LITERACY BLOCK: MEETING THE NEEDS OF ALL LEARNERS; A SUMMATIVE PROGRAM EVALUATION

A thesis presented by

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Abstract

This summative program evaluation study investigated the Response to Intervention (RTI) pilot literacy block program that was implemented in first and second grade classrooms in a small southeastern suburban school. All 111 students in the first and second grade were involved in this RTI model during the 2010-2011 school year including special education students, English Language Learners (ELLs), advanced learners, and students in regular education. Eight educators were purposefully selected and volunteered to be participants in the study which included three grade one teachers, three grade two teachers, a building substitute and a moderate special needs educator.

The following two research questions were investigated in this study:

1. How do teachers perceive that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and student learning?

2. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) guided by distributive leadership with a focus on literacy differentiation?

The program evaluation followed a qualitative methodology (Patton, 2002) as this study tells a story which focused on teachers’ perceptions related to implementation of the RTI literacy block pilot as well as their views as to how it impacted student achievement. The study also explored teacher collaboration including teachers’ perceptions about the collaborative structures put in place as well as ones that took place independent of the ones set aside by the building principal. In addition, this researcher addressed the following: PLC development, the role of the principal within the PLC, teachers’ perceptions of the principal’s involvement, and distributive leadership practices within the school.
Key words: differentiated instruction, response to intervention, professional learning communities, distributive leadership, collaboration
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of Problem and Significance

There are a number of factors that are impacting public schools including the demands of high stakes testing and accountability. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was enacted to bring about improvement in student achievement. This was to be accomplished by providing high quality teaching to all students with an emphasis on two of the neediest subgroups; minority students and students from low social economic status (Losen & Orfield, 2002). This reform effort contains several key principles:

1. Improved test scores
2. Improvement over local standards
3. Increased accountability
4. Attention to minority populations
5. Quality of education
6. School choice
7. Funding
8. Public perception of public education
   (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2002)

These key principles are the focus of America’s public schools today with an emphasis on providing a high quality education to all students. In addition, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) was designed to improve students’ academic achievement and also serves as a means of identifying a student having a specific learning disability. (Fuchs & Fuchs, p. 14. 2007) Student failure is not acceptable and schools throughout the United States are striving to have all students reach proficiency in English Language Arts and Mathematics state academic achievement standards and assessments by 2014.

Many schools are beginning to address student needs through a response to intervention (RTI) approach using research based practices. RTI is a proactive approach to teaching and learning
versus the prior discrepancy model which was a “wait to fail” approach. (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003; Gersten & Dimino, 2006; Murawski & Hughes, 2009).

One of the vital components in the RTI process includes the analysis of students’ performance. Teachers adjust their instruction based on how students’ understand the concepts presented and change their methodology in order to meet students’ needs. This process helps to identify students with specific learning disabilities as well as increases the chances for improvement in student achievement. Reschly (as cited in Boutwell, 2009). According to the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) (2005) RTI is “the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals and applying child response data to important educational decisions” (p. 3). This teaching/learning process is an ebb and flow where teachers provide instruction, monitor students’ understanding, and adjust their instruction according to student feedback. The aspect of progress monitoring is important as it provides teachers with much needed data regarding students’ understanding of the information presented and answers the key question: Did the students learn what was taught?

In order for children to meet the demands of a competitive society they will need to be competent in the skill of reading. “This is even more evident in our technological age where the demands for higher literacy are ever increasing, creating more grievous consequences for those who fall short” (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998, p. 1). Students enter school with tremendous variances in their abilities to read. Careful attention should be taken to address students’ learning needs with additional support provided using a systematic research-based methodology when needed. Researchers have found that literacy skill development is progressive and students’ early experiences with reading are highly predictive of their success in learning to read in later
years. (National Reading Panel, 2000; Casey & Howe, 2002; Neuman & Dickinson, 2001; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, 2001; O’Connor, 2000; O’Connor R. E., Fulmer, D., Harty, K. R., & Bell, K, 2005; Torgensen, 1999). It is important for teachers to intervene as soon as possible so that students will not become failures in our schools and in society. Without intervention supports our students will be at risk for failure that may follow them throughout their school years and later on in life. (Lyon & Fletcher, 2001; Torgensen, 2002; Linan-Thompson, Vaughn, Prater, & Cirino, 2006; McMaster, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2005).

Lyon & Fletcher (2001) argue that early identification and prevention programs could reduce the number of students with reading problems. For example, a kindergartner may be identified as an “at risk” student for reading problems when their phonemic awareness is assessed. If this student receives the support, he/she may be reading at an appropriate level when he/she reaches first grade. Walker-Dalhouse, et al (2009) state, “RTI holds great promise for students experiencing reading difficulties for its emphasis on prevention rather than failure” (p.86). If a student has benchmarked with nonsense word fluency skills in first grade this is a good predictor of later success in reading. It is important to identify students who are at risk early and provide them with research based instruction tailored to their needs. This can be done through a response to intervention program. Gettinger & Stoiber (2007) state, “Inherent to an RTI approach is the practice of providing high-quality instruction and supplemental individualized support, based on children’s needs, through a multi-tiered model” (p.199). It is imperative that educators address reading deficits early on so that the gap between proficient readers and those who are struggling does not continue to widen (Vellutino, Scanlon, & Lyon, 2000, Badian, 2000; Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1999; Snow, Burns,
Developing strong reading skills is easier to accomplish the earlier we address students’ diverse needs.

In many suburban school settings in Massachusetts, this problem of practice can be found. In 2009, the MA special education percentage rate was 17% (MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2010). Many suburban districts are finding themselves above the state average. English Language Learners, low income students, and students from varied cultural backgrounds increase the potential numbers of students who may be at risk in the area of literacy. Many schools are addressing this issue using a tiered approach such as RTI. RTI was introduced in 2004 as part of the IDIEA, Public Law 108-446 (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Students’ learning was now examined as part of a process which measures “whether a learner’s academic performance improves when they are provided with well-defined scientifically based interventions” (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008, p. 281). This developmental framework is aimed at providing appropriate leveled literacy instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

Many schools are establishing RTI programs by first gathering as a community of learners in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) to investigate the problem in depth. The principal plays a key role in fostering collaboration and a positive culture needed for PLCs to flourish within the building. By using varying forms of distributive leadership, the principal is able to tap into leadership talents within the school and build an RTI program that is research based and has the elements necessary for sustainability.

Discussion of Practical and Intellectual Goals

This study is a qualitative summative program evaluation of a pilot RTI literacy block that was established in a southeastern Massachusetts elementary school during the 2010-2011 school year for students in grade one and two. (Patton, 2002) Review of teachers’ perceptions of the literacy
block, the amount of collaboration that took place, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) data, as well as the aspect of a working professional learning community with a lens on distributive leadership as well as the principal’s role in this process were investigated. The study investigated the effectiveness of the literacy block format in order to determine if this program should be continued. It is hoped that once the literacy block format has been in place, research-based teaching practices implemented, and appropriate resources allocated, there will be potential to close the achievement gap for all learners in the area of literacy.

**Brief summary of Research Questions**

The following questions will be explored by this researcher during this study:

1. How do teachers perceive that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and student learning?
2. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of a PLC guided by distributive leadership with a focus on literacy differentiation?

The implementation of a pilot RTI literacy block during the 2010-2011 school year was evaluated to determine if there was a positive influence on student achievement using the DIBELS assessment system and teachers’ perceptions gathered through one-to-one open-ended interviews and the Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective School-wide Reading Programs – Revised (PET-R) survey. This survey is an evaluation instrument utilized for planning and evaluation of effective schoolwide reading programs. Teachers completed this survey with a focus on the literacy block portion of their reading program. In addition, teacher collaboration was examined to determine if the pilot literacy block RTI program contributed to collaboration amongst the grade one and two staff. The role of the school principal in establishing a PLC within the school and the
bearing that it had on teacher growth, leadership opportunities—distributive leadership, and improved literacy skills for students was also explored.

**Summary of Doctoral Thesis Contents and Organization**

There are several key components included in this qualitative doctoral thesis. Chapter 1 includes an introduction of the problem, the significance, practical and intellectual goals, summary of the research questions, the theoretical framework, research design and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 includes a literature review of scholar practitioners related to several key themes including: connections to Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory, differentiated instruction, response to intervention, professional learning communities and the role that principals have in fostering them in schools, teacher collaboration, school culture and distributive leadership practices. Chapter 3 includes the research design used in this summative program evaluation and includes the research questions, methodology, validity and credibility of the study as well as information related to the protection of human subjects; Chapter 4 contains the report of research findings. Chapter 5 includes the implications to the theoretical lenses guiding this study, implications for literature, research findings, implications for the educational community and a conclusion. An appendix has also been included which contains the interview protocol, interview questions along with the coding system, PET-R Survey, and recording form to note salient points that surfaced during the one-to-one interview process as well as other tables and figures found in this document.

**Theoretical Framework**

This qualitative study is comprised of three theories used as lenses: Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory, DuFour, DuFour & Eaker’s professional learning communities, and Fullan’s distributive Leadership. Vygotsky’s theoretical lens with a concentration on the more knowledgeable other (MKO) and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) are critical factors associated with teaching
and student learning. The work of DuFour, DuFour & Eaker (2008) stress the importance of PLCs which provide a venue for collaboration and sharing of best practices contributing to the reorganization of literacy instruction that took place. In addition, Fullan’s research notes that a key component of distributive leadership is the focus on teachers becoming leaders and learners within their buildings creating a culture that is ripe for sustainability of school reform efforts.

**Vygotsky’s Socio-cultural Theory**

The key theoretical lens that guided this research was the work of Lev Vygotsky, in particular, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD),

> The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

Vygotsky’s theoretical work on the ZPD was used to understand the most effective method of delivering instruction and acquisition of reading skills for students in the primary grades. This theory can be applied to any new skill that is too difficult for a child to master independently, but can be done with guidance and encouragement from a *more knowledgeable other* (MKO). (Vygotsky, 1978)

In schools, the teacher is often the MKO but it is also possible for a higher ability peer to assist a student to work through his/her ZPD in the learning process (Tudge, as cited in Moll, 1990, p. 155). The key in providing effective support remains that the MKO must have more knowledge about the particular topic being covered than the learner and the ability to assist in developing the skill for the student. This is regardless of the MKO’s role; teacher or more skilled peer.

Eun, Knotek, & Heining-Boynton (2008) note,

> …many studies have been devoted to exploring the role of the adult (tutor) in guiding the child (tutee) through a problem solving process. Results from these studies indicate that the qualities of the tutor are crucial in guiding the
development of the tutee. The most important quality has been identified as the tutor’s ability to adjust his or her level of guidance to the current level of the child’s psychological functioning. The child is dependent on this social interaction with more advanced others in order to gain higher levels of knowing (p. 135).

Vygotsky believed that there were distinct levels in the ZPD. One level is the independent performance level where students are able to independently use their problem solving abilities. The other performance level is the unknown knowledge level. The ZPD is the gap in between these two levels where the MKO uses his/her abilities to assist the child in learning new skills. Each student has a different ZPD which is defined by society, culture, and the experiences that the child has had.

Relating this to reading development, the teacher, being the MKO, provides instruction at just the right level so that the child learns new skills. The teacher carefully monitors the student’s progress and provides support where needed. In essence, the teacher differentiates instruction and tailors teaching methods to address students’ learning needs. A vital component in this process is teachers’ knowledge about the developmental stages of children. This knowledge coupled with a keen understanding of core content sets the right stage for teaching and learning. (Hedegaard, 1990)

The classroom teacher can structure various activities that will promote learning such as cooperative groupings or partnering students for an activity. “Vygotsky believed that the context in which the interaction occurs is of critical importance” Tudge (as cited in Moll, 1990, p. 156). As long as there is an individual with more knowledge at the helm as well as that individual having a key understanding of the current level of the child’s psychological functioning guiding the student along, the student is able to work through his/her ZPD which results in learning and movement towards independence. This would assist the student in achieving a higher level of
cognition. Vygotsky (as cited in Moll, 1981) states, “The intellectual skills children acquire are directly related to how they interact with others in specific problem-solving environments” (p.11). The ZPD encompasses not only the child and the teaching that the child receives, but also focuses on the child and the collaborative activity that they are involved in within a social environment. This social system is created between the child and the MKO. Children are active participants in their education and not just an object of the educational process (Blank, as cited in Moll, 1990, p. 50).

Scaffolding of information is another way to meet students’ needs by breaking tasks into manageable parts (assisted performance) and, with guidance and support, the student will move toward a level of independence. Using Vygotsky’s ZPD, teachers are able to carefully monitor all students’ progress and teach to the appropriate level. Students having difficulty are provided with remedial supports and scaffold instruction in order to develop the skills that they are lacking. Vygotsky’s ZPD is also relevant for the gifted learner as well. Zambo (2009) states, “When the tasks given to gifted students are not within what the great theorist Lev Vygotsky (1978) termed their zone of proximal development, the passion and excitement they have for learning quickly fades” (p. 270). In many RTI programs, the gifted learner is forgotten. It is important to recognize that these students need instruction that is tailored to their needs. Knowing exactly where the child is academically is vital as this information supplies the MKO with key information that they need in order to provide the right type of instruction to move the child forward in their learning.

The MKO assists the student by guiding them, offering explanations, providing demonstrations, and taking time to get to know the learner. In some instances, the teacher can model how to reach solutions to problems. The student could then be asked to complete a
similar task with the teacher by his/her side monitoring their progress and offering guidance and support where it is needed. Working closely with the student provides the teacher with feedback which is timely and essential to the student’s success. This social interaction with the adult is an important component in the learning process. (Knotek, & Heining-Boytton, 2010)

Vygotsky also believed that language plays an important role in cognitive development as it is the foremost means by which adults convey information to children. Diaz, Neil & Amaya-Williams (as cited in Moll, 1990) state, “Indeed, a major theme in Vygotsky’s developmental theory is that, at one point, children begin to use language not only to communicate but to guide, plan, and monitor their activity” (p. 135). Vygotsky also saw the importance of students’ “private speech” as a way to plan out activities and strategies which assist students with their development. Diaz, Neal, & Amaya-Williams (as cited in Moll, 1990) state the following about Vygotsky’s theory regarding how self-regulatory capacities develop,

It is the child’s symbolic activity, specifically the child’s use of language in private speech, that creates a new level of behavioral organization characterized by independence from the stimulus field and by increasing mastery and control of the child’s own operations (p. 136).

In essence, language acts as a catalyst in the learning process. So much of what transpires in schools takes place through oral language which is primarily teachers communicating with students, and students communicating with peers. This social interaction plays an important role in the educational process. (Eun, Knotek, Heining-Boytton, 2008, p. 135). A. Rosa and I. Montero (as cited in Moll, 1990) state,

The Vygotskian approach... emphasizes the development of the individual in social interaction; specifically, the individual is formed through the internalization of activities carried out in the bosom of society and through the interaction that occurs within the zone of proximal development (p. 83).
Vygotsky’s theory provided one of the theoretical lenses for this research. As educators strive to bridge the gap between that which is known and new knowledge, the ZPD is essential. It is imperative for educators to know their students and provide instruction that is tailored to their needs. Bruner (as cited in Hobsbaum, Peters & Sylva, 1996) stated, “Optimum assistance is closely adapted to the learner’s successes, failures and tempo” (p.18). Teachers need to carefully monitor students’ progress and provide appropriate supports along the way which assist students in gaining new skills.

**Professional Learning Communities**

This study also focused on the work of DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker (2008). These authors have written extensively on the subject of professional learning communities (PLC) at the elementary level. These authors define a PLC as:

…educators committed to working collaboratively in an ongoing process 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 (DuFour, Eaker, & Many, as cited in DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008, p. 14).

