based on the Literacy Block initiative’s foundational belief in formative assessment. It was very evident that the DIBELS assessment tool was used to gather data, create literacy block groups and inform the Literacy Block instructional practices. It should also be noted that within the individual categories a great deal of variability was evident. The greatest level of variability was seen in Professional Development, and the least amount of variability was seen in Differentiated Instruction. This researcher believes that the PET-R results accurately depict how the Literacy Block initiative is perceived at this school.

**DIBELS**

The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) is an assessment tool that was used at the southeastern Massachusetts primary school to gather formative assessment, create Literacy Block groupings and progress monitor students. This tool was first adopted when the Literacy Block initiative began. All of the teachers involved in Literacy Block had been trained to administer the tool however some participants in the study mentioned that another opportunity for training would be valuable. All of the teachers had access to DIBELS resources and were proficient at administering the DIBELS measures. The University of Oregon’s DIBELS website defines the DIBELS tool as follows:
The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills from kindergarten through sixth grade. They are designed to be short (one minute) fluency measures used to regularly monitor the development of early literacy and early reading skills. DIBELS were developed to measure recognized and empirically validated skills related to reading outcomes. Each measure has been thoroughly researched and demonstrated to be reliable and valid indicators of early literacy development and predictive of later reading proficiency to aid in the early identification of students who are not progressing as expected. When used as recommended, the results can be used to evaluate individual student development as well as provide grade-level feedback toward validated instructional objectives. [https://dibels.uoregon.edu/dibelsinfo.php](https://dibels.uoregon.edu/dibelsinfo.php), retrieved on January 15, 2011

This researcher focused on three DIBELS subtests; Phoneme Segmenting Fluency (PSF), Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) and Oral Reading Fluency (ORF). Only data sets that reported three data points were used for analysis. This allowed for an examination of PSF and NWF for first grade students and ORF for second grade students. It should be noted that the DIBELS historical data was used to inform the primary data source for this study and to create focus group questions to be asked during the primary data source collection; the Focus Group meetings. The DIBELS website describes the PSF subtest as follows:

The DIBELS Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF) measure is a standardized, individually administered test of phonological awareness (Kaminski & Good, 1996). The PSF measure assesses a student's ability to segment three- and four-phoneme words into their individual phonemes fluently. The PSF measure has been found to be a good predictor of later reading achievement (Kaminski & Good, 1996). The PSF task is administered by the examiner orally presenting words of three to four phonemes. It requires the student to produce verbally the individual phonemes for each word. For example, the examiner says "sat," and the student says "/s/ /a/ /t/" to receive three possible points for the word. After the student responds, the examiner presents the next word, and the number of correct phonemes produced in one minute determines the final score. The PSF measure takes about 2 minutes to administer and has over 20 alternate forms for monitoring progress. [https://dibels.uoregon.edu/measures/psf.php](https://dibels.uoregon.edu/measures/psf.php), retrieved on August 20, 2011
The DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) measure is a standardized, individually administered test of the alphabetic principle - including letter-sound correspondence in which letters represent their most common sounds and of the ability to blend letters into words in which letters represent their most common sounds (Kaminski & Good, 1996). The student is presented an 8.5” x 11” sheet of paper with randomly ordered VC and CVC nonsense words (e.g., sig, rav, ov) and asked to produce verbally the individual letter sound of each letter or verbally produce, or read, the whole nonsense word. For example, if the stimulus word is "vaj" the student could say /v/ /a/ /j/ or say the word /vaj/ to obtain a total of three letter-sounds correct. The student is allowed 1 minute to produce as many letter-sounds as he/she can, and the final score is the number of letter-sounds produced correctly in one minute. Because the measure is fluency based, students should receive a higher score if they are phonologically recoding the word, as they will be more efficiently producing the letter sounds, and receive a lower score if they are providing letter sounds in isolation. The intent of this measure is that students are able to read unfamiliar words as whole words, not just name letter sounds as fast as they can. The NWF measure takes about 2 minutes to administer and has over 20 alternate forms for monitoring progress. https://dibels.uoregon.edu/measures/nwf.php#description, retrieved on August 20, 2011

The Oral Reading Fluency measure looks at a student’s words per minute reading rate. This is often referred to as reading fluency. At the end of second grade it is hoped that all students would be reading a minimum of ninety words per minute. Teachers used the data from this measure to place students in Literacy Block groups that supported students that needed to build reading fluency and groups that challenged students that scored above the benchmark goals. The DIBELS data base describes the ORF measure as follows:

DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) is a standardized, individually administered test of accuracy and fluency with connected text. The DORF passages and procedures are based on the program of research and development of Curriculum-Based Measurement of Reading by Stan Deno and colleagues at the University of Minnesota and using the procedures described in Shinn (1989).
A version of CBM reading also has been published as The Test of Reading Fluency (TORF) (Children's Educational Services, 1987). ORF is a standardized set of passages and administration procedures designed to (a) identify children who may need additional instructional support, and (b) monitor progress toward instructional goals. The passages are calibrated for the goal level of reading for each grade level. Student performance is measured by having students read a passage aloud for one minute. Words omitted, substituted, and hesitations of more than three seconds are scored as errors. Words self-corrected within three seconds are scored as accurate. The number of correct words per minute from the passage is the oral reading fluency score. DIBELS ORF includes both benchmark passages to be used as screening assessments across the school year as well as 20 alternate forms for monitoring progress. 
https://dibels.uoregon.edu/measures/orf.php#description , retrieved on August 20, 2011

To fully comprehend the DIBELS results used to inform this study it is advantageous to understand the DIBELS grade level benchmark goals. The following table depicts the three period benchmark goals for first grade students measured using the PSF and NWF probes.

Table 4.1 Grade One Benchmark Goals for Three Assessment Periods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Beginning of Year</th>
<th>Middle of Year</th>
<th>End of Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSF</td>
<td>35 and above</td>
<td>35 and above</td>
<td>35 and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWF</td>
<td>24 and above</td>
<td>50 and above</td>
<td>50 and above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second grade benchmark goals for Oral Reading Fluency are depicted in Table 4.2. Similar to PSF and NWF three different benchmarking periods are shown.
Table 4.2  Grade Two Benchmark Goals for Three Assessment Periods

**Grade Two Oral Reading Fluency Benchmark Goals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Beginning of Year Month 1 - 3</th>
<th>Middle of Year Month 4 – 6</th>
<th>End of Year Month 7 – 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ORF</td>
<td>44 and above</td>
<td>68 and above</td>
<td>90 and above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students who meet the benchmark goals are noted as students who are increasing reading skills at a developmentally acceptable rate. It was the goal of Literacy Block to continually support learners who consistently met the benchmark goals, provide support for those who are below the benchmarks, and enrich those students exceeding benchmark goals. The following section will explore the results of the 2007-2010 historical DIBELS data of first grade and second grade students.

**DIBELS Results**

Historical DIBELS data was used to assist this researcher in telling the story of Literacy Block. The data that was collected by teachers at the southeastern Massachusetts primary school and had been entered into the DIBELS data base by some of the Focus Group participants. Also, this historical data had been reviewed by all staff members who were involved with the Literacy Block initiative and the Professional Learning Community that had taken place during the 2009-2010 school years. Knowledge of this data was imperative to fully understand this initiative and how it related to this researcher’s research questions. This researcher gained IRB approval and permission from the school district to access the DIBELS data base and retrieve data for first grade and second grade students who were assessed using the DIBELS measures during the
2007-2008, 2008-2009, and 2009-2010 school years. It was hoped that the DIBELS data would provide a window into the implementation of the Literacy Block and its goal of meeting the needs of all diverse learners.

The DIBELS assessment was used to measure the progress of first and second grade students in three specific areas of learning: first grade, PSF and NWF/CLS, and second grade students ORF skills. Data was analyzed over three different school years: 2007-2008, 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. Each school year consisted of three assessment periods for each skill being measured. In first grade PSF skills were assessed at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year; and NWF and ORF were assessed in the same fashion. Teachers were required to use and implement tools/curricula that were aligned with the Literacy Block goals for all of the three school years. It was hoped that this skill based Literacy Block design would meet the diverse needs of the students. Also, all teachers were required to utilize the DIBELS assessment as a way to monitor student progress. Teachers were given access to the DIBELS data-base at The University of Oregon and were cognizant of grade level benchmarking goals.

**Mean analysis.** When reviewing the data, it should be noted that each school year is independent of the other school years and that each assessment is considered independent. The scores from the DIBELS beginning of the year assessment are independent of the middle of the year as well as the end of the year scores. Tables 4.3 and Table 4.4 summarize the data’s mean data analysis for each assessment over the course of the three years providing the sample size and means for each assessment. Each table summarizes one skill being assessed by DIBELS over the course of the three years that were being studied. The data collected was a sample that is representative of the population. In order to make sure the conclusions from the data are valid...
the sampling must represent the population; in this case all first and seconds graders were participants. This ensures that all subgroups of interest are represented by the data.

Table 4.3  Mean Analysis for Grade One PFS Data

*Grade One Phoneme Segmenting Fluency Means Scores for 2007-2010*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIBELS Grade One PSF</th>
<th>beginning</th>
<th>middle</th>
<th>end</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean score for group</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean score for group</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean score for group</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In an initial look at the mean scores for the first grade DIBELS PSF data there is an overall increase from the beginning to the end in each year the data was collected. In 2007-2008 there was a 38% increase ($M = 44.3$ to $M = 61$). The 2008-2009 showed the largest increase in scores from beginning to the end of a 57% increase ($M = 40.7$ to $M = 63.8$). The final year of the study saw a 30% increase in the PSF mean score ($M = 46$ to $M = 60$). When looking at the mean scores from the middle to the end of the year, the data also shows minimal increase for the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. During the 2007-2008 school year, the scores from the middle to the end of the year show a slight decrease. This minimal progress and slight decrease could be due to fewer Literacy Block lessons during the middle of the school year and the end of the school year. The noted time frame consists of two school breaks and a period of time when Literacy Block was not in session due to state mandated testing requirements. During the state
mandated testing time period Literacy Block was suspended and some of the teachers that were involved in the initiative were asked to proctor the state mandated assessment. Over the course of three years the PSF scores improved from beginning to the end of each school year.

Table 4.4  Mean Analysis for Grade One NWF Data

**Grade One Nonsense Word Fluency Means Scores for 2007-2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIBELS Grade One NWF</th>
<th>beginning</th>
<th>middle</th>
<th>end</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>number of students</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mean score for group</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>63.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>number of students</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mean score for group</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>number of students</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mean score for group</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>63.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the data in the first grade DIBELS NWF assessments show very positive growth in terms of the mean scores. In 2007-2008 the mean score jumps 130% ($M = 34.7$ to $M = 79.9$) and in 2008-2009 we see another impressive increase of 122% ($M = 34.9$ to $M = 77.7$). The trend continued in 2009-2010 which saw a 115% increase in the mean scores ($M = 37.6$ to $M = 81$) for the first grade students. The increase from the middle of the year to the end of the year is not as significant for each year of historical data, but this could be due to the limitation of word types in this measure. For example, students are only give short vowel or cvc words on this measure. At the time when the second benchmark is given, students in grade one have been exposed to long vowel and vowel team phonics patterns. Often, the first grade students begin to read a short
vowel word as a long pattern to show that they are aware of the new skill being taught in their
daily instruction. This could account for the minimal growth in the mid-year to end of the year
benchmark goals seeing that only short vowel nonsense words are included in this assessment.
Overall, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, significant growth is noted.

Table 4.5  Mean Analysis for Grade Two ORF Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIBELS Grade Two ORF</th>
<th>beginning</th>
<th>middle</th>
<th>end</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008 number of students</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean score for group</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>104.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009 number of students</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean score for group</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>90.3</td>
<td>106.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010 number of students</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean score for group</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>106.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The trend of increasing scores continues in the second grade DIBELS ORF skills measure.
During 2007-2008 there was almost a 60% increase in the mean scores ($M = 65.9 \text{ to } M =
104.7$) and in 2008-2009 the scores increased by 61% ($M = 66.1 \text{ to } 106.4$) and again in 2009-
2010 a 53% increase ($M = 69.8 \text{ to } M = 106.9$) from the beginning to the end of the school
year.

It is the belief of this researcher that the increase in scores throughout the year and for the
different DIBELS measures is impressive and shows immense efforts by both the teachers and
the students. The result of this mean analysis was used to inform the research and delve deeper into the analysis of the PET-R and the Focus Group interview results.

**Analysis of variance.** For more extensive analysis this researcher performed the Analysis of Variance (One-way ANOVA) to test if the sample means were significantly different enough from each other to say that these changes would not happen by chance. The ANOVA was performed for each school year and DIBELS assessment testing periods. $M_{\text{Beginning}} = M_{\text{Middle}} = M_{\text{end}}$. If the samples were statistically significant, indicating that at least one mean score was different than the others over the course of the school year, then further analysis was carried out to find where exactly the mean scores differed significantly. Multiple two sample dependent t-Tests were used to do the secondary analysis. This analysis was appropriate for this data to discover that the mean scores from the beginning to middle to end of the year on the DIBELS assessment were significantly different enough based on the variance in scores not just the mean summary statistic. All DIBELS samples were large enough and representative of the population. Even though the samples were not selected randomly, all subgroups of this particular school’s population were represented in these samples. These analyses were done testing the claim that the means between the time periods were equal, and all tests were carried out at the 0.05 significance level.

In the first grade PSF assessment, during the 2007-2008 school year, the one way analysis of variance showed the change in mean scores to be significant, $F(2,179) = 34.61, p < 0.001$. This meant that at least one mean was different from the others, so a closer look at the means showed that the gap in mean scores from the beginning of the year ($M = 44.3, SD = 19.5$) to the middle of the year ($M = 62.2, SD = 9.1$) was a significant change, $t(80) = 6.37, p < 0.001$, so the chance of randomly selecting two samples in the same way this data was collected
and seeing the difference as large as this one would be nearly impossible simply by chance. The chance in means from the middle of the year to the end of the year \( (M = 61, SD = 8.1) \) was not found to be significant, \( t(123) = 0.78, p = 0.44 \). Finally, the change from beginning to end of the school year was found to be statistically significant, \( t(75) = 6.05, p < 0.001 \).

In the 2008-2009 school year, DIBELS data on the PSF assessment of first grade students, the means were found to contain at least one that was not equal to the others, \( F(2,167) = 25.4, p < 0.001 \). The difference between the assessments throughout the year were not all found to be significant; from the beginning \( (M = 40.7, SD = 18.2) \) to the middle \( (M = 62.2, SD = 12.7) \) with the t-test showing significance, \( t(101) = 7.42, p < 0.001 \), and the means from the middle to the end \( (M = 63.8, SD = 8.8) \) of the year were not significantly different, \( t(105) = 0.81, p = 0.42 \). It should be noted that the means from the beginning to the end of the year would be significantly different, \( t(81) = 8.76, p < 0.001 \).

In the 2009-2010 analysis of the DIBELS data on PSF assessment of first grade students’ skills, this researcher’s analysis showed similar results with the previous two years. The one way analysis of variance showed that at least one mean was significantly different from the others, \( F(2,181) = 31.93, p < 0.001 \). With a closer look similar results were found in prior years’ data. The mean scores from the beginning \( (M = 46, SD = 13.8) \) to the middle \( (M = 60.1, SD = 9.9) \) were found to be significantly different, \( t(109) = 6.48, p < 0.001 \). Whereas the change in means from middle to end \( (M = 60, SD = 9.5) \) of the year were not found to be significant, again, \( t(121) = 0.06, p = 0.95 \). The change in mean scores from the beginning of the year to the end was found to be significant, \( t(106) = 6.54, p < 0.001 \).
The following table 4.6 shows the ANOVA data analysis results for first grade PSF data 2007-2010.

Table 4.6 ANOVA for Grade One PFS Data

*Grade One Phoneme Segmenting Fluency Analysis of Variance for 2007-2010*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIBELS Grade One PSF</th>
<th>sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between groups</td>
<td>11883.22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5941.61</td>
<td>34.61</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within groups</td>
<td>30727.87</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>171.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42611.09</td>
<td>181</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between groups</td>
<td>19661.94</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9830.97</td>
<td>52.53</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within groups</td>
<td>30727.87</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>171.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>42611.09</td>
<td>181</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between groups</td>
<td>8049.47</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3124.66</td>
<td>44.59</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within groups</td>
<td>22812.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>30861.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05

The one way analysis of variance was also used to analyze 2007-2008 first grade DIBELS NWF data to see if the mean scores are equal from the beginning \( (M = 34.7, SD = 23.3) \) to the middle \( (M = 63.5, SD = 24.5) \) to the end \( (M = 79.9, SD = 30.8) \). This sample was found to be significant, \( F(2,179) = 44.59, p < 0.001 \). Breaking the data down with a closer look the difference between the beginning of the year and middle of the year was found to be significant, \( t(118) = 6.6, p < 0.001 \), as was the change from the middle to the end of the school year.
\[ t(116) = 3.28, p < 0.01, \] and it follows that the difference from the beginning to the end would also be significant and it was, \[ t(113) = 9.1, p < 0.001. \]

The following two years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 depict the same pattern almost identically when looking at the 1st grade DIBELS NWF measure. Initially the one way analysis of variance was used to look at 2008-2009 school year to see if the mean scores are equal from the beginning \((M = 34.9, SD = 21.8)\) to the middle \((M = 62.5, SD = 27.4)\) to the end \((M = 77.7, SD = 29.9)\). This sample was found to be significant, \(F(2,177) = 39, p < 0.001\). Breaking the data down with a closer look the difference between the beginning of the year and middle of the year was found to be significant, \(t(112) = 6.04, p < 0.001\), as was the change from the middle to the end of the school year, \(t(120) = 2.93, p < 0.01\), and it follows that the difference from the beginning to the end would also be significant and it was, \(t(111) = 8.7, p < 0.001\).

Also, the one way analysis of variance was used to look at 2009-2010 school year data to see if the mean scores were equal from the beginning \((M = 37.6, SD = 23.5)\) to the middle \((M = 63.4, SD = 26.8)\) to the end \((M = 81, SD = 34.1)\). This sample was found to be significant, \(F(2,181) = 39, p < 0.001\). Breaking the data down with a closer look the difference between the beginning of the year and middle of the year was found to be significant, \(t(51) = 4.22, p < 0.001\), as was the change from the middle to the end of the school year, \(t(93) = 2.87, p < 0.01\), and it follows that the difference from the beginning to the end would also be significant and it was, \(t(63) = 6.38, p < 0.001\). The following table notes the ANOVA results for first grade NWF for 2001-2010.
Table 4.7  ANOVA for Grade One NWF Data

* Grade One Nonsense Word Fluency Analysis of Variance for 2007-2010 *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIBELS Grade One NWF</th>
<th>sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>mean square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between groups</td>
<td>62489.32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3124.66</td>
<td>44.59</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within groups</td>
<td>125427.02</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>700.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>187916.34</td>
<td>181</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between groups</td>
<td>55588.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27794.15</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within groups</td>
<td>125442.89</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>712.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>181031.19</td>
<td>179</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between groups</td>
<td>55588.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27794.15</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within groups</td>
<td>125442.9</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>712.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>181031.2</td>
<td>183</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05

The data in the NWF analysis shows that there were significant changes throughout the year and consistently over the three year period. This was not evident in the PSF data. The trend in the PSF data over the three year period showed significant change from the beginning to the middle of the school year, then the change from the middle to the end of the school year assessment was not found to be of significance.

In the final set of data looking at the second grade students DIBELS ORF scores, this researcher carried out the one way analysis of variance then use the two sample t-test to find the significant differences between the means of the three assessments that were taken each year. The analysis started with the 2007-2008 school year using the data from the second grade ORF
DIBELS assessment. The one way analysis of variance showed that the mean scores were significant in this sample, $F(2,211) = 26.53, p < 0.001$. At least one mean from the beginning ($M = 65.9, SD = 31.6$) to the middle ($M = 91.1, SD = 34.3$) to the end ($M = 104.74, SD = 30.9$) of the year is considered to be significantly different than the others. The first t-test between the beginning and the middle showed a significant difference, $t(118) = 6.6, p < 0.001$. Also significant was the difference from the middle to the end of the year for the mean scores, $t(116) = 3.28, p < 0.05$. The analysis then showed that the change in mean score from beginning to the end of the school year were also significant, $t(113) = 9.1, p < 0.001$.

Over the next two school years, 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 this researcher found very similar patterns in the second grade DIBELS ORF data when compared to the 2007-2008 school year. In 2008-2009 the one way analysis of variance found the mean scores from the beginning ($M = 66.1, SD = 30.9$) to the middle ($M = 90.3, SD = 31.1$) to the end ($M = 106.4, SD = 28.8$) of the school year to be significant, $F(2,167) = 25.4, p < 0.001$. In the t-test analysis the change in mean scores from beginning of the year to the middle of the year was found to be significant, $t(113) = 4.19, p < 0.001$. In the t-test from the middle of the year to the end of the year DIBELS ORF assessment the change was also significant, $t(110) = 2.84, p < 0.01$. Lastly, the change in mean scores from beginning to end of the year were also significant, $t(111) = 7.18, p < 0.001$.

In 2009-2010 the one way analysis of variance found the mean scores from the beginning ($M = 69.8, SD = 33$) to the middle ($M = 94, SD = 35.8$) to the end ($M = 106.9, SD = 32.1$) of the school year to be significant, $F(2,163) = 17.34, p < 0.001$. In the t-test analysis the change in mean scores from beginning of the year to the middle of the year was found to be
significant, \( t(107) = 3.69, p < 0.001 \). In the t-test from the middle of the year to the end of the year DIBELS ORF assessment the change was marginally significant, \( t(107) = 2.00, p = 0.0483 \). It follows that the change in mean scores from beginning to end of the year was also significant, \( t(109) = 6, p < 0.001 \). The following table depicts the second grade ANONA ORF analysis.

Table 4.8 ANOVA for Grade Two ORF Data

* Grade Two Oral Reading Fluency Analysis of Variance for 2007-2010*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIBELS Grade Two ORF</th>
<th>sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>mean square</th>
<th>( F )</th>
<th>( p. )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between groups</td>
<td>55340.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27670.25</td>
<td>26.53</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within groups</td>
<td>220045</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>1042.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>187916.34</td>
<td>181</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between groups</td>
<td>46665.23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23332.62</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within groups</td>
<td>153377.7</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>918.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>200042.9</td>
<td>169</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between groups</td>
<td>39299.54</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19649.77</td>
<td>17.34</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within groups</td>
<td>184687.1</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>1133.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>223986.7</td>
<td>165</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05

The progress measured by the DIBELS assessment for the second grade students ORF skills is positive. Over the course of the three year period significant progress from the beginning of the year to the end of the year assessment was made. Based upon the data analysis of the three
different measures, progress that was significant would not just happen by chance. The changes are likely due to some underlying variable that was assisting student learning. This researcher believes that this data shows there is evidence to suggest that the Literacy Block implementation may have assisted student learning. The first grade DIBELS PSF assessment showed that the change from the beginning of the year to the end of the year was of significance, but the change in mean scores from the middle of the year to the end of the year was not significant in any of the three years. The greatest improvement in scores for this assessment happened during the first half of the year. It should be noted that this data was used to inform the researcher and the interview process. It was also used to generate Focus Group questions and help to tell the story of Literacy Block.