When a PLC is established, a building principal can utilize distributive leadership to tap into the leadership capabilities of the staff. A distributive leadership lens was also explored in this study. “The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities” (DuFour, DuFour & Many, 2006, p. xi). The principal has an important role in the development of the PLC and can use distributive leadership techniques to develop the leadership talents of the staff which will promote the conditions for sustainability within the school. (Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Hernex-Broome & Hughes, 2004; Elmore, 2006; Liberman,, 1995; Marzano, Walters & McNulty, 2005; McLaughlin & Talbert 2006; Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996; as cited in DuFour, DuFour &
Eaker, 2008) These authors elaborate on the characteristics of a PLC including the need to have a shared mission, vision, values, & goals all focused on student learning. Part of this process involves teachers working in collaborative teams focused on student learning. Through their work they show commitment to continuous improvement.

**Distributive Leadership**

The principal plays a very important part in establishing a collaborative culture within the building. Hord & Sommers (2008) state, “Not only is the principal involved in creating the vision with the staff, but the principal continuously communicates the vision to all stakeholders, articulating powerful images that foster commitment to the vision by all” (p. 10). This creates a condition where all stakeholders are informed and on the same page. Fullan (2001) emphasizes the importance of the principal when he states, “The role of leadership is to “cause” greater capacity in the organization in order to get better results” (p. 65). A principal who is an effective leader realizes that it is not possible to singularly bring about sustainable reform. It takes a village to raise a child and an effective administrator realizes this point. Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) discuss distributive leadership practices where teachers are encouraged to be leaders and take responsibility as having greater success in achieving their goals than principals who don’t embrace these practices.

**Research Design**

This qualitative study centered on a summative program evaluation of a pilot RTI literacy block program implemented during the 2010-2011 school year for first and second grade students in a southeastern Massachusetts school district. The basic assumptions that guided the implementation of the pilot literacy block included the fact that in heterogeneous classrooms many teachers are not able to meet the literacy needs of all learners especially struggling learners.
and gifted learners. In addition, numerous referrals to special education were made because
students were not making appropriate progress with grade level skills. In numerous situations
students were not diagnosed with a learning disability. These students remained in heterogeneous
classrooms and teachers worked diligently to address their learning needs. Attempts to close the
achievement gap for these struggling learners were unsuccessful in many cases. A pilot literacy
block was put in place to address the needs of all students with four key formative goals in mind:
differentiating instruction to meet all learners’ needs, improving literacy skills for all students,
decreasing the achievement gap, and decreasing referrals to special education. Teachers’
perceptions about the pilot RTI literacy block program and its impact on teaching and student
learning were explored. Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development and the role of the more
knowledgeable other are instrumental in providing appropriate instruction to guide differentiated
learning experiences. In addition, this researcher investigated the impact of a PLC in the
workplace and the lens of distributive leadership and its impact on differentiated literacy
instruction.

Patton (2002) states,

Summative evaluations serve the purpose of rendering an overall judgment about
the effectiveness of a program, 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 situations. (p. 281)

Data triangulation provided this researcher with valuable information that was used to
evaluate the pilot RTI literacy block program implemented for first and second graders during
the 2010-2011 school year.

Limitations of the Study

This doctoral study focused on a small southeastern Massachusetts first and second grades
implementing a pilot RTI literacy block during the school year 2010-2011. The data was from a
one year period. The literacy block program will continue to develop and more historical data would be available for analysis. The participants were purposefully selected due to their involvement in the RTI pilot program. One teacher in grade two had been granted a maternity leave and a long-term substitute was hired. This individual was familiar with the school as she had substituted in the building in all grade levels however; her involvement in the initial phase of RTI was limited. The collected data is from one school and is limited to teachers in grade one and two as well as special education teachers working with those grade levels. The RTI program design plan was developed for this school with an emphasis on available personnel and resources. Teachers’ experiences may have an impact on their ability to differentiate instruction. Also, it is important to note that the DIBELS assessment instrument as well as using data to inform instructional practice was new to this school. The study results can, however, be generalized to other school settings with similar student populations and resources that are establishing RTI programs in the area of literacy.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review focused on the following key themes: connections to Vygotsky’s theory, the ZPD as implemented through differentiated instructional practices, response to intervention, professional learning communities with a lens on distributive leadership practices, as well as the role that principals have in fostering PLCs in schools which include elements of teacher collaboration and school culture.

This researcher concentrated this literature review on the theoretical lens of Vygotsky with a particular emphasis on the MKO and ZPD which are critical factors associated with teaching and student learning. Additionally, PLCs were investigated as they provide a venue for collaboration and sharing of best practices contributing to the reorganization of literacy instruction that took place. An additional key component of this study is that of distributive leadership. The focus was on teachers becoming leaders and learners within their buildings thus creating a culture that is ripe for sustainability of school reform efforts. These elements guided this research.

Connections to Vygotsky’s Theory

In a study by Leslie & Allen (1999) teachers were involved in a literacy project where at risk learners were presented with reading material which was developmentally appropriate for word recognition and comprehension strategies. Instruction was combined with opportunities for reading quality children’s literature. In Vygotsky’s ZPD, the MKO, in this case the teacher, guided the learner to become successful in his/her learning. An example of this is evidenced in this study,

some of the children were in the emergent reading stage and did not fully understand the concepts of rhyme or alliteration, so tutors selected predictable books and followed up with appropriate games and activities to develop those concepts. Once the children grasped the concept of rhyme, tutors chose words from the selected literature that contained rhymes for word study (p.408).
In a qualitative study by Gallant & Schwartz (2010), researchers examined the similarities and differences of pre service and experienced teachers as to how they perceive, conceptualize, and infer information based on their close observations of a child’s reading behaviors. The results from this study of 15 participants ranging in levels of experience suggests how conceptual knowledge is developed and refined through professional practice. This can have a significant impact on how teachers are assessing their students and the types of interventions that they are using which can directly affect student outcomes. The MKO needs to assess where the students are in their learning as well as know how to bring them to the next level. In this study, Gallant & Schwartz (2010) state, “further research is needed to elaborate the nature of advanced knowledge acquisition related to literacy instruction and the effectiveness of professional development for supporting that knowledge” (p. 17).

In a quantitative study conducted by Patching, Kameenui, Carnine, Gersten & Colvin (1983), these researchers found, “systematic instruction by an adult using modeling with explicit training in overt strategies was significantly more effective than either exposure to the same material in a workbook format or no intervention” (p. 415). Content knowledge and the ability to adjust instructional methodology are key to assisting a student in their learning. The social interaction between child and adult is an important part of the learning process.

The standards noted by The International Reading Association (IRA) (2010) also highlight the important task that teachers have in assessing where their students are having difficulty. This goes along with the vital role that the teacher has in providing feedback to the student and adjusting instruction to meet the student’s needs. Johnson (2010) states,

Teaching students who experience difficulty acquiring literacy requires paying close attention to how they go about literate activities and carefully choosing places to support them while keeping them in control of processing (p.604).
Knowing each learner’s strengths and weaknesses enable the teacher to provide instruction that is matched to each student’s needs. McTighe & Brown (2005) also emphasize the importance of the teachers’ key content knowledge and the importance in the delivery of instruction. Teachers must constantly review what they are teaching and how they are going to teach it so that every learner is able to maximize their learning potential. These authors further state,

Because students construct meaning and attach all new learning to previous cognitive schema (Vygotsky, 1934/1986), classrooms that promote high levels of standards mastery emphasize experiential learning activities that are both multi-sensory and sensitive to the range of learning styles and intelligences present within the student population (p. 240).

No two learners are alike and teachers need to be experts in their field in order to address the variances found within the classroom. In order for students to construct meaning to new information they need a means to make sense of the new information, link it and connect it to prior knowledge.

**Differentiated instruction.** Allan & Tomlinson, 2000; Ellis & Worthington, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978 (as cited in Huebner, 2010) state,

Solid research does validate a number of practices that provide the foundation of differentiation. These practices include using effective classroom management procedures; promoting student engagement and motivation; assessing student readiness; responding to learning styles; grouping students for instruction; and teaching to the student's zone of proximal development (the distance between what a learner can demonstrate without assistance and what the learner can do with assistance (p.79).

The notion of modifying teaching practices in response to the needs of students is not a new topic. Carol Ann Tomlinson has written numerous books and articles related to differentiated instruction. Teachers need to continuously look for ways to improve their teaching and build a portfolio of teaching strategies to address the wide range of abilities and needs of the students in their classrooms. The basic philosophy behind RTI falls in line nicely with differentiated
instruction. The learner is the primary focus and teachers adjust their teaching strategies to meet the learners’ needs which also align with Vygotsky’s ZPD. In order to accomplish this in a successful manner, the teacher must get to know his/her students well. This is accomplished by on-going assessments. The act of assessment plays an important role in the learning process and quality instruction is directly correlated to improved student learning. Tomlinson & Allan (as cited in Anderson, 2007) state,

Differentiated instruction integrates what we know about constructivist learning theory, learning styles, and brain development with empirical research on influencing factors of learner readiness, interest, and intelligence preferences towards students’ modification, engagement and academic growth within schools (p. 50).

Carol Ann Tomlinson has done extensive work with the theory and paradigm of differentiation. Her numerous books and articles explain the how and why of differentiated instruction in order to best meet the needs of students. Tomlinson (as cited in Moon, 2010) explains, “Differentiation is the recognition, articulation, and commitment to plan for students’ differing needs” (p. 226). In many instances teachers already have many of the tools needed to begin transforming and differentiating their instruction in classrooms.

Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) wrote about differentiated instruction and understanding by design, showing how they are interrelated and work together in the classroom. The authors discuss the importance of a demanding curriculum, which includes standards-based instruction and assessment practices with the expectation of academic success for all learners. The authors provide insight as to how teachers may provide quality instruction in a standards-based environment in a meaningful way.

Allington & Walmsley (as cited in Allington, 2008) state that in order to best meet the needs of struggling readers a comprehensive and sustained intervention plan is necessary. This aligns
well with Vygotsky’s ZPD. Students who are struggling receive intensive instruction tailored to their needs. The key elements discussed by Allington & Walmsley are:

1. Improving classroom instruction
2. Enhancing access to intensive, expert instruction
3. Expanding available instructional time
4. Availability across children’s school careers (p. 111)

These four points are embedded in the pilot RTI literacy block program that was investigated. Learning to read does not come naturally and students need highly trained professionals who are well-versed in reading instruction. Teachers must be ready and able to provide varied instruction based on the needs of their students. When intervention is needed, the instruction should be explicit and research-based. Some students may require additional time during the school day participating in an intervention program in order to improve their skills. Although early intervention is ideal in order to address students’ deficits before the gap widens, students who continue to struggle in reading should continue to receive support throughout their school careers. Allington (2008) also addresses the importance of differentiated reading instruction and how many districts already have the resources needed to provide quality interventions that really work.

**Response to intervention.** Some of the key components of a high-quality Response to Intervention (RTI) program include: intervention that begins in the general education classroom, appropriate screening and assessments so that students’ deficits can be quickly identified, utilizing data when making instructional decisions, effective interventions which target students’ needs and a system of progress monitoring to ensure that the students are making and continue to make effective gains. (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Mellard, Deshler, & Barth, 2004).
Mellard, MacKnight, & Deshler (2007) discuss the ABCs of RTI for elementary school reading. The authors elaborate on key RTI practices focusing on schoolwide screening, progress monitoring, tiered instruction, high-quality research-based instruction and interventions, collaboration amongst school staff members, and fidelity of implementation. They state, “The purpose of RTI is to identify those students who are struggling in school and to ensure that each of those children receive just the right instruction or intervention to be successful” (p.1). Additional research on this topic which corroborates the above statement is found in *Responsiveness to Intervention and Learning Disabilities, (Responsiveness to Intervention and Learning Disabilities, 2005).*

Gettinger & Stoiber (2007) also note the importance of providing systemic screening, and progress monitoring which will enable the teacher to provide instruction that is targeted to the learner’s needs (p. 199). These key elements provide the teacher, or MKO, with valuable information about the learner. Instructional decisions can then be made once the data has been gathered and analyzed.

Fuchs & Fuchs (2007) discuss two different models of intervention that are typically seen in schools. The first model is called “problem solving” and although instruction is tailored to the students’ needs, this approach tends to focus on skills that are already learned by the student rather than providing instruction that will enhance students’ learning of new skills. In some instances the school psychologist is involved in planning specific interventions for an individual student. This is primarily due to the view that academic deficiencies are linked to motivational problems rather than a struggle to acquire a new skill. The second approach focuses on “standard protocols” which are aimed at addressing new skills for the student. The standard protocols are adhered to at the same time that any behavioral or attention deficits surface. The
authors recommend that schools utilize a combination of both methods to address the wide spectrum of students that they teach; a problem solving method used for behavioral issues and the standard protocol used for academic difficulties.

Many schools utilizing an RTI intervention system have designed a three tiered approach. Each tier is more explicit, comprehensive, intensive, and supportive than the prior tier. Tier III is the most intense level of intervention and set aside for those students with the most significant needs. Fuchs & Fuchs (2006), state,

The nature of the academic intervention changes at each tier, becoming more intensive as a student moves across the tiers. Increasing intensity is achieved by (a) using more teacher-centered, systematic, and explicit (e.g., scripted) instruction; (b) conducting it student groupings; or (e) relying on instructors with greater expertise. (p. 94)

Instruction in many instances is one-on-one and is specific and tailored to the student’s explicit needs. In most schools there are only about 3-5% of the students who fall into this population (Mellard & Johnson, 2008, p. 3). The most prevalent system for monitoring students’ progress in intervention groups is to use a curriculum-base measurement (CBM) system. According to Deno (2005) the action of problem solving in our schools rests in “those discrepancies between students’ present levels of development and some other expected or desired level of development” (p. 11). These CBMs provide a benchmark for appropriate achievement and those students falling short of this benchmark are at risk of failure. This can be in a number of curriculum areas; however, this researcher focused on reading achievement. CBMs are a way to assess students’ skills and also to monitor their progress throughout the year so that continued progress can be achieved by the student. They are an essential component of a RTI program.

Studies of intervention practices. “Children do not acquire reading abilities naturally, easily, or incidentally (Lyon & Chhabra, 2008, p. 6). Once students are identified as struggling
learners, it is imperative to begin intervention; reading skills must be taught. Students who are struggling should be serviced in either a small group format or individually. Howell & Nolet (as cited in Harn, Linan-Thompson, & Roberts, 2008) state, “In addition, small group instruction increases students’ opportunities to practice skills and receive corrective feedback from teachers to enhance learning” (p. 116).

Another study conducted by Shanahan & Barr (1995) explored a program called Reading Recovery based on the work of Marie Clay. This grounded theory qualitative study examined the effects of the Reading Recovery program for at risk learners. The data set came from Reading Recovery evaluations of students in the U.S. that had both pre and post comparisons. Additional factors include:

1. Children served but who typically complete fewer than 60 lessons because of transfers, absences, eventual rejection from Reading Recovery, or other reasons.
2. Children who are successfully discontinued from the program.
3. Those who complete 60 or more lessons but who have not progressed to the level of the average group in their classrooms and, therefore, are not discontinued (p.965).

Several issues are noted regarding the reporting of students tested and counted in the Reading Recovery reports. As the study progressed, it was determined that students involved in the program did make gains, however, questions were raised about the overall effectiveness of the program. For example: Would the students have made similar gains if they remained in the classroom or if they were provided with compensatory instruction? In order to determine this, additional research was conducted. Results showed that Reading Recovery groups also performed as well as or better than the average-achieving comparison groups in phoneme awareness and phonological decoding.
It was also noted that this intervention program is taught in a one-to-one format and cannot be adjusted to accommodate a larger group. A small percentage of students were not able to continue the program after the 60 lessons; the full Reading Recovery program. Although this represents only 10 to 30% of students in the Reading Recovery program it should be noted that some students may never actually complete the program. Additional factors were discussed which included the financial impact of the Reading Recovery Program and the impact it has on a district, “Instructional interventions with substantial costs must be studied rigorously to provide policymakers and the public with assurances of their high quality and efficiency” (Shanahan & Barr, 1995, p. 991). In other words, although the one-to-one support is seen as beneficial to students, it is impractical to provide this as the only approach in a school system for remediation due to its high cost.