**Focus Group Interview**

In May of 2011 the Focus Group participants gathered to answer a battery of open ended questions. The Focus Group meetings were the primary data source for this study. The PET-R and the DIBELS data were used to create focus group interview questions and to inform this researcher about the participants’ beliefs and practices in regard to literacy block. The following questions were asked and the responses were recorded using an Olympus digital recording device:

1. How do you feel about Literacy Block?
2. What do you think the benefits of Literacy Block are?
3. What do you think is not beneficial about Literacy Block?
4. What kind(s) of changes (if any) did you notice with students skills during the implementation of Literacy Block?
5. What is your opinion about the Professional Learning Community focused on Literacy?
6. Do you think the PLC is “working”? Why or why not?
a. Describe the implementation of the PLC and the impact it has had on you in conjunction with the literacy block.

b. What impact, if any, has the PLC had on student learning in conjunction with the literacy block?

7. Do you feel that students that are above grade level have received differentiated literacy instruction during Literacy Block to meet their needs?

8. Do you feel that students below grade level have received differentiated instruction during Literacy Block to meet their needs?

9. Proponents of Literacy Block as a Response to Intervention Model, say it can help improve schools on two fronts – both with early intervention and appropriate assessment/placement in special education. Has Literacy Block affected the process of referring students to receive special education services at Ralph Talbot? If so, can you give examples?

   a. Probe: Do you refer students to receive special education services more frequently, less frequently, or just as frequently as you did before the implementation Literacy Block? Can you explain?

10. Is there anything that we haven’t talked about with regard to the Literacy Block or the Professional Learning Community that would be important to know? (Patton, 2002, p. 379)

   a. Probe: What information does the progress monitoring give you? Does this information change instructional practices?

   b. What are your reactions to our grade level meetings to discuss the results of progress monitoring and the RTI implementation?
Table 4.9 shows the above interview questions and the criteria/element and or the DIBELS data that was used to create the interview questions and inform this researcher’s data analysis. The following coding defines the roman numerals in column two; I: Goals/Objectives/Priorities, II: Assessment, III: Instructional Practices and Materials, IV: Instructional Time, V: Differentiated Instruction/Grouping, VI: Administration/Organization/Communication, VII: Professional, Development. The Pet-R element and or the Dibels data shaped the interview questions. For example, 1. How do you feel about literacy block?; directly relates to all seven of the noted Pet-R elements. The participants’ perspectives in all seven of the areas directly related to their feelings about the initiative. The second questions related to Pet-R elements as well as the data results from the DIBELS. Further explanation is found in the appendix.

Table 4.9  Focus Group Questions and Relate Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Question</th>
<th>PET-R Evaluation Criteria/Element</th>
<th>DIBELS Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.  How do you feel about Literacy Block?</td>
<td>I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII,</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.  What do you think the benefits of Literacy Block are?</td>
<td>I, III, IV, V</td>
<td>Grade one Nonsense Words, Grade one PSF, Grade one ORF, Grade two ORF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.  What do you think is not beneficial about Literacy Block?</td>
<td>I, III, IV, V</td>
<td>Grade one Nonsense Words, Grade one PSF, Grade one ORF,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions and Related Data Sources Used to Create and Inform Focus Group Questions
<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. What kind(s) of changes (if any) did you notice with students skills during the implementation of Literacy Block?</td>
<td>II, V</td>
<td>Grade one Nonsense Words, Grade one PSF, Grade one ORF, Grade two ORF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What is your opinion about the Professional Learning Community focused on Literacy?</td>
<td>VI, VII</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Do you think the PLC is “working”? Why or why not?</td>
<td>I, III, VI, VII</td>
<td>Grade one Nonsense Words, Grade one PSF, Grade one ORF, Grade two ORF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Describe the implementation of the PLC and the impact it has had on you in conjunction with the literacy block.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. What impact, if any, has the PLC had on student learning in conjunction with the literacy block?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do you feel that students that are above grade level have received differentiated literacy instruction during Literacy Block to meet their needs?</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Do you feel that students below grade level have received differentiated instruction during Literacy Block to meet their needs?</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Proponents of Literacy Block as a Response to Intervention Model, say it can help improve schools on two fronts – both with early intervention and appropriate assessment/placement in special education. Has Literacy Block affected the process of referring students to receive special education services at Ralph</td>
<td>II, III, IV, V,</td>
<td>Grade one Nonsense Words, Grade one PSF, Grade one ORF, Grade two ORF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Talbot? If so, can you give examples?

a. Probe: Do you refer students to receive special education services more frequently, less frequently, or just as frequently as you did before the implementation Literacy Block? Can you explain?

10. Is there anything that we haven’t talked about with regard to the Literacy Block or the Professional Learning Community that would be important to know? (Patton, 2002, p. 379)

   a. Probe: What information does the progress monitoring give you? Does this information change instructional practices?
   b. What are your reactions to our grade level meetings to discuss the results of progress monitoring and the RTI implementation?

| I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, Grade one Nonsense Words, Grade one PSF, Grade one ORF, Grade two ORF |
| PSF: Phoneme Segmenting Fluency |
| ORF: Oral Reading Fluency |
| NWF: Nonsense Word Fluency |
Protocols

All twelve participants were present at the meeting and appeared relaxed and eager to participate in the focus group. All of the focus group questions were asked and additional probes were included for the purpose of clarification or expansion of a discussed topic. The meeting was recorded and transcribed. The focus group met for a second time to allow for member checking. Participants were asked to review the transcript and clarify anything that may have been transcribed incorrectly. The transcript was emailed to the participants to review prior to second meeting to allow for ample reflection time. The participants were also given the opportunity to address and restate anything that was transcribed that conflicted with what they truly meant. This researcher again allowed time at the second meeting for participants to read through the transcription and then went page by page through the document allowing each participant to note any changes that needed to be made. Each participant was pleased with the transcription and no changes were made. When all data analysis was complete, the results were shared via e-mail with the participants. The participants were given ample time to read and respond to the data analysis results. Lastly, the participants were given two additional opportunities to meet with the researcher to discuss their reactions to the Focus Group data, DIBELS data, PET-R data and the overall triangulation of the data. None of the participants changed or added to the prior collected data.

Focus Group Results

The Focus Group transcript was entered into the MAXQDA 10 qualitative research software program and coded. During the coding of the transcript, it was evident that some predetermined codes were not needed and that additional codes needed to be included. Due to the use of the MAXQDA 10 system, the codes no longer needed the addition of numerical coding linking back
to the research questions. Although the original coding system was useful for connecting the research questions to the codes, it was not necessary for use with MAXQDA 10. The codes ultimately used were derived from participants’ responses during the focus group meetings. The following codes were entered into the MAXQDA 10 program:

Literacy Block Assessment
ELL Negative
ELL Positive
Literacy Block Achievement
Literacy Block Communication Parents/guardians
Literacy Block Decline
Literacy Block Differentiation
Literacy Block Differentiation Professional Development
Literacy Block Differentiation Planning
Literacy Block Differentiation Resources
Literacy Block Goals Clear
Literacy Block Goals Unclear
Literacy Block Grouping
Literacy Block Grouping Negative
Literacy Block Grouping Positive
Literacy Block Grouping Dynamics
Literacy Blocking Staffing
Literacy Special Education
Professional Learning Community Professional Development
Upon analysis of the data, Table 4.10 shows how many times responses aligned with the codes and were then noted in the Focus group transcription. This researcher found it interesting that certain codes were not mentioned at all during the Focus Group interview.

**Table 4.10**

*Summary of Transcription Coding Frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency of coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Assessment</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL Negative</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL Positive</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Achievement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Communication Parents/guardians</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Decline</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Differentiation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Differentiation Professional Development</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based upon this researcher’s analysis of the transcript, a number of themes emerged from participants comments during the Focus Group interview meetings. Throughout the interview common threads began to surface. This researcher examined the transcripts and with the support of the MAXQDA 10 program the following key themes emerged based upon the frequency of discussion: *Literacy Block Grouping*, *Literacy Block Staffing*, *Literacy Block Assessment*, *Literacy Block Differentiation*, and *Literacy Block Communication and Collaboration*. The following table depicts the thematic reduction that enabled this researcher to unearth the key themes of *Literacy Block Grouping*, *Literacy Block Staffing*, *Literacy Block Assessment*, *Literacy Block Differentiation*, and *Literacy Block Communication and Collaboration*. 
Table 4.11

Summary of Thematic Reduction of Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Code</th>
<th>Thematic Reduction Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Grouping</td>
<td><em>Literacy Block Grouping</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Negative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Positive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Grouping Dynamics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Blocking Staffing</td>
<td><em>Literacy Block Staffing</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Assessment</td>
<td><em>Literacy Block Assessment</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Differentiation</td>
<td><em>Literacy Block Differentiation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Differentiation P.D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Differentiation Planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Differentiation Resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Differentiation P.D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Special Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Community P.D.</td>
<td><em>Literacy Block Communication and Collaboration</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Communication Colleagues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Community group dynamics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Community Leadership Role Principal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Community Resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Community Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Community Collaboration Unstructured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Community Leadership Role Teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Community Structured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Community Student Academic Growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Community Student Academic Growth Decline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Community Student Academic Growth Increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Community Time Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following section will delve deeper into each of these themes.

**Literacy block grouping.** The Focus Group discussion provided much insight into the practices, and beliefs around Literacy Block grouping. Participants discussed how the original grouping based on the Joplin Plan had been changed. Members of the Focus Group articulated that
most recently, students were grouped by skill level and grade level. The original grouping theory had been modeled after the Joplin Plan wherein the students were placed in skill based groups based on assessment data. The students may not have been placed with their grade level peers or a teacher who was assigned to their specific grade level. The students participated in literacy skill lessons with teachers who were most qualified to provide and guide the instruction in accordance with Vygotsky’s theory of the More Knowledgeable Other. Due to limited staffing, the teachers shared that they changed this grouping structure to be based on skill level and grade level only. This change created three groups at each grade level. One educator stated, “I think we looked to starting the year mixing the two grades and then moved back based on feedback that I received.” (Participant 8). The group often spoke about grouping in regard to the numbers of students in certain literacy block groups. One participant stated,

I know the middle group is kind of a mish-mash. I realize that, but with the low groups and the high groups those kids were placed there because that is where they belong. So it might feel overwhelming (having a large number of students) but those kids are there because they need that instruction that you are going to give them for forty-five intense minutes. So for forty-five minutes of their day they are getting what they struggle with according to DIBELS or what they need some work with. I know it would be great if the numbers were, smaller, but at the same time, they are in a group of kids that are struggling with pretty much the same thing. (Participant 2).

One educator shared how the grouping schedule impacted them professionally, “Just the scheduling alone, you have the greatest opportunity of collaboration and differentiation if everyone is doing literacy at the same time…the biggest benefit I can see is that everyone is focused on literacy at the same time.” (Participant 1). A grouping theme that surfaced several times was a reference to returning to the original grouping practice based on the Joplin Plan.

I have twenty-four. I have the high group and I have twenty-four in my group which is more that I have in my regular classroom. So when you are trying to work with twenty-four kids in really forty-five minutes and target all of their needs it is definitely difficult to do that. I think I have been with literacy block
since we started it way back, we were doing it really a more effective way when we first began literacy block. (Participant 10)

Similar to Participant 10’s response, one educator stated, “I had conversations with the second grade teachers, it was clear that in terms of instruction, and it was much sounder to leave the two grades mixed. Instructionally speaking, it seems to be a much more sound practice.” (Participant 8). Another participant shared, “I found when we mixed the groups…they were much more at the same level. It was easier to have that middle group because my first and second graders were all at exactly the same level. I was able to service them all together.” (Participant 9). Another educator shared similar insight when they stated, “I really liked it at the beginning when we did first and second grade (together). I think that really fostered more differentiation in-between the grade levels.” (Participant 3). In response to Participants 3’s comment, another educator shared, “We …find that the groups, because we are not utilizing other people in the building the groups were too big…” (Participant 10). The proposal of returning to the original grouping practice emerged frequently. It appeared that the teachers stopped combining grade levels due to staffing needs and not necessarily the needs of the students. Also, many of teachers were no longer working with groups based upon the educators’ skill sets, but rather the assignments to groups appeared to be based on individual teacher preferences. This researcher also looked further into the theme of Literacy Block Grouping and how educators perceived the practice as positive and negative.