In a qualitative study conducted by Roehrig, et al., (2008) the authors utilized a grounded theory design for their research. The study began with key questions related to progress monitoring of data to inform literacy instruction. As the study progressed, the various conclusions were made related to the teachers’ lack of training in DIBELS and the availability of the data once generated. Teachers’ core knowledge about teaching reading and the critical role of the coach to assist teachers in interpreting data and making connections to the curricula were noted as areas of concern. In addition, some barriers holding the teachers back from using progress monitoring as a formative tool to inform their instruction were identified. These included the lack of time to meet with the reading coach to receive and discuss student data as well as the lack of classroom management techniques to implement interventions. Also, some teachers were more receptive to the data and more willing to change their own practice to bring about the positive student outcomes that were desired. Teachers must know where their students
are academically as well as how to take them to the next level of learning. They need to be willing to make adjustments in their teaching practices based on student data. The focus of instruction is dependent on student performance.

In a study by Connor, et. al., (2009) the authors note that the most effective reading instruction may possibly differ depending on children’s language and literacy skills that they possess when they enter school which are “child characteristic-by-instruction interactions (child X) instruction interactions” (p. 78). Differentiating instruction for the child would be an effective strategy for improving students’ literacy skills. This particular study involved a cluster-randomized control field trial which was conducted in ten moderate to high poverty schools. The study examined the effects of individualizing literacy instruction for both struggling learners and those students that had basic skills. There were 461 students involved in the study from 47 different classrooms. The mean age of the students was 6.7. The instruction each first grader received in the fall, winter and spring, was recorded. Results showed that the more explicit the instruction that occurred for struggling learners correlated to the literacy skill growth that the child gained. The intervention had a positive effect on the literacy outcomes, “… these findings point to the potential importance of individualizing (or personalizing/differentiating) instruction based on the child’s entering skill levels” (p. 77). Results provide strong evidence of child X instruction interaction effects on literacy outcomes.

Teachers in this study involved in the intervention groups received both training in the web based program (A2i) and professional development as to how to individualize literacy instruction in the classroom based on student data. Struggling students who received the intervention did demonstrate approximately a two month difference in their grade equivalent (GE) scores. It was also noted that the more that the teacher used the A2i software, the greater was their students’
reading comprehension skill growth. The researchers acknowledged that other factors may have also contributed to this growth,

Might the treatment effect have been the result of professional development teachers received rather than the different amount and types of instruction children received? …. More knowledgeable teacher may have been more likely to use A2i or were more effective generally which may have been unrelated to individualizing instruction (p. 82).

Also, teacher qualifications may contribute to their effectiveness in the classroom. Teachers’ knowledge about reading and language concepts has also been shown to relate to students’ outcomes. This school also received Reading First funds and this may have contributed to the treatment effect.

**Studies of assessment.** Several studies, (Roehrig, et. al., 2008; Gallant & Schwartz, 2010; Fitch, 2009; Kort, 2008; Leslie & Allen, 1999) investigated methods to improve literacy instruction for struggling learners. It is essential to identify students as early as possible so that intervention can be implemented. Identification of reading difficulties and pinpointing areas that need remediation are essential if educators are to effectively address the learning needs of all students. One study by Pomplun (2004) examined a screening/assessment instrument for students in K-3. In this study, it was determined that the differential predictive validity of an initial skills analysis can over predict achievement of African American and Hispanic students in several areas which could in essence negatively affect these students and keep them from receiving remedial services that they so desperately need in order to be successful readers. Staff must be trained well in analyzing data to ensure that students that need instructional support will receive it. A screening instrument is only as good as the staff that is trained to utilize it.
Professional Learning Communities

**Difficulties establishing professional learning communities.** Principals must keep many things in mind when they create professional learning communities where the staff will work collaboratively with a clear focus on improving both teacher growth and increasing student learning outcomes. Professional learning communities can at times be difficult to establish for several reasons. Even if the principal follows all of the suggested guidelines for developing PLCs, there may be conditions present in schools that sabotage or hinder professional learning communities from being created. If leaders plan to move forward in establishing this type of learning culture in their schools, they need to be cognizant of the facts that may hinder their mission. Mezirow (as cited in Servage, 2008) states, “It is a gift to recognize that significant learning is “threatening, emotionally charged, and extremely difficult” (p. 70). Change can be viewed as exciting and invigorating for one person and seen as a negative force for another. The process of implementing a professional learning community must be thought through carefully taking all stakeholders’ perspectives into consideration before taking a leap of faith. Principals will need to assess the readiness of their staff and proceed accordingly. (Gordan & Patterson, 2006)

Anderson (as cited in Rafoth & Foriska, 2006) states some of the influences that kept principals from progressing towards a movement of collaboration include:

(a) time constraints (principals who need teacher leaders to execute the plans they do not have time for); (b) external pressures (governmental mandates for accountability, high-stakes testing, and continuous school improvement; fiscal pressures); (c) direct involvement in day-to-day discipline crises (teachers prefer principal involvement here); and (d) demand for academic leadership (teachers want the principal to lead by example) (p. 133).

Portin (as cited in Rafoth and Foriska, 2006) further examined the roles that principals play in the face of their daily pressures. His accounts come from 21 schools covering all grade levels in
four states. He was able to identify seven leadership roles that principals displayed and found that not all principals actually performed all leadership functions well. There were variations that occurred in the functions that were performed. These authors found that a principal’s approach to instructional leadership is a pivoting factor impacting the culture of the school. (Gordan & Patterson, 2006)

Fullan & Hargreaves, Louis, Mars & Kruse (as cited in Servage, 2008) state that, “Bridging diverse and specialized interests, particularly in high schools, has been well documented” (p. 71). In essence, there are always going to be individuals who have a different agenda. Bringing these individuals on board with the reform efforts can at times be a difficult factor for the building principal to overcome. Rusch (as cited in Servage, 2008) further states, “jealousy, competition, and politics in school districts undermines the “scaling up” of promising school improvements” (p. 71). When different factions compete within a school, it is impossible to put forth a comprehensive reform effort. Roberts and Pruitt (as cited in Mullen and Hutinger, 2008) state, “the principal may be seen as a visitor or, worse, an intruder, and hence not be privy to the brainstorming that typically occurs” (p. 281). Principals must think carefully about how they implement school reform efforts. It is important for principals to keep all stakeholders well-informed as well as stress the importance of a collaborative approach where the building principal is actively involved in the reform efforts. Additionally, Mullen and Huntinger (2008) state that when it comes to distributive leadership, some principals who wish to build leadership capacities in their staff may be hindered due to district or state regulations. When PLCs are first established it is imperative to carefully communicate the boundaries related to how the PLC will operate. While PLCs emphasize collaboration, many veteran teachers may not have had
experience working in this collaborative capacity. Establishing the guidelines and norms during
the initial meeting provides a structure for the PLC to operate.

Some veteran teachers have found comfort behind the four walls of their classrooms and may
not embrace the collaborative culture of a PLC. Leonard and Leonard (2005) note the following
in their study,

In terms of collaborative relationships, they felt that their school environments did
not induce enough care and trust amongst the faculties, that teachers did not seem
to like each other sufficiently, that levels of shared values and beliefs were not
adequate, and that diversity of opinion was not promoted to the extent desirable
(p. 35).

How is it possible to bring about change when individuals are at opposing ends of a
spectrum? It is difficult when the staff allows distinct personalities to interfere with what
is best for the collective body. PLCs must be well crafted and thought through carefully.
It may take several years to build the right culture in a building where a PLC can flourish.
Leonard and Leonard (2005) also state,

Many administrators already appreciate the need for sustained professional
interaction in their schools but, also, that they may be unwilling, or unable
without sufficient support from other significant participants, to adequately foster
its manifestation. (p. 36)

Establishing PLCs in some buildings may be welcomed and exciting and for others it may be
seen negatively. A needs assessment is important prior to beginning the process of establishing
PLCs. Reading professional journals, articles, and speaking to other principals who have
worked through this process may be beneficial to principals looking to create PLCs in their
buildings. The establishment of PLCs provides the stage for a culture that is built on inquiry.
Collinson & Cook (2007) state, “inquiry is vital in organizations that want to learn” (p. 93).

It is important for educators to constantly reflect and ask questions in order for the organization
to make forward gains.
In another study, Cranston (2009), involved twelve principals who were examined related to their conceptions of a professional learning community. The study found that although these principals felt that PLCs were a normal part of the cultures of their schools, they had varied understandings of what actually constitutes a PLC. The definition used in this study was created by Toole and Louis (as cited in Cranston, 2009), “…not only in discrete acts of teacher sharing, but in the establishment of a schoolwide culture that makes collaboration expected, inclusive, genuine, ongoing, and focused on critically examining practice to improve student outcomes” (p. 3). Of note, three principals in the study used teacher evaluations as an opportunity to build relationships with their staff. Additionally, the principals in the survey were primarily focused on the process of creating PLCs with little emphasis on the product—the specific actions that can be measured and used to develop a plan for improvement (Cranston, 2009).

In addition, McLaughlin & Talbert (2006) add to the body of literature on this subject. “The work lives of teachers in school learning communities illustrate ways in which new professional cultures can be established to improve student achievement” (p.22). The authors note,

Further, developing teacher learning communities entails the growth of learning practices, or the capacity of the group to create and use knowledge and tools for improving instruction with its students (p. 40).

Too many times districts provide professional development programs that do not target the needs of teachers. Professional learning communities provide the structure and venue for professional growth based on the needs of the school culture and the individuals in the school.

McClure (2008) discusses the importance of teacher collaboration and professional learning communities in relation to school improvement. Collaboration is a necessary component and important structure that needs to take place within a building to build efficacy and growth. Hord & Sommers (2008) state, “In just about every school improvement technique and strategy that is
promoted by the literature, research, and consultants, collaboration is mentioned” (p. 33).

Schools and teachers benefit in a variety of ways when teachers work together. There is an increasing body of evidence which suggests an affirmative relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement.

Teachers need to rethink how they teach. Most importantly, are the students in their classrooms learning? Currently there is a great deal of emphasis placed on data-driven instructional practices. This may be a dramatic change in the way that some educators have been teaching. Fullan (2007) discusses the importance of a change in culture that is needed in order for sustained transformation to occur.

Most strategies for reform focus on structures, formal requirements, and event-based activities... They do not struggle directly with the existing cultures within which new values and practices may be required ....Restructuring (which can be done by fiat) occurs time and time again whereas re-culturing (how teachers come to questions and change their beliefs and habits) is what is needed. (p. 25)

There is a great deal written on the importance of a positive school culture. In order to affect school reform, a positive collaborative culture needs to exist. Establishing the right conditions for a positive culture in the building can rest on the shoulders of the building principal. Taking the needed time to lay the groundwork and establish conditions for a positive culture is essential to school improvement efforts.

**School culture.** School culture represents the beliefs, assumptions, standards, expectations and behavior that comprise the norm for the school. In order for PLCs to flourish in schools, a supportive culture must be present to embrace them. Goodlad (as cited in DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008) states, “Teachers’ relationships with the principal and their perceptions of the principal as a leader have a major impact on school climate and teacher satisfaction” (p. 302).

Relationships can either promote organizational learning and growth or can hinder it. Leonard &
Leonard (2005) state, “Numerous studies and an expanding cache of scholarly and professional literature have served to promote widespread recognition of the importance of school culture and its potential to manipulate school improvement initiatives” (p. 24). The principal plays an important role in developing school cultures where collaboration among staff is an expectation. In this endeavor, all staff is included, and PLCs are focused with a lens on examining teaching practices to improve student learning outcomes. Barth (2006) also stresses the importance of establishing a positive work environment. One of the foundational underpinnings of the PLC is the ability of the staff to work together. Barth talks about the culture of collegiality and notes four primary actions that must be present for this culture to flourish:

1. Talking with one another about their practice.
2. Sharing their craft knowledge
3. Observing one another while they are engaged in their practice
4. Rooting for one another’s success (p. 11)

There are many roles and responsibilities of the building principal; however, creating a positive school culture is essential (Cranston, 2009; Habegger, 2008; Harris, Brown & Abbott 2006).

According to MacMillan, Meyer, and Northfield (as cited in Williams, Brien, Sprague, & Sullivan, 2008) state,

…trust between a principal and teacher in a school is a reciprocal relationship that is not automatic but is negotiated and earned. They claimed that without trust some teachers might retreat to the minimal requirements with regard to instruction and resist becoming involved in school improvement efforts (p. 5).

Building this type of trust can take place when the principal sets a supportive tone in the building and provides necessary resources for teachers. This may involve training for the staff members as well as words of encouragement during this process. Graham (2007) states, “For school-based leaders working to maximize student learning and achievement, identifying opportunities to encourage and support classroom level teacher improvement is a top priority” (p.
2). This author also noted, “…the powerful impact that the principal had on the character and nature of the school” (Graham, 2007, p.11).

Teachers in a study conducted by Leonard & Leonard (2005) state, “Teacher collaboration requires sufficient administrative support” (p.32). Principals can promote collaboration by developing schedules where entire grade levels, or discipline teams have common planning time. (Drago-Severson, 2004) Holt (as cited in Leonard and Leonard, 2005) states, “Principals must build a community of learners, and it is the principal’s role to develop and nurture that community” (p. 36). Principals can also be active members of the professional learning communities and work with staff to analyze data. This can be a positive experience when there isn’t the fear of finger pointing and blame. Building a community of risk takers can only take place if trust has been established first. When teachers are able to look at data and remove the emotional piece, then the PLC is viewed as a group of individuals working collaboratively, learning together, and finding ways to improve instruction and student learning (Leonard & Leonard, 2005; Mullen & Hutinger, 2008)

Principals have a role in creating school cultures where teachers feel that their input is valued and they are supported to take risks and attempt new teaching methods. Thompson, Gregg, & Niska (2004) state, “For people to learn together, they must be comfortable challenging their own and others assumptions and beliefs within safe places” (p.5). Principals can develop this culture by taking an active interest in their teachers through casual conversations and attentive listening showing a genuine interest in the staffs’ wellbeing. Habegger (2008) states, “…two significant types of activities on which the principals concentrated and in which they engaged to help create positive culture; creating a sense of belonging and providing a clear direction for all
involved—students, teachers, parents, and community” (p.43). These may seem like small things to do but the impact they have on building a positive school culture cannot be ignored.

Gusky & Huberman (as cited in Mullen and Huntinger, 2008) point out, “By developing environments committed to the professionalization of teachers, principals confront the isolation that many classroom teachers experience, thereby countering teacher attrition while enabling policies and practices to be influenced” (p. 277). One of the most important factors that impacts new teachers is that they are embraced in the culture of the school and that they feel supported. Many things contribute to the culture of a school, some easily seen by newcomers, and other components become apparent as they work within the structure of the school. School cultures are not stagnant and can be shaped by its members. Staff must be cognizant of the belief systems that their school holds dear and should be mindfully aware that attention and nurturing of a school culture should be reviewed and time should be taken to reflect on it often. (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008).

**Communication.** Principals can change the way that they communicate managerial information to staff by using e-mail so that precious time is not taken from faculty meeting time. The focus of faculty meetings and grade level meetings should concern student data sets. In addition, principals must refrain from trying to do it all. They must limit the number of initiatives that they want to work on and instead focus on the areas that will make significant differences in student learning. It is important that principals don’t spread staff in too many directions. They need to keep focus on those items that align with the school’s goals (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). With any new program or initiative it is imperative to keep the lines of communication open and ensure that all stakeholders are informed.
**Professional growth.**  Asking teachers to become involved in professional learning communities invites them to examine student learning. Teachers are then able to discuss student data, share best practices, and work collaboratively toward improvements. PLCs clarify what needs to be done and creates a strong focus on results. This improves the teachers’ level of performance as it adds strategies to their “bag of tricks”. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, (2008) state the following about a school principal, “You must become a student of the PLC process and model the concepts and ideas for your staff” (p. 330). Principals must provide their staff with data in a timely manner so that they are able to make instructional decisions based on their students’ needs. In essence, principals must walk the walk and be part of the learning community that they are creating in their schools.

DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) state,

> Research shows that the kinds of professional development that improves instructional capacity display four critical characteristics… They are: ongoing, embedded with content-specific needs of a particular setting, aligned with reform initiatives, grounded in a collaborative, inquiry-based approach to learning. (p. 367)

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (as cited in DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008) have clarified the essential responsibilities of principals in its publication *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do* and state,

> If adults don’t learn, then students won’t learn either… The school operates as a learning community that uses its own experience and knowledge, and that of others, to improve the performance of students and teachers alike. …They must be a place where learning isn’t isolated, where adults demonstrate they care about kids but also about each other. In such places, learning takes place in groups. A culture of shared responsibility is established, everybody learns from one another. (p. 365)
Principals must work diligently to create this climate in their schools. Many districts provide professional development which does not meet the needs of all staff. Creating learning cultures in buildings allows teachers to receive the support that they need in order to improve their teaching. The support becomes focused on what they need professionally in order to improve their practices. PLCs build their own learning capacity. When teachers take this new information and apply it in their classrooms, the children are the ones who benefit. Establishing learning communities that work is a way to enhance teacher performance which will directly impact student learning. DuFour (as cited in Graham, 2007) states, “The best staff development happens in the workplace rather than in a workshop” (p. 2). The principal plays a vital role in the development of PLCs by ensuring that the correct conditions are present in schools so that PLCs can flourish. (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006)

In a study conducted by Cranston (2009) involving twelve principals, he stressed the importance of, “…trust as the strongest facilitating feature for schools developing as professional learning communities” (p.10). Building a trusting relationship with staff is a foundation for the success of a PLC. Cranston further notes, “trust is the bond required to hold the frame together” (p. 11). Trusting relationships between the principal and staff as well as staff towards each other are important for the success of a PLC.

**Distributive Leadership**

**The building principal.** The role of a school principal has evolved over the years to meet the demands of society. Early on, many schools did not have individuals serving in the principal role. In the twentieth century, as schools expanded from the one-room schoolhouses to schools that incorporated multiple grades and classrooms, there developed a need for someone to manage these more complicated organizations. At first, teachers filled this role. They continued to teach
students while managing the complexities associated with the school. Initially, these teachers were called principal teachers. After a while it became almost impossible for principal teachers to continue to teach and manage the school and a principal teacher resulted in a full time position as an administrator. Some of the tasks involved in this position ranged from managing the financial aspect of the school, enforcing the discipline policy, generating student schedules, managing personnel, attending to public relations, overseeing building maintenance, coordination of the instructional programs, as well as other school related matters. These new administrators were also responsible for some curriculum, instruction, and supervision. The primary responsibility of the administrator was focused on school management until the early 1980s. (School Principal, 2009)

The role of the principal changed from school manager to school instructional leader and then to the school reform leader as the accountability movement gained momentum. Principals continued to be responsible for the management of their buildings but additional responsibilities have surfaced with an increased urgency focusing on improvement of student learning outcomes. Principals are now instructional leaders in their schools focused on school reform. (School Principal, 2009)

The principal plays a key role in developing professional learning communities focused on teacher growth and improved academic outcomes for students. (Fullan, 2007; Williams, Brien, Sprague, Sullivan, 2008; Gordon & Patterson, 2006; Blanc, et al. 2010) According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals (as cited in DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008) principals at all levels receive specific recommendations for their leadership roles. The standards noted below relate to collaboration, school culture and distributive leadership practices
and address research question two in this study. Mary Buckingham (as cited in DuFour, Dufour & Eaker, 2008) has concluded,

...one thing leaders must always remember to be effective is the importance of clarity - clarity regarding the fundamental purpose of the organization; the future it must create to better fulfill that purpose; the most high-leverage strategies for creating that future; the indicators of progress it will monitor; the explicit standards; rubrics, and exemplars that illustrate the quality of work expected in the organization; and the specific ways each member of the organization can contribute both to its long-term purpose and short-term goals. (p. 358)

Strong communication skills are necessary in order to keep all stakeholders informed. The staff needs to be on the same page, with the same goals and mission. All arrows need to be pointing in the same direction if effective reform efforts are to take place.

Emphasis is placed on teachers working collaboratively and taking responsibility for not only the students in their classroom but rather for teachers to think more holistically and consider the entire school population. PLCs provide a venue for collaboration so principals can tap into teachers’ expertise to become leaders within the school. These standards recommended by the above noted researchers include the following:

- Lead schools in a way that place student and adult learning at the center.
- Set high expectations and standards for the academic and social development of all students and the performance of adults.
- Demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement of agreed-upon standards.
- Create a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and other school goals.
- Use multiple sources of data diagnostic tools to assess, identify, and apply instructional improvement.
- Actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success (p. 306).

A similar framework is noted in Joyce, et al (as cited in Coppieters, 2005) where the authors hypothesized conditions that transform schools into centers of inquiry. These frameworks provide principals with a structure for managing their buildings and assist in establishing
learning communities. Principals address each of the above noted factors in different ways. These factors establish key leadership responsibilities/roles for principals. Each factor is not isolated but rather all factors collectively work hand in hand to create environments where schools can work in a unified manner to address teacher needs and improve student learning outcomes.

**Accountability.** During the latter part of the twentieth century, as schools began to be held more accountable for the performance of their students on national and state assessments, the duties and responsibilities of principals changed. Principals became more responsible for teaching and learning in their schools. Principals began to take on more responsibility in the area of instruction and worked to assist teachers to improve their teaching practices in the classroom. Observations and evaluations were conducted with a spotlight on student learning. Principals worked with teachers to improve their instructional techniques with student learning outcomes as the focus.

Principals’ responsibilities continued to expand. They soon found themselves at the heart of leading school reform with the ultimate goal of raising student achievement. Principals who were successful in leading reforms found that creating and communicating a shared vision with all stakeholders assisted them as they implemented changes that included teachers taking on an active role in shared decision-making. This approach results in more commitment from staff and more motivation and engagement in the reform initiative (School Principal, 2009)

**Models of school leadership.** Anderson (as cited in Rafoth and Foriska, 2006) discuss three different models of school leadership, each one considerably different than the other with respect to distributive leadership. In the first model, the buffered principal, the authors state that the building principal is surrounded by various teacher leaders. Their primary responsibility is to
“buffer” the principal from the rest of the staff. These teacher leaders oftentimes mediate between the principal and the other staff members so that the building runs smoothly. Unfortunately, the building principal in this case relies on a small group of teacher leaders to provide him/her with feedback. This model does not promote collaborative problem solving and leadership options for all of its staff members. As a result, many staff members feel that they are not empowered to make decisions and bring about school wide reform. This can negatively impact their self efficacy.

The second model, the interactive principal, involves all staff in the decision making process. The authors state that this is more in line with transformational leadership. This model of leadership fosters both formal and informal teacher leadership styles. In this model, the principal is visible and an active member of the team. The author further states, “The more diffused leadership influences, the interrelatedness of all staff, and the climate of shared decision making all provide essential ingredients to strong problem-solving teams because individual teacher empowerment is fostered” (Gordon & Patterson, 2006, p. 132).

The third model, the contested principal, does not promote a collegial work environment. The principal is seen as an “outside force”. Often times, when the principal tries to initiate change, staff members contest it. These three models were drawn from a study conducted in six schools. Various methods of leadership were visible in the schools and in some cases external influences kept the principal from creating the collaborative learning environment necessary for school reform.

Gordan & Patterson (2006) conducted research on twelve schools from North Carolina that were part of the North Carolina A+ Schools Program where there was a great deal of principal succession. While this was occurring, the schools were in the process of system wide school
reform. Various leadership styles were observed including Network Leadership. In this style, leadership is spread throughout the school rather than residing in any one individual. In Network Leadership, teacher expertise is not confined to classroom matters. Staff is deeply involved in decision-making on many levels. In schools where Network Leadership is conducted, principals are seen as both strong leaders and are supportive of their staff.

There were a variety of leadership styles in the twelve schools in the study. Some of them used a Vanguard approach. A Vanguard approach is when leadership in a school is held by more than one individual in contrast to a top down leadership style. Interviews of both staff and administrators were conducted. In one school, two teachers took on roles of team leaders. From here, leadership expanded throughout the building and ultimately included parents and children. At another school where Network Leadership was practiced, one parent stated, “Everybody is moving in the same direction. And that’s a function of leadership and a function of the faculty and the staff” (Gordan & Patterson, 2006, p. 220). In some of the schools in the study, the new principals were trying to change the culture of the school from an Overt Top-down leadership that was in the building prior to the new leadership to that of Network Leadership. The staff was not prepared for the cultural shift. The principal met with some resistance when he had staff members establish committees. The staff was not ready for this type of change in their building. Teachers had always been told what to do and they obediently followed directives. This principal demonstrated that he did not have a connection to his staff. They were not ready for the changes that he had envisioned for the school. A needs assessment may have benefitted the principal and provided him with a better pulse related to the school culture. Part of the principal’s role is to determine the readiness of the staff to take on leadership responsibilities and to provide them with guidance and support as they become active learners and leaders in their
school. Collins (as cited in DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008) stated, “The most effective leaders focused on building the capacity of their organizations to improve continuously, on developing the next generations of leaders, and on ensuring the organizations would continue to thrive long after they were gone” (p. 325). This type of leader is looking for sustainability of reform.

An effective leader is not just focused on today he/she has a vision with the future in mind. Building a collaborative culture in a school has far reaching effects that will outlast the principal’s tenure. Collins also stated, “The main mark of an effective principal is not just his or her impact on the bottom line of student achievement but also how many leaders he or she leaves behind who can go even further” (p. 325). In order for reform efforts to be sustainable, principals will need to actively engage and foster distributive leadership practices so that reform efforts will continue long after the principal has retired or left the position.

**Sustainability.** Currently, principals are working under enormous pressures to create reform movements that will improve student learning outcomes. They are turning toward staff to create professional learning communities as an integral part of this process. Fullan (1997) states, “principals can make even more long-lasting contributions, by broadening the base of leadership of those with whom they work - teachers, parents, students” (p. 46). In some situations, principals may have to act as a lead teacher and lead learner in order to move this process forward. Principals want to develop teachers who are committed to action and willing to accept the challenges facing education today. Fullan (2004) further states, “The main mark of an effective principal is not just his or her impact on the bottom line of student achievement but also how many leaders he or she leaves behind who can go even further” (p. 31). Prestine (as cited in Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004) suggests that, “Principals must have the ability to share authority, facilitate the work of the staff, and have the ability to participate without
dominating” (p. 4). This can certainly be challenging for some administrators. The readiness of the staff and administrator come into play when a shared leadership concept is considered.

Lawler, Wohsletter, Smyer, & Mohrman (as cited in Coppieters, 2005) state:

> The literature in educational administration has become replete with such evolving leadership conception that emphasize the need for the school leader to invite and actively promote high-density involvement not only in administrative or school-wide decisions but also in professional interaction that addresses the everyday work life of teachers (p.24).

Sergiovanni (as cited in Servage, 2008) notes, “…developing a community of practice may be the single most important way to improve a school” (p. 63). Effective leaders find ways to highlight leadership talents in others and encourage participation of staff members in decision making. Rafaeli, Patchen, Manz & Simms (as cited in Leech & Fulton, 2008) note “the traditional roles of teachers and principals have changed and improved organizational teamwork is fostered by all members of the learning community assuming decision making roles” (p.1). In essence, effective leaders build leadership characteristics in their staff so that they can lead themselves.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, U.S. DOE 2001) has established key standards with an ultimate goal of having each student earn a proficient score in reading and math by 2014 in order to receive a high school diploma. Accountability reigns high for schools to reach certain benchmarks as they strive to meet high expectations by 2014. Each year the target moves closer. Schools have put both feet forward seeking ways to evaluate current models of teacher professional development so that schools can achieve and maximize positive impacts on student achievement.

**Distributive leadership in action.** Block (as cited in Leech & Fulton, 2008) proposes, “…organizations must embrace democratic participative structures to effect cultural change.
These structures demand a new vision of leadership, in which the decisional ownership and accountability is distributed among all members of the organization” (p. 2). In order to affect school-wide change, teachers need to venture out of their classrooms and share their work and ideas with other teachers. A sense of collaboration and teamwork should prevail versus isolation and disengagement with events that take place outside the teacher’s four walls. (Coppieters, 2005)

Shedd and Bacharach (as cited in Leech & Fulton, 2008) outline the rationale of participatory leadership, “(a) improves job satisfaction, (b) provides higher levels of employee morale and motivation, (c) contributes to greater commitment to organizational goals, and (d) develops a collaborative spirit among all members of the organization” (p. 2). Distributive leadership is a shift away from one person or a top down approach to a more comprehensive model of leadership that fosters development of a broad base of leaders who are able to move as a connected entity towards improvement. (Harris, Brown & Abbott, 2006)

Prestine (as cited in Murphy, Elliott, Goldring & Porter, 2007) state, “Effective leaders empower others and provide faculty with voice—both formal and informal—in running the school, not simply their own classrooms” (p. 189). Tapping into this potential will increase the opportunity for sustainable change.

Mullen & Hutinger (2008) state that distributive leadership is part of a reform movement where leadership is shared, responsibility is equal, and work is public.

Study groups, a proven method for supporting school priorities, function as the cornerstone of PLCs. They can be used as a vehicle for improving the quality of teacher professional development, coordinating adult learning with students needs, adopting research-based strategies, enhancing teacher leadership, and building community and common vision aligned with school and district goals. (p. 280)
Formations of faculty study groups or PLCs can be one way to begin efforts in establishing a culture within the building that involves the staff to not only be teachers but also engages them in the process of true leadership which also involves decision making. A study group as defined by Roberts & Pruitt (as cited in Mullen & Hutinger, 2008) “refers to faculty members who gather to discuss student work, instructional strategies and school wide goals or initiatives” (p. 278). Study groups or PLCs provide staff members with social interactions with colleagues as well as creating an atmosphere where staff can converge and feel supported. Their primary focus is on learning and improving their practice of teaching and bettering student learning outcomes. The study groups are focused on a vision with the central attention being student learning. The principal is seen as a key figure in facilitating these study groups and developing partnerships with staff as he/she works to establish leadership capacities with members of the staff. One of the first responsibilities of the school principal involves assisting the faculty to establish an agreed upon mission as well as specific goals for student learning. (DuFour, 2006) Building principals can then work with the faculty to develop group norms that will assist the members of the group to work collaboratively. Some of the principal’s responsibilities include overseeing the organization and implementation of study groups. Principals are also active members of PLCs and can assist in analyzing student data and identifying areas of teachers’ needs and students’ needs. They can also schedule time for uninterrupted meetings. This sends an important message to staff that this is important as time is scheduled into the day for discussion and reflection of practice. Principals can provide teachers with resources that they need in order to carry out their ideas. They are ultimately the gatekeepers of funding. Providing the necessary resources sends a message to staff that administration is supportive which validates their work. (Drago-Severson, 2004; Richardson, 2007)
(Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Hord & Sommers, 2008) discuss some of the benefits of establishing a collective or shared approach to leadership as this is one way to create supportive structures where teachers are encouraged to take on more responsibility and become active participants in reform movements. This creates a shared responsibility and a shared purpose for schools. Wanda Gray Elementary School incorporated study groups during their weekly faculty meetings. Through these study groups the faculty, including the building administrator, determined that higher order thinking skills was an area of weakness for their students. They discussed this as the topic at faculty meetings. Teachers shared instructional techniques, and they then brought what they learned back to their classrooms (Murphy & Lick, 2005).

Principals are the key leaders in facilitating this type of reform in their schools. Frequently, teachers are heard saying that they wish that they had time to converse and collaborate with their colleagues. Days are busy with lesson planning, correcting papers, and running off materials needed for lessons, leaving very few opportunities for interaction with colleagues. Providing grade level meetings or faculty meetings with this focus allows time for teachers to work collaboratively as a staff. Principals can participate as part of the teams in several ways including assisting in analyzing data and providing teachers with the needed resources in order to carry out academic work with their students are a few examples of roles that principals play. Drago-Severson, (2004) states, “Recent research on highly effective practices in teacher development affirms that participation in study groups affords teachers an opportunity to prioritize student needs and school improvement goals, not only on a consistent basis but also in a supportive context” (p. 278).