Negative. Based on the MAXQDA 10 analysis several negative statements about Literacy Block Grouping surfaced. Recurrently, a group referred to by the participants as the “middle group” was discussed. Participants shared that students in this group varied with language arts skills so widely that it was very difficult to satisfactorily instruct these students. It was also noted that the group size for many of the groups were too large. One participant stated, “…sometimes the middle group and sometimes even the high group can be in the mid twenties and you are not
accurately targeting those students’ needs if they are in such a big group.” (Participant 11).

Teachers appeared to question their ability to meet the students’ learning needs and they believed that their instruction was inadequate due to the complexity of the group. One participant stated,

…the hard thing that I find is that in the low group we have small numbers and when we break them up by scores (DIBELS) it is a very specific score amount and the same thing with the high group but the middle group seems to be everyone left over and it is tough to give qualified service when the middle group is really at all different levels within that group. (Participant 9)

Repeatedly, members of the focus group shared concerns about group size and the composition of the “middle group”. The next section will discuss the **Literacy Block Grouping Positive findings**.

**Positive.** Throughout the focus group interview process, many positive comments were shared and discussed in regard to **Literacy Block Grouping**. The educators discussed that the literacy block grouping model allowed for differentiation. The differentiation allowed for students who were struggling and for students who needed to be enriched. “I think it is great for the high achievers and the struggling students. We are able to pinpoint exactly what their needs are and service them.” (Participant 9). The teachers also shared that they enjoyed working with students who may not have been in their class or even the grade that they were assigned to. One teacher stated, “I think it is sort of fun for the children to work with another teacher.” (Participant 10). It was evident that a community of learners was developed through the grouping practice. The teachers seemed to feel accountable for their classroom of students as well as the students that they worked with during the literacy block period. Literacy block was not considered to be part of the core reading program and one member teacher shared how the grouping practice allowed her to use her professional knowledge and skills;

I wanted to add that I think the Literacy Block allows you to supplement your core reading program with some of the other materials or training that a lot of teachers have so much training in other programs. You do not usually have the
opportunity to do it during the day with the core program in place. (Literacy Block)…pushes you to differentiated instruction with the kids. (Participant 3)

It was evident that even when the components of the groupings were difficult, the teachers believed in the overall benefit of the initiative;

I know the middle group is kind of a mish-mash. I realize that, but with the low groups and the high groups those kids were placed there because that is where they belong, so it might feel overwhelming, I know because I have done it before …but those kids are there because they need that instruction that you are going to give them for forty-five intense minutes. So for forty-five minutes of their day they are getting what they struggle with according to DIBELS or what they need some work with. I know it would be great if the numbers were smaller, but at the same time they are in a group of kids that are working on the same thing. (Participant 2)

One participant stated that the number of special education referrals for evaluations subsided significantly due to the grouping practice. Many of the participants agreed with this statement and also shared that they looked to the Literacy Block initiative to provide for the students who need intervention and not just the special education department. The focus group meeting unearthed many positive comments about the grouping practices that took place with Literacy Block. It appeared that the grouping practice was most positively thought of when the students were mixed by skill level and not just grade level. Also, the teachers clearly stated that the grouping methodology was meeting the needs of the struggling learners and the advanced learners.

**Literacy block staffing.** Staffing of the Literacy Block initiative emerged as a predominant theme. The group shared that due to enrollment and scheduling challenges the most recent staffing practices were different than what was originally designed for the Literacy Block initiative. In the past, the special education staff and the English language learning staff members were readily available and able to be part of the Literacy Block initiative. Although they still remained members of the staff, some of the teachers were no longer available to take a Literacy Block group,
and others could only see students who had an individual education plan or those who were designated as English Language Learners. Past practice allowed for these staff members to infuse their groups with other students and on varied occasions co-teach with staff members. The loss of these staff members and the limited flexibility with their schedules seems to have stifled the ability to provide instruction in smaller groups. The first and second grade teachers felt the impact of not being able to have students without an individual education plan meet with a special education teacher during the Literacy Block period. This change in practice forced the teachers to create groups that may have been working on similar activities that the special education teachers were doing during Literacy Block. In turn, this increased the number of students in the other groups and limited the teacher’s ability to differentiate. One teacher stated, “We were using our special education teachers, we were using our ELL teachers and our regular classroom teachers and the groups were much smaller and it was much more effective.” (Participant 10). Focus group members responded to this comment,

We tried to not see kids that we had on our case load during the Literacy Block time. It just became impossible to squeeze everything else in. You would be putting sped groups together that did not make sense just to keep your Literacy Block group time open. (Participant 1)

Repeatedly, participants made mention of limited staffing and not utilizing all staff members during the Literacy Block period. Participant 4 shared,

Some of our kids (students on IEP’s) this year should have been included in the Literacy Block. They had made so much progress, but we had to take them as a (special education) group. We need additional staff…If we had more staff that would take care of this problem.

Often when comments were made about the need for additional staff member, participants would shake their head in agreement. This researcher noted that the group seemed to be discouraged and it appeared that they knew how they wanted the Literacy Block to be staffed, but were unable to
carry out the desire due to circumstances out of their control. The following section will delve into the theme of *Literacy Block Assessment*.

**Literacy block assessment.** The use of formative assessment seemed to drive the Literacy Block initiative. The term assessment was mentioned on numerous occasions and it was evident that the members of the focus group were confident and passionate about the assessment initiative at their school. The predominant tool used for placement in the Literacy Block is the Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills.

I think the DIBELS tool guiding our Literacy Block is great, especially the progress monitoring piece. I feel that prior to us doing Literacy Block something that was really missing was constantly reassessing where the kids were and taking the time to do that. (Participant 10)

The focus group shared that the assessment data was vital to planning their instruction. They also felt that the assessment tools provided a resource for helping parents understand their child’s literacy development and the rationale behind placement in particular Literacy Block groups.

A concern that surfaced around the *Literacy Block Assessment* theme was the limited time to engage in data analysis and the need to build this into the Literacy Block practice. One participant shared,

Having the time to analyze the data you do have is a big positive, it also helps you own it...If everyone is more comfortable with the data and interpreting the data, they you would say ok, I think he is better than that, but look where he scored. By doing the test and giving the test if that is what we are using, fidelity, then we will have more confidence with it. (Participant 1)

One participant shared the desire for updated training with the DIBELS tool and many of the focus group members shook their head in agreement. The group also shared that they felt very confident about presenting data about their students when they needed to refer a child to the Student Support Intervention Team (SSIT). The SSIT is comprised of a group of teachers who help support the teacher when a student is having difficulty in class. A teacher must present to the SSIT team in-
order for the student to be evaluated for special education needs. Participants shared that due to assessment data and their knowledge of their students, they feel prepared to support their beliefs about the students and they no longer have to rely on a “gut” feeling. Participant 2 states,

It (assessments) legitimizes your feelings. As educators we all do it for so long you have a gut feeling, even without having the kids sit down to do anything. After doing the DIBELS, after doing Literacy Block, it just kind of says, yes, I was right, or I need to give them more time.

Through the Focus Group interview process, it was evident that participants felt competent about using assessment data. This was an essential component of the Literacy Block initiative. The next section will look at the theme of differentiation.

**Literacy block differentiation.** The theme of differentiation was prevalent in the Focus Group transcript. The initial charge of Literacy Block was embedded in the belief of differentiated instruction and how to best meet the needs of individual learners. A key discovery that emerged from the conversation of the Focus Group was the hesitation to call Literacy Block a tier two intervention under the guidelines of The Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Education Act (IDIEA). In 2004 the IDIEA was revised to include a Response to Intervention (RTI) model. This model typically consists of three tiers. Tier one is mainstream classroom instruction. Tier two refers to additional intervention for students who struggle with the core classroom curriculum, and tier three is intensive services for students who may need alternative learning methodologies. It was evident to this researcher that the practice of differentiation that was taking place during the Literacy Block aligned with tier two of RTI. This researcher found it very interesting that the staff involved in Literacy Block was reluctant to call it tier two RTI differentiation.

I think it has great potential to be the RTI model for literacy at these grades, whether it gets used that way. I think we have been reluctant to claim it as tier two. We are using it but then saying that we have to come up with some RTI…go get it! You have to claim it and use it as such and be able to document the data
that may eventually refer someone for special education or at least make differentiation. (Participant 1)

To completely understand the beliefs of the group, this researcher asked if the Literacy Block was part of their RTI model. One veteran staff member firmly responded that it was their tier two RTI and that support from the special education staff was their tier three level. No member of the Focus Group disagreed with this statement. The Focus group members also shared that the differentiation was well done for the students who were struggling and the students who needed to be challenged. Participant 9 stated, “I feel like the low and the high group (were differentiated), it was the middle group that we all struggled with. Higher groups were able to read novels and do a lot of critical thinking type activities.” It was evident the teachers were comfortable with the idea of differentiated instruction and were doing it well with the students who needed reinforcements and those who needed to be challenged. One educator summed up the groups practice of differentiation by stating,

Instructionally speaking, it seems (Literacy Block) to be a much more sound practice. It seems like all of the feedback that I have received that has been negative has been around staff, number of people. I was concerned that it was comfort zone issues, but you guys have been doing this for so long. It seems like what is really positive is to differentiate instruction. People have let go of the idea that I need my kids, my class, all of the time because I know them better. We know better that that practice is not nearly as effective as differentiated instruction which in our own room is very difficult to do. This (Literacy Block) is differentiated. It is inherent differentiaition. (Participant 8)

The final section will discuss the theme of Communication and Collaboration.

Communication and collaboration. The theme of Communication and Collaboration emerged repeatedly when this researcher asked the Focus Group participants about their participation in a professional learning community (PLC) and in discussions about Literacy Block practices. The Professional Learning Community took place during the 2009-2010 school-year. The PLC focused on Literacy Block and one participant shared,
I think it was good to get together and be able to have discussions about our literacy instruction. I feel that we started a lot of conversations that we never finished once the year ended. But it definitely got me thinking more about what we do in Literacy Block. (Participant 11)

When participants discussed working with colleagues in regard to Literacy Block practices, positives statements emerged;

(In regard to) having your colleagues working with some of your kids (during Literacy Block). Sometimes we get stuck in a rut or your colleague has a different bag of tricks and they will come into your room and they say something to you, and you say I did not think of it that way or I did not see him that way … it definitely makes a difference. (Participant 10)

Participants spoke very positively about collaborating with their peers and learning from each other. Participant 3 shared how the PLC looked into five key areas of reading and how to best implement best practices during Literacy Block. “We were trying to find some different ways to teach it or instruct students in that area and… to see what other people were doing in their rooms.” (Participant 3). It was evident that the PLC was a time for the staff to share ideas and collaborate on best practices around Literacy Block. One area of concern that surfaced was the lack of contractual time for the PLC.

We had a really big issue around time. I think the intent was good, I think that the conversations, everything was headed in the right direction. We ran into an issue with time, how much we can spend together. People were giving more time than, I don’t want to say allowed, but they were going outside of their contractual obligations in terms of time. I think it gets in the way of progress. (Participant 8)

The Focus Group shared that many conversations had been started and were never finished. This was a concern to many members. It appeared that through collaboration and communication the PLC was digging deeper into their Literacy Block practices and then everything halted due to the end of the school year. When this researcher asked if the group would have liked to have continued the PLC all of the Focus Group members responded with a resounding yes. Members
shared that they learned new techniques during the PLC meetings and they believed that their learning impacted the students that they instructed. The results of the Focus Group showed positive results from the PLC, but a need for continued meetings.

The information that was gleaned from the Focus Group meetings was imperative to this study. Through detailed transcription of the meetings and analysis of the final document five key themes emerged. The themes were *Literacy Block Grouping, Literacy Block Staffing, Literacy Block Assessment, Literacy Block Differentiation, and Literacy Block Communication and Collaboration*. Using the PET-R and the DIBELS data to inform the Focus Group meeting data analysis, the following section will summarize the results of this research study.