The building principal can assist in this learning through study groups, peer coaching, and teacher mentoring.
Hirsh, Speck, & Knipe (as cited in Mullen & Hutinger, 2008) note:

Job-embedded learning requires teachers to use current student data and research to develop or refine instructional strategies that assists students in meeting academic standards. Learning should be incorporated into daily activity through inquiry, reflection, and analysis of students' work and professional practice (p. 279).

Principals can further enhance the effectiveness of the group by applying some form of distributive leadership. Stoll (as cited in Williams, Brien, Sprague, & Sullivan, 2008) states, “Principals need to distribute leadership by providing teachers with opportunities to take leadership roles related to teaching and learning” (p. 4). Principals can ensure that teachers are taking responsibility for their own professional development/learning as well as that of their colleagues. Servage (2008) notes, “A democratic ideal is promoted by frequent references to distributed leadership” (p. 64). Gupton (as cited in Mullin and Hutinger, 2008) states, “Principals are in unique positions to mobilize professional talent and resources to maximize human learning and organizational development” (p. 281). Principals need to ensure that staff members have the skills and a knowledge base so that they are able to make good judgments. Leech & Fulton (2008) note, “Oftentimes the principal is perceived as a gatekeeper or filter for information. To be empowered, stakeholders must be knowledgeable of all aspects of an impending decision” (p. 6). Communication between the principal and staff members is vital in establishing an environment where staff can make effective decisions based on the most current data. Building relationships with staff members is also seen as an integral part of building a successful organization focused on learning. The principal is part of the learning process and becomes an active participant as well. The principal should also provide on-going feedback and acknowledge staff members’ contributions. Being valued and respected is an integral part of building staff members’ efficacy.
Summary

The theoretical lens of Vygotsky’s MKO and ZPD are critical factors associated with teaching and student learning. PLCs provide a venue for collaboration and sharing of best practice contributing to the reorganization of the literacy block instruction that took place. A key component of distributive leadership is the focus on teachers becoming leaders and learners within their buildings, creating a culture that is ripe for sustainability of school reform efforts. The literature researched supports this study and correlates to the research questions that this summative program evaluation sought to answer.
Chapter 3: Research Design

This qualitative study centered on a summative program evaluation of a pilot RTI literacy block program implemented during the 2010-2011 school year for first and second grade students in a southeastern Massachusetts school district. The basic assumptions that guided the implementation of the pilot literacy block included the fact that in heterogeneous classrooms many teachers are not able to meet the literacy needs of all learners, especially struggling learners and gifted learners. In addition, numerous referrals to special education were made because students were not making appropriate progress with grade level skills. In numerous situations students were not diagnosed with a learning disability and these students remained in heterogeneous classrooms where teachers worked diligently to address their learning needs. A pilot literacy block was put in place to address these needs of all students with four key formative goals in mind: differentiating instruction to meet all learners’ needs, improving literacy skills for all students, decreasing the achievement gap, and decreasing referrals to special education. Teachers’ perceptions about the pilot RTI literacy block program and its impact on teaching and student learning were explored. Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development and the role of the more knowledgeable other are instrumental in providing appropriate instruction to guide differentiated learning experiences. In addition, this researcher investigated the impact of a PLC through the lens of distributive leadership and its impact on differentiated literacy instruction.

Patton (2002) states,

Summative evaluations serve the purpose of rendering an overall judgment about the effectiveness of a program, 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 situations. (p. 281)
Data triangulation provided this researcher with valuable information that was used to evaluate the pilot RTI literacy block program implemented for first and second graders during the 2010-2011 school year. The following two questions were explored during the study:

**Research Questions**

1. How do teachers perceive that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and student learning?

   This research question connects to Vygotsky’s theoretical lens. Student data guided differentiation of literacy instruction viewed through the lens of Vygotsky’s ZPD. The MKO is the teacher who carefully monitors students’ progress and provides instruction tailored to their needs.

2. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of a PLC guided by distributive leadership with a focus on literacy differentiation?

   PLCs provide a structure for teachers to collaborate with one another. This teacher to teacher professional development can enhance teachers’ knowledge in relation to meeting students’ needs. Distributive leadership is a way to build and sustain school improvement efforts.

Table 3.1 in Appendix B represents the research questions, data sets, and sources from which all information were gathered. Triangulation of all data sources increased credibility of this summative program review.

**Methodology**

This summative program evaluation followed a qualitative methodology (Patton, 2002; Patton, 1987; Weiss; 1998) as this study focused on describing teachers’ reactions to the implementation of the pilot RTI literacy block and any impact they perceived that it had on
teaching and student learning. In essence, this researcher sought information about the pilot program in order to tell a story regarding the effectiveness of the RTI literacy block program from a teachers’ perspective. (Weiss; 1998) The study also explored PLCs through a lens of distributive leadership during the implementation of the pilot RTI literacy block. This included the role of the principal in establishing a culture of collaboration within the PLC and how distributive leadership practices were used to guide this process.

By utilizing a qualitative approach in the behavioral and social sciences this researcher was able to garner a better understanding of the day to day teaching practices being studied and was able to acquire the “real life” perspective of the teaching and learning taking place (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). By utilizing a collection and analysis of qualitative data this researcher had the potential to reveal the density of issues that surfaced during the study. (Creswell, 2009).

One method that has been used in qualitative studies is the interview (Creswell, 2009). The interview provides the researcher with an opportunity to understand the experiences of other people and the meaning that they make of their experiences (Seidman, 1991; Miles & Huberman; 1994, Patton, 1987, Weiss, 1998). The one-to-one open-ended interviews provided this researcher with data sets related to the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and student learning?

2. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of a PLC guided by distributive leadership with a focus on literacy differentiation?

Through the interview process teachers had an opportunity to share their view points and experiences with this researcher. This enabled this researcher to tell the story of the literacy
block which was piloted during the 2010-2011 school year for students in first and second grade.

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)

This researcher also utilized a standardized one-to-one open-ended interview protocol. Patton (2002) states,

> When doing action research or conducting a program evaluation, it may only be possible to interview participants once for a short, fixed time, such as a half hour, so highly focused questions serve to establish priorities for the interview. (p. 346)

This type of questioning technique ensured that the interviewer asked each interviewee the same questions which made it easier to compare responses. In addition, this format provided a means to organize data and more importantly a structure to make analysis of the data sets easier. (Patton, 1987) Open-ended questions should be asked “in a truly open-ended fashion so people can respond in their own words” (Patton, 2002, p.353). At the completion of the one-to-one interviews, this researcher transcribed and then coded the data as this researcher was looking for common themes to surface. Patton (2002) states, “The period after an interview or observation is critical to the rigor and validity of the data” (p. 383). Some of the phrases that this researcher heard in response to the interview questions included but are not limited to: intervention, collaboration, best practice, leadership role, support, varied resources, guided instruction, monitoring students’ understanding, and differentiating instruction according to students’ needs. These phrases are supported by the work of Vygotsky, the ZPD, and MKO as well as the work by Fullan and DuFour, DuFour & Eaker. The form in Table 3.3 (Appendix D) was used to
record data and salient points, themes, and opinions of teachers involved in the pilot RTI literacy block program and were captured during the first read of the transcripts.

A number of the interview questions were taken from a study conducted by Barnhardt (2009) and others were generated by this researcher based on DIBELS and the PET-R. The one-to-one interviews provided this researcher with an opportunity to understand the experiences of the participants involved in the pilot RTI literacy block program and the meaning that they made of their experiences. Interview questions were followed by probes, “Probes are used to deepen the response to a question, to increase the richness of the data being obtained, and to give clues about the level of response that is desired.” (Patton, 1987, p. 125) The interview questions align with the two research questions that drove this study and enabled this researcher to tell a story about the pilot literacy block and its impact on teaching and student learning. The first analysis took place after the interview as participants’ responses were fresh in this researcher’s mind. The form noted in Table 3.3 (Appendix D) was used to capture salient points and any themes that surfaced. The one-to-one interviews were audio taped, transcribed and then coded using MAXQDA 10 computer-assisted technology and this researcher examined the text for common themes and salient points that surfaced. An original code system was created based on the anticipated responses from the participants. This code system was later thematically reduced to reflect a more succinct and accurate report of the themes that surfaced based on the actual responses.

The one-to-one interviews were conducted during the school day and coverage was provided. The open-ended interview questions that teachers were asked along with the initial interview introduction are included in Appendix A.
Myles & Huberman (1994) state, “...ongoing coding uncovers real or potential sources of bias, and surfaces incomplete or equivocal data that can be clarified next time out” (p.65). Agar (as cite in Myles & Huberman, 1994) states, “The conventional advice was to go through transcripts or field notes with a pencil, marking off units that cohered because they dealt with the same topic and then dividing them into topics and subtopics at different levels of analysis” (p. 57). Thus, coding took place in an on-going process throughout the study. This method allowed this researcher to not only collect the data for analysis but more importantly drove the data collection process. “Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). Some of the key terms that surfaced during the interview related to Vygotsky included but are not limited to the following: intervention, collaboration, best practice, leadership role, support, varied resources, guided instruction, monitoring students’ understanding, and differentiating instruction according to students’ needs. Additionally, this researcher heard the following terminology related to the work of Fullan (2001; 2004; 2007): leadership role, added responsibility, and resource staff member. Collaboration and best practice are terms that align with the work of (DuFour, 2006; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2006; DuFour, Dufour, Eaker & Many, 2006) related to PLCs. This researcher transcribed the interview transcripts and looked for repetition or significant statements that related to the program goals. Additionally, this researcher utilized a computer-assisted tool, the MAXQDA 10, to assist with the organization and coding of data. Patton (2002) states, “Qualitative software programs facilitate data storage, coding, retrieval, comparing, and linking but human beings do the analysis” (p. 442). This researcher reread the interview notes several times to code salient points. The initial codes that were developed aligned with the research
questions that tied into Vygotsky, PLCs and distributive leadership. The codes noted in Table 3.2 in the appendix were used during the initial analysis.

Table 3.2 (Appendix C) depicts how the coding system was originally created. The first number in the code represents the corresponding research question; the second represents the theme and the third represents the code system within the theme. For example, in the code of 1.1.1, the first digit (1) would represent the first research question: How do teachers perceive that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and student learning? The second digit (1) would represent the theme: Differentiation, and the third digit (1) would represent the topic within the theme.

Coding allows researchers to chunk like information for analysis. Many times data that is collected during an open ended interview is chunked according to the meaning of a particular word or phrase. The initial coding system was modified during the study as new or unanticipated themes surfaced. Miles & Huberman, (1994) discuss the importance of modifying the coding process noting “… the researcher is open to what the site has to say, rather than determined to force-fit the data into preexisting codes” (p. 62). The coding system allowed this researcher to retrieve the information and organize it in a manageable way. “The organizing part will entail some system for categorizing the various chunks, so the researcher can quickly find, pull out, and cluster the segments relating to a particular research questions, hypothesis, construct or theme” (Myles & Huberman, 1994, p. 57). Table 3.3 (Appendix D) was utilized to record and code data during the initial first read. (Myles & Huberman, 1994, p. 54) This researcher then utilized the MAXQDA 10 computer-assisted tool which enhanced organization and reorganization of codes an assisted with analysis of the data sets.
This researcher provided the participants with a copy of the transcripts so that they had an opportunity to review the statements to ensure accuracy and completeness of this researcher’s data. This researcher e-mailed the transcripts to the participants and requested that they mark any area in red that needed to be refined before they returned it and participants were asked to type information that they wanted added to their transcript in green. This researcher also noted that she was willing to have a phone conversation or meet with the individual in person to clarify transcript data. During the initial meeting, this researcher provided an opportunity for the first and second grade team to ask questions and this researcher clarified information and answered any inquiries that surfaced.

**Site Participants**

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select the participants for this qualitative study. During the past year a pilot literacy block format was put in place for first and second grade students enrolled in a southeastern Massachusetts elementary school as a way to efficiently meet all learners’ needs in the area of reading instruction. Fifty-nine first grade students and fifty-two second grade students participated in the pilot RTI Literacy Block implemented during the 2010-2011 school year. Three first grade teachers, three second grade teachers, one special needs educator, and one building substitute were purposefully selected and volunteered to be part of this study as they were involved in the pilot RTI literacy block instruction.

Participation in a research study may seem daunting for some individuals. Every effort was made to create a comfortable risk free environment so that participants would share their perspectives. Even though this researcher did her best to create a safe and supportive environment, staff responses may be distorted due to anxiety, distress, personal bias or the emotional state of the staff member interviewed. The staff members may have responded to
what they feel the principal would want them to say rather than their actual impressions. During
the interview process staff members were encouraged to say whatever they wanted in a risk free
environment. As the interviewer, this researcher wanted to establish rapport with each person.
This researcher listened to responses without passing judgment. The participants were informed
that their responses would remain confidential. This researcher presented findings in a non
delineated manner such as: participant one noted, or several participants reported, etc. No
individual in the study was linked to any statement in the report.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Several steps were taken by this researcher in order to ensure that the rights of all members
of the study were protected. The participants purposefully selected for this study include three
grade one teachers, three grade two teachers, one building substitute, and one moderate special
needs educator. The school name has not been indicated in the final draft. Consent to conduct
the study was initially granted by the superintendent of schools and the building principal. This
allowed this researcher access to the DIBELS on-line data base. Consent was not needed for the
DIBELS assessments as all students in the district in grade one and two take these assessments.
No staff was identified in any manner in the final reporting. Staff names were not used in
reporting out findings. Staff members were notified at the start of the study that they had the
option of not participating at any time during the study. There was little to no risk associated
with any of the participants in the study.

**Data Collection**

**Interview.** In this qualitative summative program evaluation study, one-to-one interview data
was the primary means of data collection. Data sets were collected related to teachers’
perceptions of the implementation of the pilot literacy block using the standardized one-to-one
interview protocol in Appendix A. The standardized open-ended interview questions noted in Appendix A engaged teachers in a purposeful dialogue between the researcher and staff member. The intention was to garner information from the staff members to better understand the staff members’ views on how the pilot literacy block impacted them personally and their perception of how it impacted student learning. (Bogan & Biklen, 2006) The interview enabled this researcher to collect descriptive data from the staff members in their words relative to the implementation of the pilot RTI literacy block and provided insights on staff members’ perspectives. The interview protocol in Appendix A was used to guide the interview process. Topics of the interview include how the literacy block looked in first grade and second grade, the staff member’s role as a stakeholder, teachers’ perception on the goals of implementing the pilot RTI literacy block, the role that the principal had in the implementation, changes in students’ skills during the literacy block, changes in school culture, types of collaboration, use of progress monitoring, impact on the referral process, and future changes needed in the PLC that the school principal can put into practice.

Although the interview protocol was structured and had a consistent format containing specific questions, exploration of additional topics was considered during the interview to allow for flexibility (Patton, 2002; Patton 1987). The flexibility of asking more probing questions allowed this researcher to clarify understanding with regard to how teachers were thinking.

**DIBELS.** Additionally, data from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) was analyzed to determine if the literacy block had an impact on student achievement. This data informed this researcher during the development of the interview questions. Teachers administered the baseline DIBELS data in their homerooms. Each teacher had the DIBELS data relative to students in their homeroom class. They were provided this for the three benchmark
assessments for the fall, winter, and spring. Teachers took turns participating in the analysis and grouping sessions. Teachers who were involved in the grouping sessions had all of the DIBELS data for the two grade levels involved in the pilot literacy block program. Each grade level teacher had an opportunity to partake in the grouping session at one point during the year. This enabled them to see the collective DIBELS results from all students in grade one and two. This researcher was able to employ data that was used to establish literacy block grouping for the 2010-2011 school year and serves as a point of reference. This researcher was also able to review DIBELS data from the previous year. Teachers were introduced to DIBELS during the 2009-2010 school year but were not held accountable for entering the data and using it to make instructional decisions. Although the data set is not comprehensive in nature, it did provide this researcher with valuable information during the analysis.