**Research Findings Summary/Triangulation of Data**

This researcher used three varied data sets to research the practice of Literacy Block. The primary data sets were Focus Group Interviews and in addition the PET-R and the DIBELS data results were used to inform this researcher and delve deeper into the Focus Group transcripts. This researcher conducted the study *Literacy Block: Literacy Instruction and Differentiation* to answer the two following research questions:

1. How does the reorganization of literacy instruction impact teaching and student learning?

   Based on this researcher’s findings, it is evident that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and student learning in several ways.

   The staff members involved with the Literacy Block initiative were confident with their use of assessment to drive the Literacy Block instruction. The results of the PET-R support the *Literacy Block Assessment* theme that emerged as an area of strength from the Focus Group
interview. The element/category of Assessment was the highest ranked area on the PET-R and it was evident from the Focus Group conversations that assessment was used frequently to modify and create Literacy Block groups. Although it was noted that additional training may be helpful, it was evident the use of progress monitoring and benchmark assessment guide the differentiation of instruction.

The theme *Literacy Block Differentiation* is also supported by the results of the PET-R and DIBELS data showed significant student growth for varied benchmarking periods in each of the three data sets. It is evident that the teachers are differentiating instruction and that students are finding success with their literacy skills. A key finding that emerged was the hesitation to claim this differentiation as a tier two practice based the IDIEA Response to Intervention Model. Some participants were more comfortable candidly sharing the belief that this was a tier two model; while other participants nodded their heads in agreement. This researcher found this finding to be enlightening and interesting when viewing this data result through the theoretical lens of Kegan. This speaks to teachers’ efficacy beliefs and the adult learning stage that he or she may be at.

The theme *Literacy Block Communication and Collaboration* emerged from the Focus Group transcription and was supported with a 72% implementation rating using the PET-R. This theme helped to answer the second research question. It was evident to this researcher that the staff could see the importance of communication and collaboration but struggled with the limits of time. It was also noted that through communication and collaboration the staff brought new ideas into their Literacy Block practices. Although they reported the benefits and positive beliefs around this theme, they also stated that it was an area that needed to be improved upon.

The limited number of staff members seemed to significantly impact the practice of Literacy Block. This theme, *Literacy Block Staffing*, emerged repeatedly throughout the Focus Group
interview. Although the three years of DIBELS data did not show lack of student progress, it was evident that the teachers believed that they could greatly improve their ability to differentiate instruction and impact student learning if more staff members were part of the initiative.

The final and most frequently discussed theme was *Literacy Block Grouping*. The Focus Group interview revealed a change in the original Literacy Block grouping practices. Although the teachers initiated this change due to staffing issues, the group clearly articulated a desire to go back to the original grouping format based on the Joplin Plan. The change in the grouping format created larger groups and groups that consisted of students with less homogenous skill sets. This creation led to a group frequently referred to as the “middle” group. The participants shared that the grouping was beneficial for the struggling and advanced students, but the students who were on grade level or not significantly above or below grade level were clustered into one group with great variability as to their literacy needs. The Focus Group believed that returning to the original grouping format may help with the “middle” group issues.

This researcher found two findings to be remarkable. First, the hesitation to claim the literacy block instruction as a tier two model under the IDIEA Response to Intervention Model, and secondly the practice of providing instruction based on teachers’ preferences rather than student needs. Both of these finding lend themselves to analysis based on Kegan’s adult learning theory. It should also be noted that even after sharing the PET-R and DIBELS data results with the participants, none of the participants wanted to change any of their original focus group responses or add additional commentary to the study. This researcher found the satisfaction with the original transcript to be remarkable considering that the shared PET-R and DIBELS data was in conflict with some of the responses of the participants.

Chapter five will look at the discussed findings and the implications of these findings.
Chapter V: Discussion of Research Finding

Chapter five provides a summary of the findings of this study and the implications of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework, implications of the findings for the literature, implications of the findings for research, and lastly implications of the findings for educational practice. This qualitative study gleaned information from Focus Group Interviews. The Focus Group Interviews were the primary data source for this summative program review, and the PET-R and the DIBELS were used to inform the primary data set. Table 4.9 in the appendix portrays how the PET-R and the DIBELS were used to create the focus group questions and inform the primary data source. This study complements existing research in the area of literacy instruction and will add to the literature in the areas of professional learning communities, literacy, and differentiation. Based on this researcher’s analysis, five themes emerged from the data. These five themes focused on grouping practices, assessment, staffing, differentiation, and communication and collaboration.

The purpose of this study was to investigate a literacy initiative called Literacy Block. A qualitative summative program review of literacy instruction and three years of assessment data allowed the staff at a small suburban primary school to see if the differentiated instructional initiative called Literacy Block, met the initial goals and how the initiative impacted student learning in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. Although teachers reported that students had done better since the inception of this initiative, there had never been a systematic program review to verify these allegations. The purpose of this summative program review was to help teachers to better understand their practice and the impact of differentiated instruction. Data gathered through Focus Group Interviews, DIBELS assessment data and a PET-R likert instrument provided answers to the following research questions:
1. How does the reorganization of literacy instruction impact teaching and student learning?

2. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of a professional learning community with a focus on differentiated literacy instruction at the first and second grade level?

Themes

This summative program review revealed five themes and their associated findings. The five themes were Literacy Block Grouping, Literacy Block Staffing, Literacy Block Assessment, Literacy Block Differentiation, and Literacy Block Communication and Collaboration. The themes emerged based upon a thematic reduction of the original coding system using the Focus Group transcription data and were informed by the PET-R and the DIBELS data. To ensure the credibility of this study, member checking was done after the transcription of the focus group and two other times after the study participants were given time to digest the results of the study. Based on the five themes, seven key findings emerged. The following section will explain in detail the major findings of the study.

Findings

The Literacy Block grouping arrangement was initially based on the Joplin Grouping plan (Newport, 1967). Students in grades one and two were assessed using the Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills and then placed in a literacy block group that focused on a targeted skill area. The first and second grade students were mixed by skill need not by grade level, and teachers were assigned to groups based on their qualifications to teach specific skills and not necessarily according to grade level. This created groups that consisted of students in grade one and grade two mixed together. Due to changes in staffing and schedules, the original grouping practice was changed. The most recent grouping practice provided for skill based groups at each grade level and homogeneous clustering of first and second grade students. Due to the change in
the original grouping practice the groups grew in size and teachers did not feel able to meet the literacy needs of all students. The Focus Group participants frequently mentioned a group referred to as the “Middle Group”. Although the teachers initiated this change due to staffing issues, the group clearly articulated a desire to go back to the original grouping format based on the Joplin Plan. The change in the grouping format created larger clusters resulting in a more heterogeneous mix. This contradicted the philosophy that supported the original Literacy Block initiative and created less homogenous leveled groups. This led to a group frequently referred to as the “Middle Group”. The participants shared that the grouping was beneficial for the struggling and advanced students, but the students who were on grade level or not significantly above or below grade level were clustered into one group with great variability as to their literacy needs. The Focus Group believed that returning to the original grouping format may help with the “Middle Group” issues.

- Finding: The size of the “Middle Group” literacy block group hampered with perceived student learning and teacher success.

- Finding: The original grouping plan of Literacy Block may have best met the needs of the students.

The second theme that emerged related to the subject of staffing. The participants in the Focus Group interviews shared stories about a time when the staffing of Literacy Block consisted of at least one more person, and each staff member was assigned to groups based upon student needs rather than staff time constraints. Special education teachers reported only seeing students
on IEPs wherein prior years the students that they worked with during Literacy Block may have or may not have had an individual education plan. The prior practice resembled what the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEAIA) advocated. It was also evident in the focus group transcripts that some staff members were being allowed to choose to work with groups of students based upon their comfort levels rather than what he or she may be skilled in.

- Finding: The staffing of the Literacy Block is crucial to sustaining the initiative, meeting the needs of the diverse learners, and building teachers’ efficacy beliefs.

- Finding: Teachers need to work with students based upon their skills and credentials not solely his or her teaching preferences.

All of the data collected supports that Literacy Block was inherent differentiation. Based on teacher reports, the ability to differentiate instruction was keenly meeting the needs of the struggling learners and the advanced learners. The group that was of concern, consisted of students who were on benchmark and making average strides. Educators have the daunting task of working to meet the needs of all learners. Administrators and teacher training sites need to provide up-to-date professional development that educates teachers about how to meaningfully differentiate instruction and meet the needs of all students.

- Finding: The staff involved in Literacy Block were hesitant to claim this block of literacy instruction as tier two of a Response to Intervention (RTI) model.
Data driven curriculum decision making is imperative in today’s educational system. The Focus Group interview and the two supplemental data sources supported the importance of assessment in this initiative. The participants were well versed in the formative assessment tool that they used, DIBELS, and understood that the placement of the students and the curriculum that they received during Literacy Block hinged on their analysis of the assessment data.

- Finding: The teachers were confident in understanding formative assessment tools and using the data to drive their instruction.

The result of the Focus Group interview and the supporting data sources revealed the importance of communication and collaboration around the implementation and the sustainment of initiatives. Researchers Newmann and Wehlage (1995) as cited in *All Things PLCs*, found that successful schools used PLCs in an effort to create collaborative cultures with the goal of student learning. This researcher found that the inclusion of PLCs assisted teachers to learn from each other, and ultimately benefitted student learning. In this way, best practices were shared and capitalized on.

- Finding: Involvement with a Professional Learning Community (PLC) benefited students and encouraged staff members to look at their own teaching practices and professional development.

**Implications of Findings**

The following section will look at the implications of the findings and how they relate to the theoretical framework, literature, future research and, educational practices.
Implications of Findings for the Theoretical Framework

This doctoral study relied on one theoretical framework informed by the work of Lev Vygotsky and Robert Kegan. Vygotsky’s *Zone of Proximal Development* is essential to understand when looking at student data and literacy instruction. The lens of the ZPD allows for the combination of reactive and proactive teaching methodologies. For example, knowing a student’s literacy needs through formative assessment allows for appropriate reactive lesson planning, while at the same time planning lessons that will allow for the student to develop his or her skills with the support of a *More Knowledgeable Other (MKO).*

The first implication for the theoretical framework was the importance of using formative assessment to inform instructional practices. This was noted in the data and based upon the participants’ responses they too saw the value of understanding the assessment data and using their assessment knowledge to provide a ZPD for the students involved in the Literacy Block initiative.

The second implication noted for the theoretical framework was, the participants expressed their inability to be the MKO when the students’ ranges within the collective group were so vast. The work of Vygotsky was referenced as this researcher noted the participants concerns with the “middle group”. It was evident that the size of the group was a concern to the participants, but also the variety of learning needs of the students. Although the participants did not use the exact terminology, it was evident that Vygotsky’s development theory was relevant to the Literacy Block initiative.

This researcher found two other findings to be remarkable. First, the hesitation to claim the literacy block instruction as a tier two model under the IDEAIA 2004, Response to Intervention Model, and secondly the practice of providing instruction based on teachers’ preferences rather
than student needs. Both of these finding lend themselves to analysis based on Kegan’s adult learning theory and lead to the third implication for the theoretical framework.

Although many of the teachers presented as self-authorizing adults, some of the finding suggest that even though the teachers may be veteran in status, in regard to the Literacy Block initiative, they are still in the instrumental way of knowing and the socializing way of knowing. Teachers developmentally at the instrumental way of knowing level tend to be very concrete. These teachers are willing to support others, but they tend to need to receive support in return. Instrumental way of knowing teachers look for rules to follow and need their own interests to be attended to. When disseminating curriculum to these adults it is imperative to be clear and point out the value of the curriculum for that individual teacher. Teachers who shared their desire to work with Literacy Block groups based upon their own personal comfort level may be associated with this stage of development. Socializing way of knowing teachers need to be affirmed by their peers and administrators that they are moving in the right direction. These adults look to please others and want to be accepted. When disseminating curriculum to these adults it is important to make them feel part of the group. Having them work with or as grade level leaders will help to make them feel valued and allow for feedback when they fear not meeting expectations.

Based upon Focus Group transcripts, some of the participants expressed the desire to be engaging in this initiative the “right way”, and also appeared to need the support of the PLC for personal comfort. The self-authorizing knower is much less needy when compared to the prior developmental stages. These adults can lead school initiatives through conflicts and help others learn from the differences (Drago-Severson, 2004). A few participants presented at this level and emerged during the focus group. They felt comfortable sharing their personal opinions and
stated that the Literacy Block initiative was implemented to meet the needs of the students’ and not necessarily the needs of the teachers.

Some of the variability in the PET-R results may have been due to the differences in the participants’ developmental levels. This belief supports the third implication of the Kegan’s Theory. Although each participant experienced the same initiative; the responses were quite varied. The variation could have been due to the way the individual participants processed the questions at their individual developmental stage.

Implications of Findings for the Literature

Uncertainty surrounding best practices and lack of differentiated skilled literacy instruction significantly impacts student acquisition of literacy skills. Catherine Snow explains the importance of understanding best literacy practices and the art of differentiation in Preventing Reading Disabilities in Young Children (1998). This research report notes,

…effective teachers are able to craft a special mix of instructional ingredients for every child they work with. But it does mean that there is a common menu of materials, strategies, and environments from which effective teachers make choices…, as a society, our most important challenge is to make sure that our teachers have…the knowledge required to use them well. (p. 3)

If students’ literacy needs are not met at an early age, school districts could see high rates of special education referrals, teachers may continue to use undifferentiated ineffective teaching methods, and students may be inaccurately labeled as learning disabled. All of these scenarios financially burden school districts and ultimately impact students’ future occupational success (Lyon, 2009). Two findings that confirmed the literature on literacy instruction and the literature on Professional Learning Communities were, involvement with a Professional Learning Community (PLC) benefited students and encouraged staff members to look at their own teaching practices and professional development, and the teachers were confident in
understanding formative assessment tools and using the data to drive their instruction. The first implication of this finding that supports the literature is that when teachers use formative assessment to drive their instruction, they are better able to create instruction that target individual student needs. Keith Stanovich (1986, 2003) supports the idea of meeting students literacy needs at a young age if teachers are to remedy long term literacy problems.

The second implication of findings in support of the literature is, involvement with a Professional Learning Community (PLC) benefited students and encouraged staff members to look at their own teaching practices and professional development. Hord, (1997); Lee, Smith and Croninger, (2008) found that teachers involved in PLC work changed classroom pedagogy. This change in pedagogy led to gains in math, science, history, and reading when compared to students in traditionally organized settings (Hord, 1997.) This study revealed that the participants believed that they too changed classroom pedagogy and methodologies while involved in their PLC.

It should be noted that this study did not reveal any findings that did not support the current literature on literacy instruction and Professional Learning Communities.

**Implications of Findings for Research**

The seven key findings in this research study do not signify an end, but rather a starting point for future research endeavors. The following sections will touch upon different topics in relation to the study’s findings and implications for future research.

The first implication of the finding for research is; future research would be beneficial in the area of Adult Learning Theory and how the various stages influence students’ academic progress. Literacy Block requires skillful leadership that does not bend solely to the needs of the practitioners, but rather the needs of the students and the practitioners simultaneously. Teachers
need to adjust to the requirements of their students and not modify curriculum or academic practices because of their individual comfort level or personal desires. Also, this finding relates directly to the developmental level of adults and how less developmentally actualized adults may not be the key drivers of change.

The second implication of the findings for research is; future research in the area of curriculum implementation and fidelity to curriculum with limited financial resources may shed light on the ability to sustain curriculum initiatives. Administrators and policy makers need to be keenly aware of providing schools with the tools required to implement and sustain initiatives with fidelity and pride. Slowly stripping away much needed resources dilutes the efficacy of programs, and the belief system of those involved. Administrators must be able to make the difficult decision of assigning teachers to work with students based on a teacher’s credentials and not just his or her preferences.

The third implication of finding for research is; future research in models of Response to Intervention initiatives in settings with limited staffing would be beneficial. When new mandates are set in place, it does not mean that a new system needs to be created. Teachers and administrators need to look at what they have in place and to see if their current practices align with new mandates and empower teachers to claim what they set into motion and be confident about their practices. The hesitation to claim the Literacy Block initiative as a component of the school’s RTI model was baffling to this researcher.

The fourth implication for the findings for research is the importance of using data to inform curriculum decisions. Teachers can no longer make important decisions based on “feelings” and “hunches”. For any literacy initiative to meet the needs of diverse learners it is imperative to have a solid assessment system that is valid and reliable.
The last implication for the findings for research involves current research on PLCs. It would be beneficial to investigate how school districts have creatively found time within contractual limits for PLC efforts in a variety of school districts. Administrators need to incorporate the use of PLCs and foster a culture of communication and collaboration. Teachers need to participate in these learning communities and move away from isolation that so often lives in the education profession. The use of PLCs will build resources in the realm of action research while empowering educators to see the benefits of communication and collaboration.

**Implications of Findings for Practice**

This summative program review revealed important data and possible implications that should be taken into consideration for future planning at this small primary school in Southeastern Massachusetts and for other schools that have embarked on similar literacy initiatives. It was evident from all data sources that staff involved in the Literacy Block viewed assessment as a strength and an important component to ensure for differentiation. Their use of benchmark assessments and progress monitoring tools provided data that they confidently used to provide differentiated instruction for their students.

The first implication for practice is, administrators need to continually ensure that educators are able use assessment tools and their findings to plan for student learning. Secondly, there needs to be a fidelity to the data system and a broad understanding of what the results mean for curriculum planning and student learning.

The data results around the practice of grouping unearthed two different findings. First, the participants saw the need to rethink their current grouping practices, and secondly the need to address the “middle group” at the first and second grade level. This group was too large and the academic needs were too broad for teachers to feel confident that their instructional practices
were impacting student achievement. Although, DIBELS means analysis data showed growth for each of the three year periods from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, the teachers did not feel that they were fully meeting the needs of the students in that particular Literacy Block grouping. It should be noted that even after participants were aware of the data results, they did not want to change what they originally reported in the focus group interview. The group of students referred to as the “middle group” group was too large in size and the range and scope of the literacy requirements were too broad to adequately meet the needs of these learners. For practitioners and administrators this information is crucial.

The third implication of the findings for practice is, if the original grouping methods were most effectively meeting the learning needs of the students then it would be beneficial for the teachers and administrators to return to this original grouping practice. It was evident that there were barriers to easily returning to this original grouping practice, but this is a key finding that needs to be addressed if students are to receive the best instruction possible. The original practice of heterogeneous grouping of the first and second grade students based on their literacy needs, best met the learning needs of the students. Also, the Focus Group shared the need to return to the original grouping plan if they were to truly differentiate instruction and better meet the needs of the students.

The fourth implication of findings for practice is the understanding that special education and ELL staff members need to be allowed to see students that may not be on individual education plans and or co-teach groups with teachers. Also, this implication relates directly to Vygotsky and how the socio-cultural backgrounds of the students need to be taken into consideration when planning instruction and Literacy Block groupings. The support of the ELL and special education staff would be very useful when looking at the socio-cultural differences and how they impact
instruction. Data results around the area of staffing showed that the limited amount of staff and the limited use of special education staff members negatively impacted the Literacy Block. The Focus Group repeatedly shared that many of the difficulties that they experienced with Literacy Block would be solved if staffing limitations were addressed. The addition of staff members may also be a way to solve some of the reported staffing issues. The change in the original staffing model eroded the foundational beliefs behind the initiative. Staffing of any initiative is imperative. Is was evident that the Literacy Block initiative was not properly functioning due to limited staff and staffing constraints. The teachers reported that they felt ineffective. Many teachers reported that they knew what to do in regard to literacy instruction, but the current constraints were not allowing them to make effective progress. Although the DIBELS data did show that growth was made, the efficacy beliefs of the teachers began to wane. Also, teachers need to be assigned to teach students that they are skilled at teaching.

The fifth implication of findings for practice has to do with linking teaching credential with student needs. Although staff members may enjoy working with certain students based on the students’ skill sets, the teachers must be willing to teach students that need a certain methodology that a teacher may be qualified to teach. Administrators need to ensure that all educators understand the RTI initiative and allow teachers to own and embrace current practices that meet the definition of tier one, tier two, and tier three practices under the IDEAIA, 2004.

The final implication for consideration is the use of embedded professional development in the form of a Professional Learning Community. The Focus Group Interview revealed the desire and the importance for the continuation of the PLC at this particular school. The participants felt that the PLC helped build their professional knowledge base, allowed for collaboration with their peers, and enhanced student learning. The desire for more professional development was also
noted in the PET-R results. The idea of working as a community of learners with the goal to meet students’ learning needs was refreshing and desirable for the participants. Teachers reported that their involvement with the Professional Learning Community (PLC) benefited the students they worked with and encouraged them to look at their own teaching practices and professional development. Time impacted the continuation of the PLC, but teachers expressed the desire to begin another PLC. Participants wanted to continue conversations that were not fully articulated due to time constraints of the former PLC. It was also noted that professional development around the Literacy Block initiative was minimal. The continuation of the PLC would support the staffs’ yearning for professional development opportunities and quench their thirst for knowledge.

**Conclusion**

Professional learning communities have existed in many countries for hundreds of years. Although the name may have been different, the focus has been the same. Student achievement, through adult collaborative efforts, is the essence of PLC work. The United States has only begun to embrace the possibilities of PLCs. These efforts have shown growth for students as well as adults. Students see the democratic process in action while experiencing gains in mathematics and literacy skills (Grunert, 2005). Adults feel part of a community of learners. This community supports future leadership skills and a sense of collegial support. Although research has found some PLC learning to be reconstructive rather than reformative (Servage, 2008), a vast body of research supports the implementation of professional learning community efforts.
Other countries have understood the benefits of PLCs for many years, but in the United States comprehensive research did not begin to surface until 1995. At that time, Newmann and Wehlage (1995) used predominantly quantitative research from 1,200 schools to assert:

"The most successful schools were those that used restructuring tools to help them function as professional learning communities." They clarified that in these schools educators: 1. engaged in a collective effort to achieve a clear, commonly shared purpose for student learning. 2. created a collaborative culture to achieve the purpose. 3. took collective -- rather than individual -- responsibility for the learning of all students. (Newmann & Wehlage as quoted in PLC History, paragraph 5)

As well as quantitative and qualitative research, PLC work frequently contributes to action research. Action research is difficult to disseminate and locate for future research purposes (Enns, 2008). Many of these research studies are not disseminated and remain hidden to the professional community. Researchers need to be cognizant of this potentially untapped body of “hidden research” (Enns, p.432), that may support and add to future research projects.

Understanding how teacher training programs are educating tomorrow’s teachers for participation in professional learning communities, is an area where further research is needed. Additional research may focus on other academic areas such as literacy block models, social skill areas, long term effects of PLCs in regard to student efficacy, administrator efficacy, teacher efficacy, and the effects of PLCs on retention of new teachers.

In a world where isolation has been the norm for hundreds of years, education is ready for a change. In order to prepare students for the unknown future, teachers must work together to find the best solutions and practices. Working alone only allows for a limited viewpoint. The practice of collaboration allows for learning opportunities reaching beyond the stretch of one single imagination. This collaborative process often produces more questions than answers, but it can also lead to student achievement. Through a quantitative analysis of thirty years of research,
in 2003 Waters, Marzano and McNulty found that schools collaboratively focusing on most needed practices can change assessment data result from a 50% passing rate to a 72% passing rate. This research is not only enlightening, but also promising for the work of PLCs. It is clear that professional learning communities have much to offer for students, teachers and the future of the United States. It is about time that teachers in the United States begin this journey. It is a journey well worth the collaborative efforts and full of possibilities for the future of literacy instruction.