All students in grade one and two, at a minimum, are administered DIBELS benchmark testing three times per year. Students in the lower groups or those students not making the benchmark received additional progress monitoring on a more frequent basis by their homeroom teachers. Progress monitoring is a part of the DIBELS assessment system and provides a means of measuring students’ progress in between the three benchmark assessment periods, fall, winter, and spring, to determine if the instruction that is being delivered to students is resulting in academic gains.

Teachers’ perceptions relative to the positive or negative effect of the literacy block have been recorded and coded through the one-to-one open ended interview and then salient points were assigned using the codes in Table 3.3 (Appendix D). It is important to note that teachers reported that students were making significant gains in their learning throughout the year. They attributed this in part to the pilot literacy block that was put in place.
Another instrument that was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the RTI literacy block program was the Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs (PET-R)– Revised (Kame'enui & Simmons, 2003). This evaluation tool was grounded in the research completed by Sugai, Horner, & Todd (2000) Effective Behavior Support: Self-assessment Survey. This survey contains a 38 question Likert instrument utilizing a 0-2 rating scale and aligns with the questions driving this study. The PET-R is used to benchmark school performance in the area of literacy. This instrument can be used to gather current data and for planning purposes allowing individuals to clearly assess schoolwide practices and beliefs in the area of literacy. Participants were asked to answer questions in this instrument with a focus on the pilot literacy block and not the comprehensive reading program utilized at this school at each grade level. The questions in the PET-R are arranged in seven specific categories: Goals/Objective/ Priorities, Assessment, Instructional Practices and Materials, Instructional time, Differentiated Instruction/Grouping, Administration/Organization, Communication, and Professional Development.

Data Analysis

An analysis of the effectiveness of the pilot RTI literacy block on student achievement, teacher collaboration, and the role of the principal during the PLC development with a lens on distributive leadership was created from the DIBELS data sets, interview notes, and the PET-R Likert survey. Three data sets were used during the triangulated data analysis and this researcher examined them to define the common themes that surfaced. An analysis of variance, ANOVA, was only used with the DIBELS 6th edition data sets. It is important to stress that this information was used to inform the interview process. (Salkind, 2010) DIBELS 6th edition data sets and the PET-R survey results were used to inform the interview process. Specific interview
questions (see Appendix A; question three, six - including probe a, b, & c) were developed and relate to DIBELS and correspond to student achievement. This was done to gain teachers’ perspectives relative to the overall success of the RTI pilot literacy block program on student achievement. The PET-R survey is an instrument that is utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of literacy programs. This instrument covers a variety of topics including the following: goals/objectives/priorities, assessment, instructional programs & materials, instructional time, differentiation/grouping/scheduling, administration, organization, communication, and professional development. Questions from the interview were generated after this researcher carefully reviewed the PET-R instrument. This was done to insure that this researcher was addressing the important elements that are essential to an effective reading program.

DIBELS is a curriculum based skills’ assessment and students are placed into one of three categories for several subtests based on their score on the assessment: at risk, some risk, low risk. These benchmark assessments are given three times per year: fall, winter and spring with the fall data set being used as a baseline. The fall benchmarks represent the baseline and the spring benchmark represents the summative data sets. The analysis examined data sets from the fall to the winter, winter to spring, and fall to spring. It is important to note that all DIBELS assessments showed significant improvements from the beginning to the end of the year. There were several questions contained in the interview that relate to DIBELS and progress monitoring: Question number three: What kind(s) of changes did you notice with students’ skills during the implementation of the pilot RTI literacy block program? Question number six: Can you discuss progress monitoring and its impact in your classroom/work, since the implementation of the literacy block? Probe number six a: What information does the progress monitoring give you? Does this information change instructional practices? And Probe number
six b: How have you used the DIBELS data during the pilot literacy block in comparison to the way you utilized it prior?

In addition, progress monitoring assessments, which are part of the DIBELS curriculum based assessment system, are completed at various intervals in between the three benchmark tests. Progress monitoring assessments are completed to insure that students continue to make progress with their skills. If at any time students show regression, the teachers will adjust his/her instructional approach. This qualitative methodology best fits with the summative program evaluation and the data points that were collected.

**Trustworthiness and Credibility**

To ensure trustworthiness and credibility of this study, this researcher collected data sets from several sources also known as triangulation (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996) including one-to-one interviews, DIBELS data sets, and a Likert scale evaluation instrument completed by the teachers.

**Trustworthiness.** “The aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is to support the argument that the inquiry’s findings are worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). Lincoln and Guba also elaborate on several techniques that can be used to establish trustworthiness including data triangulation and member-checking. To ensure trustworthiness, this researcher provided each staff member with the transcripts generated from the interview. This member-checking assured accuracy of the information collected. Staff members were able to correct any information that was inaccurate or add information if they desired. No changes were requested by the participants.

Member checking was also done after the analysis of all three data sets was completed. This researcher contacted the study participants and offered the following scenarios to review the
study findings: meet with all participants during the school day, meet with participants either before or after school, phone call to participants, or e-mailing the study findings. It was determined that participants wanted to receive the findings via e-mail. This researcher e-mailed the participants, allowed them one week to review the information, and also informed the participants that this researcher would be available at their school on a specified date both before school and after school for a meeting to discuss the findings if they desired. Participants did not attend the before/after school meeting nor did they make any comments regarding the study.

**Credibility.** “Credibility is an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a credible conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants’ original data” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). This study analyzed data sets from the one-to-one interviews, PET-R, as well as DIBELS which created a richer, multilayered and more credible data set than one or two would have generated.

This study also was peer reviewed by a colleague with a similar research interest. This involved a review of the study methodology including the data collection, analyses, and findings of this study. In addition, a reflective memo was kept during the study which provided a complete audit trail of the study as it progressed.

The DIBELS assessment contains several components. Table 3.5 in Appendix F shows the various measures of reliability and validity for the components. This is based on the work of Good, Kaminski, Smith, Simmons, Kame’enui & Kaminski (2002). Some key terms noted in Table 3.5 include: concurrent validity which is a measure of how a test correlates to a previously validated measure, alternate form-reliability which measures how reliable an assessment instrument is when alternate forms of the measure are used. DIBELS benchmark assessment is given three times per year; once in the fall, winter, and spring. In between the benchmark
assessments the alternate forms of the DIBELS are utilized to monitor students’ progress. Additionally, predictive validity is also noted. This instrument looks at how well a tool predicts future reading performance.

Data on subtests from Table 3.4 (Appendix E) was retrieved from the DIBELS home web site at https://dibels.uoregon.edu/ and includes the references of work cited. This data elaborates on the validity and reliability of the DIBELS 6th edition assessment instrument.

Table 3.5 (Appendix F), shows additional references which demonstrate reliability and validity of the DIBELS assessment instrument. The primary focus is predictive validity and reliability and is based on another commonly used curriculum based measurement used in the primary grades; the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery and Curriculum Based Measure.
Chapter 4: Report of Research Findings

Background

This study consists of a summative program evaluation of a pilot RTI literacy block program that was implemented in first and second grades in a southeastern Massachusetts elementary school. The site was purposefully selected as this was the first year that the RTI pilot literacy block program began. Fifty-nine first grade students and fifty-two second grade students were enrolled in the pilot RTI literacy block program. There were three grade one teachers, three grade two teachers, two special educators, and a building substitute who implemented the pilot RTI literacy block program. Approval to conduct the study was provided by the Superintendent of Schools as well as the building principal. Throughout this study, this researcher has also kept a log to provide a history and audit trail of the study.

Although the pilot RTI literacy block program was implemented during the 2010-2011 school year, several staff members began exploring RTI programs in other districts the prior year. Two southeastern districts were mentioned during the interviews. These schools were reported to have had established RTI programs in place however; school personnel and resources in these schools did not match precisely with the school in this study. There were additional staff members and numerous resources available at the other schools, and teachers at this study site were left with numerous questions related to how RTI would look in their workplace.

One school that was visited had teams of teachers who reviewed data and developed academic plans for individual students. Both schools had reading specialists who took on leadership roles within the school. The school in this study did not have comparable resources that were noted in the other schools.
In addition, the elementary school in this study had a new principal as of September, 2010. The new principal had previously been a second grade teacher in another school within the district. She had visited the school in this study during the prior year, directed by the Superintendent, to teach staff members how to use the DIBELS on-line assessment system. It is also important to note that the new principal was a driving force behind the RTI literacy block program that was implemented in her previous school. Teachers at this study site began using the DIBELS assessments during the 2009-2010 school year to familiarize themselves with the assessments as well as the on-line recording component. DIBELS was not used at this site during 2009-2010 for reorganization of instruction or grouping of students.

Several teachers noted that during the first few weeks of school, the new principal scheduled time for teachers to visit the other elementary school within the district which had similar resources and personnel to observe the RTI literacy block that had been in place for several years. Teachers from this site were able to view the students in the RTI literacy block model and observe the differentiated instruction that took place. The teachers were able to ask questions about the RTI literacy block program and its impact on teaching and student performance. The teachers from the neighboring school also assisted the school in this study by modeling how to use DIBELS data to create the RTI literacy block groupings. They reviewed the DIBELS data and determined the focus of instruction for each of the groups. The principal then met with the teachers at her school to discuss the various resources that she had available for them. Resources had already been organized by the special education teachers and placed in the literacy closet for classroom teachers to use with their literacy block groups.
Theoretical Lenses

Vygotsky. Vygotsky’s theory was used as the primary lens for this research. As educators strive to bridge the gap between that which is known and new knowledge, the ZPD is essential. It is imperative for educators to know their students’ learning profiles and provide instruction that is tailored to their needs. Teachers need to carefully monitor students’ progress and provide appropriate supports along the way which assist students in gaining new skills. The work of Vygotsky aligns with the RTI literacy block program that was piloted as teachers acting as the MKO, developed lessons targeted at students’ zones of proximal development.

After the DIBELS assessment was administered, students were placed into groups based on their skill levels. Instruction was matched to learners’ needs and teachers monitored students’ progress through observations as well as other means to ensure that students were making appropriate growth with their skills.

Professional learning communities. In addition, the theory of DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, who have written extensively on the subject of professional learning communities, was used as a lens in this study. Teacher collaboration was examined to determine if the pilot RTI literacy block program contributed to collaboration amongst the grade one and two staff. PLCs provide a venue for collaboration and sharing of best practice contributing to the reorganization of the literacy block instruction that took place.

Distributive leadership. The work of Michael Fullan, with a concentration on distributive leadership practices, was also used as a lens for this study. A key component of distributive leadership is the focus on teachers becoming leaders and learners within their buildings, creating a culture that is ripe for sustainability of school reform efforts. The role of the school principal in establishing a PLC within the school and the bearing that it had on teacher growth, leadership
opportunities – distributive leadership practices, and improved literacy skills for students was also explored.

Research Questions

Two key research questions guided this summative program evaluation:

1. How do teachers perceive that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and student learning?

2. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of a PLC guided by distributive leadership with a focus on literacy differentiation?

Introduction

The first question can be broken down into two components: the impact that the pilot RTI literacy block program had on teaching and the impact that the reorganization of literacy instruction had on student learning. The one-to-one interviews were the primary instrument used in this study and the PET-R and DIBELS data were used to inform the interview process. This researcher utilized the data from the one-to-one interviews and PET-R to address the first part of the first research question. The second part of the question relates to the use of student performance and data from the interviews as well as the DIBELS assessment data were used in the analysis to determine if the pilot literacy block had any impact on student achievement.

The one-to-one interviews provided this researcher with data relative to question two regarding how teachers were impacted by the implementation of a PLC guided by distributive leadership with a focus on literacy differentiation. Several questions contained in the interview align with PLCs and distributive leadership practices.

The implementation of a pilot RTI literacy block during the 2010-2011 school year was evaluated to determine teachers’ perceptions surrounding the reorganization of literacy instruction.
with an emphasis on how it impacted teaching. In addition, this researcher was interested in
determining how teachers perceived that literacy reorganization impacted student learning.
DIBELS assessment instruments for first and second graders, teachers’ perceptions gathered
through one-to-one open-ended interviews, as well as responses to the Planning and Evaluation
Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs – Revised (PET-R) survey provided this
researcher with various data sets that were triangulated and analyzed. It is important to note that
the interview was the primary instrument used in this study and enabled this researcher to tell the
story of the pilot RTI literacy block from the teachers’ perspectives.

The PET-R survey was an additional instrument used in this study as it is frequently utilized
during the planning and evaluation of effective schoolwide reading programs. Teachers completed
this survey with a spotlight on the pilot RTI literacy block portion of their reading program and not
the full literacy program offered at this school.

**Initial meeting.** Approval from the Internal Review Board was received and this researcher
initiated contact and visited the school in May, 2011 to meet with the potential participants. At
that time this researcher explained the study and answered any questions that the potential
participants raised. Grade one teachers, grade two teachers, special educators and the building sub
were provided with a consent form which was thoroughly reviewed. This researcher provided the
potential participants with a copy of the PET-R Likert Survey. They were asked to complete this
survey and return it in the stamped, addressed envelope if they selected to participate in the study.
Seven participants returned the completed surveys. The PET-R was designed to be anonymous
and participants’ return addresses were not included on the envelope nor were they on the
instrument itself. This researcher explained to the participants that they should complete the PET-
R focusing on the pilot literacy block program implemented during the 2010-2011 school year and not focus on the full literacy program offered at their school.

Data Analysis

**PET-R.** One of the instruments that was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the RTI literacy block program was the Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs (PET-R)—Revised (Kame’enui & Simmons, 2003). This evaluation tool was grounded in the research completed by Sugai, Horner, & Todd (2000) Effective Behavior Support: Self-assessment Survey. Seven PET-R surveys were completed and received by this researcher within one week of the initial meeting.

**Design.** The PET-R survey instrument contains seven categories with specific criteria noted in each category. In all there were 38 statements contained in this instrument. A Likert rating scale was used for each of these statements which align with the questions driving this study. The PET-R is used to benchmark school performance in the area of literacy. This instrument can be used to gather current data and for planning purposes allowing individuals to clearly assess schoolwide practices and beliefs in the area of literacy.

**Categories.** The complete PET-R instrument can be found in Appendix L. The following list contains the seven evaluation categories found in the PET-R:

- Goals/Objectives/Priorities
- Assessment
- Instructional Programs & Materials
- Instructional Time
- Differentiation/Grouping/Scheduling
- Administration/Organization/Communication
Professional Development

**Scoring.** Each of the categories noted above contained four to eight follow up statements. Participants were to read each statement and then allocate a point value based on how they perceived that each particular criterion was being implemented at their school during the RTI literacy block. The following three point values describe the perceived level of implementation for each of the criterion listed:

- 0- Not in place
- 1- Partially in place
- 2- Fully in place.

**Mean participant ratings.** The PET-R data was first organized by category and a participant rating percentage for each category was calculated based on the number of questions in each section. An overall rating for the entire PET-R battery was calculated for each participant and an overall rating for all participants was determined.
**Category analysis.** The PET-R is used to benchmark school performance in the area of literacy. This instrument can be used to gather current data and for planning purposes allowing individuals to clearly assess schoolwide practices and beliefs in the area of literacy. The PET-R data was organized by category and a perceived percentage for each category was calculated based on the number of questions in each section. An overall rating for the entire PET-R battery was calculated for each category. Participants perceived that there were two areas that emerged as strengths with higher ratings: Goals, Objectives, and Priorities with a mean implementation rating of (M=82%) and Differentiated Instruction, Groupings, Scheduling with a mean implementation rating of (M=88%).
rating of (M=91%). In addition, one category, Professional Development, fell well below the mean perceived implementation for the entire battery of (M=72.62%) with a mean implementation rating of (M=46%).

Figure 4.2

Overall Implementation Rating for the Entire PET-R Instrument

Category analysis. Each participant’s perceived implementation score for the entire PET-R battery is noted in the above figure. There were one hundred possible points for the entire assessment. The graph above depicts each participant’s perceived implementation for the entire battery. For example, participant one had a rating of 71.91% whereas participant two’s score was 76.74%. The seven participants’ perceived implementation for all categories noted in the PET-R ranged from 62.77% to 82.46%; with a mean score of (M=72.62%).
The questions in the PET-R are broken into seven specific categories and the following represents how they relate to the research question driving this study:

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 evaluation category relates to the first research question: How do teachers perceive that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and student learning? Literacy block instruction was reorganized and designed to take place during three sixty minute blocks. During this timeframe, the goal was to have teachers assess students’ skills and provide instruction that was matched to their students’ learning level (ZPD). Teachers carefully observed students’ progress and this informed their literacy block instruction. The MKO is the instructor who guides the learning process for students through their ZPD using research based practices and differentiated methodology.

Figure 4.3

Likert Score & Implementation by Participants/Goals, Objectives, Priorities
Category analysis. Each participant’s Likert score for this section and the perceived implementation percent is noted in the above figure. There were fourteen possible points in this category. For example, Participant one allocated a point value of eleven for this category which represents a perceived implementation of 78.57%. Additional information not noted in this table include the mean score from all participants at (M=11.43) and the mean perceived implementation from all participants in this category at (M= 82%). The following list of scores represents participants’ perceived implementation for this section: 64.29%, 78.57%, 78.5%, 78.57%, 78.57, 92.86%, 100%.

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)

Assessment aligns with the first research question: How do teachers perceive that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and student learning? This is relative as the MKO is constantly assessing students’ understandings of information and adjusting their teaching methodology to meet students’ needs. The DIBELS curriculum base benchmark assessment tool was used by all teachers to assess students’ skills. This assessment was given to all students three times during the year (fall, winter, and spring) and additional progress monitoring assessments were completed in between these times to ensure that students were making progress. The DIBELS data were used for reorganization of literacy groupings and defined literacy instruction that took place during the literacy block timeframe.
Category analysis. Each participant’s Likert score for this section and the perceived implementation percent is noted in the above figure. There were twenty possible points in this category. For example, Participant one allocated a point value of eighteen for this category which represents a perceived implementation of 90%. Additional information not noted in this table includes the mean score from all participants at (M=15.4) and the mean perceived implementation from all participants in this category at (M=77%). The following list of scores represents participants’ perceived implementation for this section: 60%, 60%, 75%, 75%, 90%, 90%, 90%.

3. 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. (PET-R, 2003, p. 7)

This evaluation component addresses the varied materials that are used by the MKO during instruction in order to meet learners’ needs and aligns with the first research question: How do teachers perceive that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and
student learning? Teachers used a variety of resources to meet the needs of learners in their RTI pilot literacy block. The instruction that took place during literacy block did not follow the “one size fits all” methodology. Teachers researched various programs and used the approach that best fit their student population. In addition, the second research question: How are teachers impacted by the implementation of a PLC guided by distributive leadership with a focus on literacy differentiation? aligns with this category as the building principal and special education teachers gathered materials appropriate for differentiated instruction for the various levels within the literacy block. The special education teachers took on a leadership role and provided general support to classroom teachers as the special educators routinely used these materials/programs when instructing students with learning difficulties and were able to model how the materials/programs were to be used.

Figure 4.5
Likert Score & Implementation by Participants/Instructional Programs & Materials

Category analysis. Each participant’s Likert score for this section and the perceived implementation percent is noted in the above figure. There were twenty-two possible points in
this category. For example, Participant one allocated a point value of seventeen for this category which represents a perceived implementation of 77.27%. Additional information not noted in this graph includes the mean score from all participants at (M=15.71) and the mean perceived implementation from all participants in this category (M= 71%). The following list of scores represents participants’ perceived implementation for this section: 63.64%, 63.64%, 68.18%, 68.18%, 72.73%, 77.27%, 86.36%.

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

   This category focuses on the first research question: How do teachers perceive that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and student learning?, and the second research question: How are teachers impacted by the implementation of a PLC guided by distributive leadership with a focus on literacy differentiation? Three sixty minute blocks were allocated for the RTI literacy block each week. The skill of time management affects the reorganization of literacy instruction and is also an essential component of PLC discussion topics. i.e. How can we best meet students’ needs in our education setting?
Figure 4.6

Likert Score & Implementation by Participants/Instructional Time

Category analysis. Each participant’s Likert score for this section and the perceived implementation percent is noted in the above figure. There were fourteen possible points in this category. For example, Participant one allocated a point value of seven for this category which represents a perceived implementation of 50%. Additional information not noted in this graph includes the mean score for points from all participants (M= 10.14) and the mean perceived implementation from all participants in this category (M=72%). The following list of scores represents participants’ perceived implementation for this section: 50.0%, 71.43%, 71.43%, 71.43%, 71.43%, 85.71%, 85.71%.

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 category aligns with the first research question: How do teachers perceive that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and student learning? This directly relates to how the MKO maximizes each student’s learning potential by honing in on
their ZPD. This builds on the student’s level of competence within the ZPD and assists them to a point where they are successful independent learners.

Figure 4.7

Likert Score & Implementation by Participants/Differentiated Instruction/Grouping/Scheduling

**Category analysis.** Each participant’s Likert score for this section and the perceived implementation percent is noted in the above figure. There were ten possible points in this category. For example, Participant one allocated a point value of seven for this category which represents 70.00% perceived implementation for this category. Additional information not noted in this table include the mean score from all participants (M=9.14) and the mean perceived implementation from all participants in this category (M=91%). This category received the highest perceived rating by participants. The following list of scores represents participants’ perceived implementation for this section: 70%, 80%, 90%, 100%, 100%, 100%, 100%.
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 category supports the second research question: How are teachers impacted by the implementation of a PLC guided by distributive leadership with a focus on literacy differentiation? Teachers working within a PLC take on leadership roles advocating for materials needed for instruction. In addition, they are able to share best practices by communicating with each other during PLC meetings.

Figure 4.8
Likert Score & Implementation by Participants/Administration/Organization/Communication

Category analysis. Each participant’s Likert score for this section and the perceived implementation percent is noted in the above table. There were twelve possible points in this category. For example, Participant one allocated a point value of nine for this category which represents 75.00% implementation. Additional information not noted in this graph includes the mean score from all participants (M=8.14) and the mean perceived implementation from all
participants in this category (M=68%). The following list of scores represents participants’ perceived implementation for this section: 41.67%, 58.33%, 66.67%, 66.67%, 75.00%, 83.33%, 83.33%.

7. Professional Development:
Adequate and ongoing professional development is determined and available to support reading instruction.

This category aligns with the second research question: How are teachers impacted by the implementation of a PLC guided by distributive leadership with a focus on literacy differentiation? Teachers are able to share best practice during PLC meetings. This ongoing professional development is essential in supporting teachers as they assess their own instruction and student learning. Adequate and ongoing professional development is determined and available supports are addressed in relation to reading instruction. (PET-R, 2003, p. 11)

Figure 4.9
Likert Score & Implementation by Participants/Professional Development

Category analysis. Each participant’s Likert score for this section and the perceived implementation percent is noted in the above table. There were eight possible points in this category. For example, Participant one allocated a point value of five for this category which
represents 62.50% implementation. Additional information not noted in this table includes the mean score from all participants at (M=3.71) and the mean perceived implementation from all participants in this category at (M=46%). This category received the lowest score for perceived implementation assessed by participants. The following list of scores represents participants’ perceived implementation for this section: 25%, 37.5%, 37.5%, 50%, 50%, 62.5%, 62.5%.

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

Summary

The results from the PET-R demonstrate that participants perceived that there were definite strengths as well as weaknesses with the implementation of the pilot RTI literacy block program. This can be seen in the variances in scores that were allocated to the different categories. Some of the categories received higher ratings meaning that teachers perceived that certain conditions were in place and implemented during the pilot year and others have not been addressed at this time.

One area, Differentiated Instruction/Grouping/Scheduling, was rated between 90%-100% by five participants. This aligns with the theoretical lens of Vygotsky with a focus on the zone of proximal development and the MKO. Two participants rated this area lower with implementation ratings of 70% and 80% respectively. The overall ratings for this category were higher than all other categories. It is speculated that this category received the highest rating due to the fact that teachers differentiate instruction in their homeroom classes on a regular basis. Differentiation occurs during guided reading as well as with other subject areas and is embedded in instructional practices in all content areas at the elementary level.
The following table represents a list of categories arranged from highest to lowest based on participants’ perceived implementation during the year long pilot program:

Table 4.1
Mean Participant Ratings for PET-R Categories

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<th>Mean Participant Ratings for PET-R Categories</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated instruction/grouping/scheduling</td>
<td>91.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals/Objectives/Priorities</td>
<td>82.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>77.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Time</td>
<td>72.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Programs &amp; Materials</td>
<td>71.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration/Organization/Communication</td>
<td>68.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>46.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The remaining four categories in the PET-R contained implementation ratings ranging from 68% to 77%, meaning that some of the components in these categories are perceived to be in place while others are not.

The second category, Goals/Objectives, Priorities, also received a favorable implementation rating. This category contained fourteen statements and participants Likert scores ranged from 9-14 points. During the interviews, participants reported that they felt that they had a clear understanding of the goals of the pilot RTI literacy block and they recognized that the pilot RTI literacy block was put in place to improve student achievement.
Teachers had minimal experiences using the DIBELS assessment system prior to the RTI literacy block. Although one of the special educators surfaced in a leadership role, the building lacked a building expert who would be responsible for overseeing the assessment system. This person could potentially take on leadership responsibilities that would ensure that all assessments were collected reliably, the data were scored and entered correctly, and feedback to staff members was delivered in a timely fashion. This researcher speculates that as staff members gain confidence with DIBELS and teacher leaders begin to surface to monitor the assessment process, the assessment system at this site will strengthen and teachers will rely more heavily on the data that is collected.

Administration/Organization/Communication received a relatively low perceived implementation rating of 68%. Careful analysis of the components listed under this heading includes the aspect of a “leadership team”. A PLC or leadership team had not surfaced at this stage at this site. Additionally, one component in this category noted that “grade-level teams are established and supported to analyze reading performance and plan instruction” (PET-R, Appendix L). One participant gave this a score of 2 and all other participants gave this a 1 or 0. During the interviews it was noted that teachers had an opportunity to attend at least one of the meetings which involved analysis of data, however, more professional development and time with colleagues was needed. During the interviews participants noted the strong leadership of the building principal. This is contradictory with the low implementation rating for this category. After reviewing the statements in this category, this researcher determined that it was not a reflection on the building principal but rather the specific components that were listed in this category that reflect the lower perceived implementation rating.
Unfortunately, financial constraints did not allow for building substitutes which would have enabled meetings where the entire grade level could review student data, analyze the information, and plan instruction. It is speculated that these factors also contributed to the lower score for this category.

Additionally, one category, professional development, was more pronounced as an area that is in need of improvement with an overall implementation rating of 46%. The category consisted of eight components with participants’ total Likert scores ranging from 2-5. Only two participants gave this category a score of 5 out of 8 representing an implementation of 62.50% for this category. The remaining five participants’ rated this category at 50% or lower.

When implementing any new program or initiative, funding for professional development needs to be a priority. During this pilot RTI literacy block program teachers did not feel that adequate time was allocated for meetings. In addition, staff members were expected to learn new programs which in many instances occurred independently. Building a strong PLC would certainly address some of the issues that surfaced in the area of professional development. Teachers could discuss programs, instructional strategies, and develop a repertoire of best practices to assist them in differentiating instruction enabling them to better meet students’ needs.

**DIBELS Analysis**

**Administration of assessment.** The DIBELS curriculum based skill assessments are administered at three different points during the year: beginning, middle, and end to measure student progress in the area of literacy development. In 2009-2010 teachers were instructed as to how to administer the DIBELS assessments, progress monitor
students, and input student data into an on-line database. At the start of the year not all student data was recorded as it was not a requirement. As the year progressed, more teachers input additional student data to practice as they would be required to do this task the following year. In 2010-2011, the teachers were required to implement the literacy block and track student progress using the DIBELS assessments and online database. In addition, they completed some progress monitoring for students who were not meeting benchmark to ensure that they were making appropriate gains. Progress monitoring assessments are part of the DIBELS assessment system and an important component in an RTI model. In essence, teachers are not waiting for a student to fail, they are able to quickly identify students that are having difficulty from baseline assessments and then administer progress monitoring assessments frequently to ensure that students continue to make appropriate gains.

**Connecting quantitative data to interview data.** There were several interview questions related to using DIBELS data and these were included to gain an understanding of how teachers perceived that the literacy block impacted student achievement. The teachers responded to questions related to the changes that they noticed with their students’ skills during the implementation of the pilot literacy block program, the use of progress monitoring data, changes that teachers made to the delivery of instruction based on the data, and how DIBELS data was used during the pilot program compared to the prior year. There was continuity with responses to these questions and the DIBELS data that was collected and analyzed. Teachers reported that they saw an overall improvement in their students’ skills from beginning to the end of the year and the data showed an overall improvement as well.
Data Sets

The data that was obtained was comprised of two independent samples from 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. In both years DIBELS data was used to assess the progress being made by first and second grade students. In the first grade, the assessments that were used included phoneme segmentation fluency (PSF) and nonsense word fluency (NWF). The following table represents the benchmark goals for the PSF and NWF for the three assessment periods.

Table 4.2 Grade One Benchmark Goals PSF and NWF 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></td>
<td>Month 1 - 3</td>
<td>Month 4 – 6</td>
<td>Month 7 – 10</td>
</tr>
<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>

(https://dibels.uoregon.edu/benchmark.php#3grade1)

PSF. During the PSF assessment, students are shown one word at a time and are asked to identify each speech sound in the word. For example, the word “den” has three different phonemes /d/ /e/ /n/.

Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words and the understanding that spoken words and syllables are made up of sequences of speech sounds.
1. essential to learning to read in an alphabetic writing system, because letters represent sounds or phonemes. Without phonemic awareness, phonics makes little sense.
2. fundamental to mapping speech to print. If a child cannot hear that "man" and "moon" begin with the same sound or cannot blend the sounds /rrrruuuuuuuuuu/ into the word "run", he or she may have great difficulty connecting sounds with their written symbols or blending sounds to make a word.
3. essential to learning to read in an alphabetic writing system.
4. a strong predictor of children who experience early reading success. (Yopp, (1992)
**NWF.** In the Nonsense word Fluency (NWF) assessment, students are shown “alien” words and are asked to sound out as many vowel consonant or consonant vowel consonant words as they can in one minute. An example of a word in this assessment section would be “zob”. The student would get credit for identifying each phoneme /z/ /o/ /b/ or in reading the entire word “zob”. NWF is a measure that assesses alphabetic principle skills. Students receive a score for the number of letter-sounds produced correctly in one minute. A student may receive a lower score if they read each letter sound in isolation as it may take longer to complete this task rather than to just read word in its entirety. Higher scores would be awarded if students are able to read the entire word which is the ultimate goal of this assessment. In this timed assessment, the key is having students correctly read unfamiliar words in a fluent manner.

**ORF.** In second grade classes, students are assessed on their oral reading fluency (ORF) skills. This assessment measures fluency and accuracy. In essence, the student has strong decoding and processing skills which are automatic when approaching an unfamiliar word. Once students have strong oral reading fluency, they are able to focus their attention on the meaning of the words that were read and comprehension skills. The following table represents the ORF benchmarks goals for the three assessments given during the year. As the year progresses, the benchmark increases. By the end of second grade students are expected to read 90 words per minute.
Table 4.3 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</th>
<th>Middle of Year</th>
<th>End of Year</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>

[https://dibels.uoregon.edu/benchmark.php#3grade2](https://dibels.uoregon.edu/benchmark.php#3grade2)

The ORF passages and procedures are based on the program of research and development of Curriculum-Based Measurement of Reading by Stan Deno and colleague 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](https://dibels.uoregon.edu/measures/orf.php#description)). 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]

Table 4.4 First Grade PSF and NWF Results from DIBELS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSF</th>
<th>DIBELS assessment</th>
<th>PSF</th>
<th>DIBELS assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NWF</th>
<th>DIBELS assessment</th>
<th>NWF</th>
<th>DIBELS assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each table has the respective scores that were being assessed using DIBELS for each assessment throughout the corresponding school year for first graders. The data collected was a sample that is representative of the first grade population of this school community. Students in the classes participated in the DIBELS assessment when the teachers began to use this during the 2009-2010 school year and full participation took place during the 2010-2011 school year. Since all scores were used in calculating the summary statistics, this sample data is representative of the population and includes all subgroups within the population. Each sampling is significantly large enough to represent the school and the full distribution of test scores all showed a relatively symmetric distribution.