Literacy skills are the foundation of all academic work and future learning. Years of research has shown that young students who are not given the appropriate differentiated reading instruction fall further behind and stay behind their peers even when remediation is given (Stanovich, 1986, Lyons, 2009). In many communities, students are being over identified for special education services. As a result, the regular education population lacks funding that is channeled into special education services. To ensure that teachers meet the literacy needs of all learners, teachers need to understand literacy research, become skilled at implementing best literacy practices, and implement differentiated literacy instruction. It is the hope of this researcher that administrators and teachers will rise to collaborate, differentiate and meet the literacy needs of all learners. If schools are to provide the education each and every child deserves, they must act now before it is too late.
References


DuFour, R., (2004). What is a “professional learning community”? Schools as Learning Communities, 61(8), 6-11.


Appendices

Appendix A

Focus Group Questions:

2. How do you feel about Literacy Block?

3. What do you think the benefits of Literacy Block are?

4. What do you think is not beneficial about Literacy Block?

5. What kind(s) of changes (if any) did you notice with students skills during the implementation of Literacy Block?

6. What is your opinion about the Professional Learning Community focused on Literacy?

7. Do you think the PLC is “working”? Why or why not?
   a. Describe the implementation of the PLC and the impact it has had on you in conjunction with the literacy block.
   b. What impact, if any, has the PLC had on student learning in conjunction with the literacy block?

8. Do you feel that students that are above grade level have received differentiated literacy instruction during Literacy Block to meet their needs?

9. Do you feel that students below grade level have received differentiated instruction during Literacy Block to meet their needs?

10. Proponents of Literacy Block as a Response to Intervention Model, say it can help improve schools on two fronts – both with early intervention and appropriate assessment/placement in special education. Has Literacy Block affected the process of referring students to receive special education services at Ralph Talbot? If so, can you give examples?
a. Probe: Do you refer students to receive special education services more frequently, less frequently, or just as frequently as you did before the implementation Literacy Block? Can you explain?

11. Is there anything that we haven’t talked about with regard to the Literacy Block or the Professional Learning Community that would be important to know? (Patton, 2002, p. 379)

   a. Probe: What information does the progress monitoring give you?
      Does this information change instructional practices?
   b. What are your reactions to our grade level meetings to discuss the results of progress monitoring and the RTI implementation?
Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs - Revised

School: ___________________________ Date: _____________

Position (check one):

Administrator
Teacher
Paraprofessional/Educational Assistant
Grade Level Team

Current Grade(s) Taught (if applicable):

Kindergarten
First
Second
Third

Years of Teaching Experience: __________

Years at Present School: __________

Directions

Based on your knowledge of your school’s reading program (e.g., goals, materials, allocated time), please use the following evaluation criteria to rate your reading program’s implementation.

Each item has a value of 0, 1, or 2 to indicate the level of implementation (see below). Please note that some items are designated with a factor, (e.g., x 2). Items with this designation are considered more important in the overall reading program. Multiply your rating by the number in parentheses and record that number in the blank to the left of the item.

In the right-hand column of the table, document evidence available to support your rating for each item.

Levels of Implementation Description

0 = Not in place
1 = Partially in place
2 = Fully in place
### Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs

#### Internal/External Auditing Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not in place</td>
<td>Partially in place</td>
<td>Fully in place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### EVALUATION CRITERIA | DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE

1. **Goals, Objectives, Priorities** – Goals for reading achievement are clearly defined, anchored to research, prioritized in terms of importance to student learning, commonly understood by users, and consistently employed as instructional guides by all teachers of reading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals and Objectives:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>_____ 1. are clearly <strong>defined</strong> and <strong>quantifiable</strong> at each grade level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ 2. are articulated across grade levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ 3. are prioritized and dedicated to the essential elements (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) in reading (x 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ 4. guide instructional and curricular decisions (e.g., time allocations, curriculum program adoptions) (x 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ 5. are commonly understood and consistently used by teachers and administrators within and between grades to evaluate and communicate student learning and improve practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_____ /14 Total Points     _____

_____ %
### EVALUATION CRITERIA | DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE

### II. Assessment – Instruments and procedures for assessing reading achievement are clearly specified, measure essential skills, provide reliable and valid information about student performance, and inform instruction in important, meaningful, and maintainable ways.

#### Assessment:

1. A schoolwide assessment system and database are established and maintained for documenting student performance and monitoring progress (x 2).

2. Measures assess student performance on prioritized goals and objectives.

3. Measures are technically adequate (i.e., have high reliability and validity) as documented by research.

4. All users receive training and follow-up on measurement administration, scoring, and data interpretation.

5. At the beginning of the year, screening measures identify students' level of performance and are used to determine instructional needs.
6. Progress monitoring measures are administered formatively throughout the year to document and monitor student reading performance (i.e., quarterly for all students; every 4 weeks for students at risk).

II. Assessment continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>_______ 7. Student performance data are analyzed and summarized in meaningful formats and routinely used by grade-level teams to evaluate and adjust instruction (x 2).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_______ 8. The building has a “resident” expert or experts to maintain the assessment system and ensure measures are collected reliably, data are scored and entered accurately, and feedback is provided in a timely fashion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

______/20 Total Points   _____ %

Percent of Implementation:
10 = 50%  16 = 80%  20 = 100%
III. **Instructional Programs and Materials** - The instructional programs and materials have documented efficacy, are drawn from research-based findings and practices, align with state standards and benchmarks, and support the full range of learners.

1. A comprehensive or core reading program with documented research-based efficacy is adopted for use school wide (x 3).

2. The instructional program and materials provide explicit and systematic instruction on critical reading priorities (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) (x 2).

3. The instructional materials and program align with and support state standards/scientifically based practices and provide sufficient instruction in essential elements to allow the majority of students to reach learning goals.

4. Supplemental and intervention programs of documented efficacy are in place to support students who do not benefit adequately from the core program (x 2).

5. Programs and materials are implemented with a high level of fidelity (x 3).

___/22 Total Points  ___%  

**Percent of Implementation:**  
11 = 50%  18 = 80%  22 = 100%
### EVALUATION CRITERIA

#### IV. Instructional Time

- A sufficient amount of time is allocated for instruction and the time allocated is used effectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documentation of Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A schoolwide plan is established to allocate sufficient reading time and coordinate resources to ensure optimal use of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reading time is prioritized and protected from interruption (x 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Instructional time is allocated to skills and practices most highly correlated with reading success (i.e., essential elements of reading including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students in grades K-3 receive a minimum of 30 minutes of small-group teacher-directed reading instruction daily (x 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Additional instructional time is allocated to students who fail to make adequate reading progress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

/14 Total Points

Percent of Implementation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
V. **Differentiated Instruction/Grouping/Scheduling** - Instruction optimizes learning for all students by tailoring instruction to meet current levels of knowledge and prerequisite skills and organizing instruction to enhance student learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Student performance is used to determine the level of instructional materials and to select research-based instructional programs.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Instruction is provided in flexible homogeneous groups to maximize student performance and opportunities to respond.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. For children who require additional and substantial instructional support, tutoring (1-1) or small group instruction (&lt; 6) is used to support teacher-directed large group or whole class instruction.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Group size, instructional time, and instructional programs are determined by and adjusted according to learner performance (i.e., students with greatest needs are in groups that allow more frequent monitoring and opportunities to respond and receive feedback).</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Cross-class and cross-grade grouping is used when appropriate to maximize learning opportunities.</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not in place</td>
<td>Partially in place</td>
<td>Fully in place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

________/10 Total Points   ______%
### EVALUATION CRITERIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VI. Administration/Organization/Communication</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong instructional leadership maintains a focus on high-quality instruction, organizes and allocates resources to support reading, and establishes mechanisms to communicate reading progress and practices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1. Administrators or the leadership team are knowledgeable of state standards, priority reading skills and strategies, assessment measures and practices, and instructional programs and materials. | |
| 2. Administrators or the leadership team work with staff to create a coherent plan for reading instruction and implement practices to attain school reading goals. | |
| 3. Administrators or the leadership team maximize and protect instructional time and organize resources and personnel to support reading instruction, practice, and assessment. | |
| 4. Grade-level teams are established and supported to analyze reading performance and plan instruction. | |
| 5. Concurrent instruction (e.g., Title, special education) is coordinated with and complementary to general education reading instruction. | |
| 6. A communication plan for reporting and sharing student performance with teachers, parents, and school, district, and state administrators is in place. | |
### EVALUATION CRITERIA

**VII. Professional Development** - Adequate and ongoing professional development is determined and available to support reading instruction.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>_____1. Teachers and instructional staff have thorough understanding and working knowledge of grade-level instructional/reading priorities and effective practices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____2. Ongoing professional development is established to support teachers and instructional staff in the assessment and instruction of reading priorities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____3. Time is systematically allocated for educators to analyze, plan, and refine instruction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____4. Professional development efforts are explicitly linked to practices and programs that have been shown to be effective through documented research.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

### Percent of Implementation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Points</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 = 50%</td>
<td>6.5 = 80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

****
Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs

Individual Summary Score

Directions: Return to each element (e.g., goals; assessment) and total the scores at the bottom of the respective page. Transfer each element's number to the designated space below. Sum the total scores to compute your overall evaluation of the schoolwide reading program. The total possible value is 100 points. The total score can be used to evaluate the overall quality of the school's reading program.

Evaluate each element to determine the respective quality of implementation. For example, a score of 11 in Goals/Objectives/Priorities means that in your estimation the school is implementing approximately 80% of the items in that element.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Goals/Objectives/Priorities</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Assessment</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Instructional Practices and Materials</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Instructional Time</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Differentiated Instruction/Grouping</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Administration/Organization/Communication</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Professional Development</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Score</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs

**School Summary Score**

**Calculating Average Schoolwide Element Scores:** Enter each individual's score by element on the following table. Sum down each column and divide by the number of participants to achieve an average school score for each element.

Calculate the proportion of total points for each element by dividing the average element score by the total possible points. This will provide the percentage of total points earned for each element.

**Calculating Average Schoolwide Overall Scores.** Enter the total scores of each individual in the designated space. Sum across the Total row and divide by the number of participants to achieve an average overall score for the school.
### Average Schoolwide Overall Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Goals I</th>
<th>Assessment II</th>
<th>Instr. Pract. III</th>
<th>Instr. Time IV</th>
<th>Grouping V</th>
<th>Admin. VI</th>
<th>Prof. Dev. VII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Points Possible**

|       | 14 | 20 | 22 | 14 | 10 | 12 | 8 |

**Percentage of Total Points**
1. Based on the schoolwide summary scores for each element and the average total schoolwide score, identify the areas of strength. Strengths may be based on elements or on specific items within elements.

2. List each element and specific items within each element that are in need of further development.
**Reading Action Plan (RAP)**

Name of School, District ____________________________  City, State ____________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Goals and Priorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1. What:** ____________________________  
|  ____________________________  
| Who: ____________________________  
| When: ____________________________  |
| **2. What:** ____________________________  
|  ____________________________  
| Who: ____________________________  
| When: ____________________________  |
| **3. What:** ____________________________  
|  ____________________________  
| Who: ____________________________  
| When: ____________________________  |
Who: 

When: 

Committee Members

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adopted by School Staff on: 

Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective School-wide Reading Programs-Revised (PET-R)
document is available for viewing at http://dibels.uoregon.edu/resources.edu/news.php#ed_use

Edward J. Kame’enui, Ph.D.

Deborah C. Simmons, Ph.D.

Institute for the Development of Educational Achievement

College of Education University of Oregon Revised May, 2003

### Appendix C

#### Table 3.1

**Research Questions and Related Theme and Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How does the reorganization of literacy instruction impact teaching and student learning?</td>
<td>1. Differentiation</td>
<td>1-1. LBD (Literacy Block Differentiation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Grouping</td>
<td>1-1. LBDP (Literacy Block Differentiation Planning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Achievement</td>
<td>1-1. LBDR (Literacy Block Differentiation Resources)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Decline academics</td>
<td>1-1. LBDPD (Literacy Block Differentiation Professional Development)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Goals</td>
<td>1-2. LBG (Literacy Block Grouping)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Assessment</td>
<td>1-2. LBGD (Literacy Block Grouping Dynamics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Communication</td>
<td>1-3. LBA (Literacy Block Achievement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1-4. LBDA (Literacy Block Decline in Academics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1-5. LBGC (Literacy Block Goals Clear)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1-5. LBGU (Literacy Block Goals Unclear)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1-6. LBAS (Literacy Block Assessment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1-7. LBCC (Literacy Block Communication Colleagues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1-7. LBCP (Literacy Block Communication Parents/Guardians)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of professional learning communities with a focus on literacy instruction at the first and second grade levels?</td>
<td>1. Time management</td>
<td>2-1. PLCTM (Professional Learning Community Time Management)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Collaboration</td>
<td>2-2. PLCC (Professional Learning Community Collaboration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Student Academic Growth</td>
<td>2-2. PLCCS (Professional Learning Community Collaboration Structured)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Leadership Role</td>
<td>2-3. PLCSAG (PLC Student Academic Growth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Professional Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Group Dynamics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2-3. PLCSAGI (PLC Student Academic Growth Increase)
2-3 PLCSAGD (PLC Student Academic Growth Decline)
2-4. PLCLR (PLC Leadership Role)
2-4PLCLRT (PLC Leadership Role Teacher)
2-4 PLCLRP (PLC Leadership Role Principal)
2-5. PLCPD (PLC Professional Development)
2-6. PLCR (PLC resources)
2-7. PLCGD (PLC Group Dynamics)

*Note: adapted from Myles and Huberman, 1994, p.56*
## Appendix D

### Table 3.2

**Research Question and Data Sources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How does the reorganization of literacy instruction impact teaching and student learning?</td>
<td>Assessment Results</td>
<td>Teachers (Grade one and two and special education), Student DIBELS data, PET-R (Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective School-wide Reading Programs) data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher questionnaire/ Focus Group Interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of professional learning communities with a focus on literacy instruction at the first and second grade levels?</td>
<td>Focus Group Interview</td>
<td>Teachers (Grade one and two and special education), Principal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Table 3.3

**DIBELS Reliability and Validity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Alternate-form reliability, Concurrent criterion validity</th>
<th>Alternate-form reliability, Concurrent criterion reliability, Predictive validity</th>
<th>Alternate-form reliability, Median criterion validity, Predictive validity</th>
<th>Median alternate form reliability, Concurrent validity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Sound Fluency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoneme Segmentation Fluency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsense Word Fluency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Naming Fluency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Reading Fluency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3.4: DIBELS Research by Sub-Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Validity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)</td>
<td>*(Kaminski &amp; Good, 1996).</td>
<td>The PSF measure has been found to be a good predictor of later reading achievement</td>
<td>The two-week, alternate-form reliability for the PSF measure is .88*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>**(Good et al., 2004).</td>
<td></td>
<td>The predictive validity of spring-of-kindergarten PSF with (a) winter-of-first-grade DIBELS NWF is .62, (b) spring-of-first-grade Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery total Reading Cluster score is .68, and (c) spring-of-first-grade CBM ORF is .62 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The DIBELS Initial Sound Fluency (ISF)</td>
<td>(Kaminski &amp; Good, 1996, 1998; Laimon, 1994)</td>
<td>assesses a child's ability to recognize and produce the initial sound in an orally presented word</td>
<td>The predictive validity of OnRF with respect to spring-of-first-grade reading on CBM ORF is .45, and .36 ** with the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery Total Reading Cluster score This test repeated 4 times results in an average reliability of .91***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Good et al., 2004)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Nunnally, 1978)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)</td>
<td>Marston and Magnusson (1988)</td>
<td>Assesses a child's ability to name as many upper and lower case letters on a given page in 1 minute</td>
<td>The predictive validity of kindergarten LNF with first-grade Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-Revised Reading Cluster standard score is .65 and .71 with first-grade CBM reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*(Good et al., 2004).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)</td>
<td>*(Kaminski &amp; Good, 1996).</td>
<td>test of the alphabetic principle - including letter-sound correspondence in which letters represent their most common sounds and of the ability to blend letters into words in which letters represent their most common sounds</td>
<td>The one-month, alternate-form reliability for NWF in January of first grade is .83 * The concurrent criterion-validity of DIBELS NWF with the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-Revised Readiness Cluster score is .36 in January and .59 in February of first grade **The predictive validity of DIBELS NWF in January of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
first grade with (a) CBM ORF in May of first grade is .82, (b) CBM ORF in May of second grade is .60, (c) Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery Total Reading Cluster score is .66 (Good et al., 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)</th>
<th>* (Tindal, Marston &amp; Deno, 1983). **(Good &amp; Jefferson, 1998).</th>
<th>The number of correct words per minute from the passage is the oral reading fluency score. Test-retest reliabilities for elementary students ranged from .92 to .97; alternate form reliability of different reading passages drawn from the same level ranged from .89 to .94. *Criterion-related validity studied in eight separate studies in the 1980’s reported coefficients ranging from .52 to .91. **</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Retell Fluency (RTF) | The purpose of the RTF measure is to (a) prevent inadvertently learning or practicing a misrule, (b) identify children whose comprehension is not consistent with their fluency, (c) provide an explicit linkage to the core components in the NRP report, and (d) increase the face validity of the ORF. Preliminary evidence indicates for students to be on track with comprehension, they should meet both of the following criteria: 1) meet the oral reading fluency benchmark goal, and 2) have a retell score of at least 25% of their oral reading fluency score. Retell Fluency should be administered to students who are reading at least 40 words per minute. | Appendix F

The asterisks note the research study in column two and the relation to the validity information in column four.
*(Kaminski & Good, 1996), **(Good et al., 2004), ***(Nunnally, 1978)
Appendix G

DIBELS Data Analysis

t-test DIBLES 1st grade PSF data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beginning to middle</th>
<th>Middle to end</th>
<th>Beginning to end</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2007-2008</strong></td>
<td>t-stat</td>
<td>-6.37</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>df</td>
<td>80.26</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p-value</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2008-2009</strong></td>
<td>t-stat</td>
<td>-7.42</td>
<td>-0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>df</td>
<td>101.55</td>
<td>104.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p-value</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2009-2010</strong></td>
<td>t-stat</td>
<td>-6.48</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>df</td>
<td>108.83</td>
<td>120.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p-value</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
t-test DIBLES 1st grade PSF data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>t-stat</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>t-stat</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>t-stat</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>-6.37</td>
<td>80.26</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>-6.05</td>
<td>75.15</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>-7.42</td>
<td>101.55</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>-0.81</td>
<td>81.04</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>-8.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>-6.48</td>
<td>108.83</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>106.27</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>-6.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

t-test DIBLES 1st grade NWF/CLS data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>t-stat</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>t-stat</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>t-stat</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>-6.6</td>
<td>117.97</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>-3.28</td>
<td>116.12</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>-9.1</td>
<td>113.17</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>-6.04</td>
<td>111.61</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>-2.93</td>
<td>119.65</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>-8.97</td>
<td>111.38</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>-5.65</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>-3.18</td>
<td>115.39</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>-8.23</td>
<td>108.42</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### t-test DIBLES 2nd grade ORF data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beginning to middle</th>
<th>Middle to end</th>
<th>Beginning to end</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>t-stat: -4.55</td>
<td>-2.49</td>
<td>-7.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>df: 139.06</td>
<td>139.06</td>
<td>140.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p-value: &lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>t-stat: -4.19</td>
<td>-2.84</td>
<td>-7.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>df: 112.93</td>
<td>109.81</td>
<td>110.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p-value: &lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.0053</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>t-stat: -3.69</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>df: 107.29</td>
<td>107.23</td>
<td>108.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p-value: &lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.0483</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H

Focus Group Questions and Relate Data Sources

Table 4.9

*Questions and Related Data Sources Used to Create and Inform Focus Group Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Question</th>
<th>PET-R Evaluation Criteria/Element</th>
<th>DIBELS Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. How do you feel about Literacy Block?</td>
<td>I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII,</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. What do you think the benefits of Literacy Block are?</td>
<td>I, III, IV, V</td>
<td>Grade one Nonsense Words, Grade one PSF,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grade one ORF, Grade two ORF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. What do you think is not beneficial about Literacy Block?</td>
<td>I, III, IV, V</td>
<td>Grade one Nonsense Words, Grade one PSF,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grade one ORF, Grade two ORF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. What kind(s) of changes (if any) did you notice with students skills during the implementation of Literacy Block?</td>
<td>II, V</td>
<td>Grade one Nonsense Words, Grade one PSF,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grade one ORF, Grade two ORF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. What is your opinion about the Professional Learning Community focused on Literacy?</td>
<td>VI, VII</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Do you think the PLC is “working”? Why or why not? a. Describe the implementation of the PLC and the</td>
<td>I, III, VI, VII</td>
<td>Grade one Nonsense Words, Grade one PSF,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Grade one ORF, Grade two ORF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impact it has had on you in conjunction with the literacy block.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. What impact, if any, has the PLC had on student learning in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conjunction with the literacy block?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Do you feel that students that are above grade level have received</td>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differentiated literacy instruction during Literacy Block to meet their</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>needs?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Do you feel that students below grade level have received</td>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differentiated instruction during Literacy Block to meet their needs?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Proponents of Literacy Block as a Response to Intervention Model,</td>
<td>II, III, IV, V,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>say it can help improve schools on two fronts – both with early</td>
<td>Grade one Nonsense Words,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intervention and appropriate assessment/placement in special education.</td>
<td>Grade one PSF,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has Literacy Block affected the process of referring students to</td>
<td>Grade one ORF,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>receive special education services at Ralph Talbot? If so, can you give</td>
<td>Grade two ORF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>examples?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Probe: Do you refer students to receive special education services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more frequently, less frequently, or just as frequently as you did</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>before the implementation Literacy Block? Can you explain?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Is there anything that we haven’t talked about with regard to the</td>
<td>I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block or the Professional Learning Community that would be</td>
<td>Grade one Nonsense Words,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade one PSF,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Important to know? (Patton, 2002, p. 379)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a.</th>
<th><strong>Probe:</strong> What information does the progress monitoring give you? Does this information change instructional practices?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td><strong>What are your reactions to our grade level meetings to discuss the results of progress monitoring and the RTI implementation?</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grade one ORF,  
Grade two ORF

This table depicts how the element/criteria from the PET-R and the DIBELS assessment data related to and helped to shape the focus interview questions. For example, question 22 asks,  
**What is your opinion about the Professional Learning Community focused on literacy?** Element VI and VII on the PET-R asks specific questions about professional development and administration/organization and communication. These elements directly relate and helped to form question twenty-two. Other focus group questions were created because they directly related to student formative data such as the DIBELS assessment tool. The table helps to correlate how each data source related to and was used to help create the focus group questions.
Appendix I

Reflective Memo Sample

Jennifer Curtis-Whipple

Research Log

May 2011:

Spoke with Principal of the Primary School, to arrange a meeting date with potential research participants.

Meeting dates were scheduled as follows:

I met with participants at 8am until 9am. I described the research project, answered questions, and gained consent from all potential participants. Participants then completed the PET-R on-line. I saved each document and printed a hard copy for analysis. Participants seemed to be excited about being part of the study and were eager to learn from the final results.


May 13th: Met with Nancy Pelletier to review what I had done to start the research project. Practiced with the recorder for the focus group and finalized materials needed to gain access to MAXQDA.

May 16th: Focus group interview from 11:00-1:00. At this time the teachers answered the interview questions and any clarification questions that I had. The interview ended at 12:30. I told the teachers that I would transcribe the data and let them check for accuracy and or clarification. I found it interesting that the teachers presented conflicted about the use of the Literacy Block as a form of RTI. It was evident that some teachers felt that LB naturally met the requirements of LB while others felt that it needed to be at a separate time to “count” as an RTI initiative. I am pleased that I chose to use the focus group format. It was clear that the participants gleaned information from each other and that the multiple people present helped to jog memories. I found it insightful to listen to participants responses with a focus on Kegan and Vygotsky. Many different terms and comments were made that align with the theoretical lens that I have chosen to use.

Met with Dr. Dougherty at 4:30