Table 4.5 The Second Grade ORF Results from DIBELS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ORF 2009-2010</th>
<th>DIBELS assessment</th>
<th>ORF 2010-2011</th>
<th>DIBELS assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>End</td>
<td>Beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>104.9</td>
<td>108.3</td>
<td>124.7</td>
<td>81.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focusing on the second grade scores now, over the course of the year both sets of data show progress measuring the ORF skills. In 2009-2010 the mean scores increased almost 20% (M = 104.9 to M = 124.7) and in the 2010-2011 school year the second grade students increased their mean scores 56% from the beginning of the year to the end of the year (M = 81.8 to M = 127.6). After review of all the mean scores in all skills tests, this researcher noted overall improvements in all scores.

**Analysis of DIBELS Data**

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 if (M Beginning = M Middle = M 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. These analysis were 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 are large enough and are 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 to eliminate the possibility that the results were subject to chance and all tests were carried out at the 0.05 significance level. It is important to stress that this data was used to inform the interview process and the development of the interview questions which are the primary source of data for this study.

**First grade ANOVA PSF 2009-2010.** In the first grade PSF DIBELS during the 2009-2010 scores the one way analysis of variance showed the change in mean scores to be significant, $F(2,128) = 39.38$, $p < 0.001$. After further analysis the difference from the beginning (M = 28.9, $SD = 14.9$) of the year to the middle (M = 47, $SD = 12.5$) of the year was a significant change, $t(72) = 5.74$, $p < 0.001$. The change from the middle to the end of the school year (M = 50.6, $SD = 9.3$) on the PSF DIBELS assessment were not significantly different, $t(64) = 1.51$, $p > 0.05$. The change from the beginning to the end of the year was also found to be significant, $t(57) = 7.97$, $p < 0.001$. A close look to the 2010-2011 ANOVA shows a similar pattern. It is important to stress that this data was used to inform the interview process. These
analyses were done to eliminate the possibility that the results were subject to chance and all tests were carried out at the 0.05 significance level.

First grade ANOVA PSF 2010-2011. In the first grade PSF DIBELS assessment during 2010-2011 school year the one way analysis of variance found there was at least one mean score that differed from the beginning (\( M = 35.6, SD = 14.4 \)) to the middle (\( M = 54.8, SD = 12 \)) to the end (\( M = 53.1, SD = 8.9 \)) of the year, \( F(2,185) = 49.18, p < 0.001 \). A closer look at the data found similar results as in the previous year, such that, the change in mean scores from the beginning of the year to the middle of the year were found to be significant, \( t(118) = 8.09, p < 0.001 \), as were the means from the beginning to the end of the year, \( t(101) = 8.16, p < 0.001 \), but the means from the middle to the end of the 2010-2011 school year PSF scores were not significantly different, \( t(114) = 0.9, p > 0.05 \). This is consistent with the ANOVA for the previous year. It is important to stress that this data was used to inform the interview process. These analyses were done to eliminate the possibility that the results were subject to chance and all tests were carried out at the 0.05 significance level.

First grade ANOVA NWF 2009-2010. First grade NWF/CLS DIBELS assessment during the 2009-2010 school year in the one way analysis of variance found that at least one mean was significantly different than the others from the beginning (\( M = 43.2, SD = 38.4 \)) to the middle (\( M = 67.3, SD = 33.5 \)) to the end (\( M = 74.2, SD = 35.8 \)) of the year, \( F(2,128) = 8.85, p < 0.001 \). The change in mean scores from the beginning to the middle of the year were found to be significant, \( t(73) = 2.92, p < 0.005 \). Interestingly, the mean scores from the middle to the end of the school year assessment were not found to be significantly different. \( t(83) = 0.95 p = .345 \). It also follows that the scores from the beginning to the end of the year were found to be significant, \( t(76) = 3.93, p < 0.001 \). The findings are similar to those found during the 2009-
2010 and 2010-2011 for PSF. It is important to stress that this data was used to inform the interview process. These analyses were done to eliminate the possibility that the results were subject to chance and all tests were carried out at the 0.05 significance level.

First grade ANOVA NWF 2010-2011. First grade NWF DIBELS assessment during the 2010-2011 school year in the one way analysis of variance found that at least one mean was significantly different than the others from the beginning (M = 31.1, SD = 24.5) to the middle (M = 58.5, SD = 30.6) to the end (M = 82.9, SD = 34.3) of the year, F (2,185) = 46.3, p< 0.001. The change in mean scores from the beginning to the middle of the year were found to be significant, t(118) = 5.53, p < 0.001. The first set of scores analyzed also revealed significant difference between the middle and end of the year scores, t (122) = 4.21, p <0.001. This DIBELS analysis also demonstrated the greatest percent increase from the beginning to the end of the year at 167%. The gain in student achievement in NWF from the beginning to the end of the year can not be considered a random occurrence or simply occurring by chance. Teachers echoed throughout the interview process that students were making significant gains with their NWF skills. It is important to stress that this data was used to inform the interview process. These analyses were done to eliminate the possibility that the results were subject to chance and all tests were carried out at the 0.05 significance level.

Second grade ANOVA ORF 2009-2010. Second grade DIBELS ORF was analyzed using the one way analysis of variance and found the mean scores from the beginning (M = 104.9, SD = 44.3) to the middle (M =108.3, SD = 38.4) to the end (M = 124.7, SD = 41.5) to be significant, F(2,171) = 3.87, p < 0.05 This was the only assessment that did not find the difference between the means from the beginning of the year to the middle of the year to be significant, t(100) = 0.43, p > 0.05. The other two comparisons were found to be significant; from the middle to the
end, $t(121) = 2.28$, $p < 0.05$, and from the beginning to the end, $t(104) = 2.43$, $p < 0.05$. It is important to stress that this data was used to inform the interview process. These analyses were done to eliminate the possibility that the results were subject to chance and all tests were carried out at the 0.05 significance level.

**Second grade ANOVA ORF 2010-2011** Second grade DIBELS ORF was analyzed using the one way analysis of variance and found the mean scores from the beginning ($M = 81.8$, $SD = 37.4$) to the middle ($M = 115.8$, $SD = 37.9$) to the end ($M = 127.6$, $SD = 37.5$) to be significant, $F(2,159 = 22.8$, $p < 0.001$. With a closer look the change in scores from the beginning to the middle of the school year were found to be significant, $t(104) = 4.67$, $p < 0.001$. The scores from the middle to end of the year assessments were not found to be significant, $t(102) = 1.69$, $p = 0.094$. The results were also found to be significant from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, $t(103) = 6.65$, $p < 0.001$. It is important to stress that this data was used to inform the interview process. These analyses were done to eliminate the possibility that the results were subject to chance and all tests were carried out at the 0.05 significance level.

**Summary**

All DIBELS samples are large enough and are 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. It is important to stress that this data was used to inform the interview process. These analyses were done to eliminate the possibility that the results were subject to chance and all tests were carried out at the 0.05 significance level.

Although teachers had data for their homeroom students for the baseline assessments, they did not have the overall statistical data to support their perceptions. This was intentional as this researcher was looking to determine how teachers perceived that students were performing. If
the statistical data was provided, teachers would have no argument for expressing disagreement with the findings. In this manner, this researcher was able to gather a true indication of teachers’ perceptions relative to students’ skill development. This researcher wanted to develop trust with participants and wanted them to understand that this researcher was interested in their voice and perspective relative to students’ academic growth or decline. If data had been provided them, participants may have deferred to the data creating a closed mind on what they actually perceived happened and this may have affected their responses. The DIBELS data informed the research questions in order to garner teachers’ thoughts. (see Appendix A for interview questions) Due to the qualitative nature of the study, this researcher did not provide participants with the statistical quantitative data during the interview.

Overall trends observed in the first grade PSF DIBELS assessment shows improvement for both the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. From beginning to end in 2009-2010 there was about a 75% increase in mean scores (M = 28.9 to M = 50.6), and 2010-2011 almost 50% increase in mean scores for the first grade students (M = 35.6 to M = 53.1).

The increase in scores continues in the NWF DIBELS assessment for first grade students; during the 2009-2010 school year there was a mean score increase of over 70% (M = 43.2 to M = 74.2) and the following year when the literacy block and DIBELS assessment was required the data shows a 167% increase in mean score from the beginning of the year to the end of the year (M = 31.1 to M = 82.9). Scores for NWF for both years showed growth. However, data from 2010-2011 is most compelling as it demonstrates that considerable improvement in scores occurred in the area of NWF.

In second grade, during the 2010-2011 school year, the ORF DIBELS assessments more than doubled the percent increase in the mean score (2010-2011, beginning M=81.8 to end 127.6
representing a 56% increase) compared to the previous year (2009-2010, beginning $M=104.9$ to end $M=124.7$) representing a 20% increase.

An Analysis of Variance for PSF, NWF and ORF was appropriate to discover that the mean scores from the beginning to middle to end of the year on the DIBELS assessments were significantly different enough based on the variance in scores not just the mean summary statistic. It is important to stress that this data was used to inform the interview process. These analyses were done to eliminate the possibility that the results were subject to chance and all tests were carried out at the 0.05 significance level. Teachers noticed that significant improvements were made in several areas.

**Interviews**

**Rationale.** The emphasis on the interview as the primary source of data collection for this study enabled this researcher to capture the impact that the pilot literacy block program had on each individual teacher as well as the impact teachers perceived it had on student learning. All three of the theoretical lenses were used during the analysis of the interviews. With the lens of Vygotsky, this researcher was looking for teacher responses to echo differentiated instruction, student groupings, matching resources and instruction to student needs, and student achievement. In the area of Professional Learning Communities, this researcher was looking for statements on communication, collaboration, goals, and professional development. With the theoretical lens of distributive leadership, this researcher was looking for statements regarding leadership roles and responsibilities. An original code system was developed based on anticipated responses and further defined based on participants’ responses during the analysis of the transcripts. Table 4.6 represents the thematic reduction of codes and aligns with the themes that emerged from
participants’ responses. Questions that align with all three theoretical lenses were embedded in the one-to-one interview questions.

**Protocols.** This researcher received the signed consent forms and consulted with the building principal in order to schedule the interviews. Each interview was scheduled for a one hour block of time and the actual interviews ranged from 35 minutes to 50 minutes. Classroom coverage was provided for the participants so that the interviews could be conducted during the school day. A quiet location was secured to ensure privacy which allowed participants to answer questions openly. Each interview began with an introduction script and an explanation of the Olympus Sorority audio recording device that was being used. This researcher explained that ten key questions would be asked along with follow up questions which would allow for additional sharing of information. This researcher also noted that time would be provided at the end of the interview where participants would be able to share additional information that was not asked by this researcher during the interview.

Participants were informed that they would receive an e-mail of their transcripts so that they could ensure accuracy of interview data collected. Participants were instructed to highlight any information that they wanted deleted in red and add any information in green and return the document at their earliest convenience via e-mail. This researcher was also available for a person-to-person meetings or phone calls if the participant desired. The participants did not make any additions or corrections to the script that was provided to them.

**Initial analysis.** After each interview, this research quickly noted any salient points that surfaced during the interview on the form found in Appendix D. These points were also reviewed after the initial transcription process was completed. The interviews were downloaded into the
MAXQDA 10 program which allowed this researcher to code the transcripts. An initial code system was utilized (see Appendix C) and an additional code was added as a new theme surfaced. Initially a code system containing a numeric alignment with each research question was developed. This code system was created based on the anticipated participants’ responses. It was further refined and reduced to reflect a clearer picture of the themes that emerged. The numeric system that was originally developed was not needed with the MAXQDA 10 software. Table 4.6 depicts the original code system and the strategic reduction of themes that was created. In addition, an example of the thematic reduction is represented in Appendix M. It is important to note that several of the themes were also present in the PET-R instrument that was used. The thematic reduction was generated as the original codes created were found to be subsets of the new themes that were developed.
### Table 4.6

**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 Goals Clear</td>
<td>Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Goals Unclear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Differentiation</td>
<td>Differentiation/Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Differentiation Planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Differentiation Resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC Resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Special Education</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Groupings</td>
<td>Groupings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Grouping Dynamics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC Group Dynamics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Achievement</td>
<td>Student Academic Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Decline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC Student Academic Growth Increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC Student Academic Growth Decrease</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC Leadership Role Teacher</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC Leadership Role Principal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Assessment</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC Community Collaboration Structured</td>
<td>PLCs -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC Community Collaboration Unstructured</td>
<td>Communication and Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC Collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literacy Block Communication Colleagues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC Professional Development</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced Learner (added)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This researcher was able to download a code quote matrix which enabled an effective method for this researcher to analyze the data. For example, using the code of “Differentiation/Resources”, this researcher was able to retrieve all participants’ responses for this
code which included literacy block differentiation, literacy block differentiation planning, literacy block differentiation resources, and PLC resources. Appendix M demonstrates an example of how the original codes were thematically reduced to Differentiation/Resources from these four original themes. The quote matrix simplified the process and allowed this researcher to re-examine the interview transcripts for key themes that emerged.

The implementation of the pilot RTI literacy block format was new to staff at this school. Teachers reported that they had heard about RTI but they were unsure as to how to implement a tiered intervention approach. Teachers reported that the RTI approach put forth by the building principal was a drastic change to their teaching practices. Several participants noted that at the beginning there was a lot of “trepidation”. Teachers reported that they were really unsure of what to do during the literacy block time frame which created stress or they simply asked themselves if they were doing the “right thing”. In addition, teachers reported that they had difficulty “giving up” their students for three sixty minute blocks during the week. As the year progressed, the participants stated that they felt more comfortable with this aspect of the literacy block design.

**Themes**

This researcher was able to use the quote matrix which was available through the use of the MAXQDA 10 program to retrieve segments from each of the interviews. The segments were categorized into the following key themes:

**Goals.** One of the interview questions related to this specific category, “What do you see as the main goal of implementing an RTI literacy block model?” Participants’ responses for this category were fairly similar and homogeneous in nature. Some of the key responses include the following statements:

The main goal would obviously be to produce fluent readers. Absolutely, I think that the goal of any teacher when you looking at a classroom is to get your students to the highest
level that they can achieve within the grade level. We all expect strong comprehension and fluency and we’re all on board with that. (Participant one)

Participant two stated, “To reach each learner at their own level”.

In addition,
To ensure the success of the students and reach out to the struggling students to bring them up in a leveled setting. Also, to meet the needs of all students no matter what level they are at low middle or high. The teacher continually monitors them with DIBELS to make sure that you are on task and students are making gains with the program. (Participant three)

Another teacher replied,

We define and focus on their skills; their specific skills that they are lacking. It is to provide them with specific skills based instruction. Also, we have tier three kids struggling and the model has helped those kids. Yes, I do. Absolutely, to improve student achievement. (Participant six)

Additional comments from this question include the following, “The main goal is really to work with the students to take what they are struggling with and focus on it in class.” (Participant seven) and “To strength children’s reading skills where they are deficient and to focus on those skills during that one hour of time so that they can make effective reading progress.” (Participant eight)

Although teachers noted that they were responding to students’ needs and differentiating instruction to meet their needs, they commented on the fact that at times they were unsure if they were in fact accomplishing this task. Some of the comments include the following statements, “One thing we were really concerned about was, “Am I doing it right?” (Participant one)

In addition, another teacher expressed,

I wonder all the time, is it working. I know that DIBELS shows it is working but I question myself. I ask myself where do I go from here, what should I do next? If you have a manual, not that you’ll follow it exactly, then you would at least have a scope and sequence. I second guess myself a lot. (Participant eight)

Clearly teachers understood the premise of the RTI literacy block but at times they questioned if they were providing their students with appropriate instruction. They second guessed themselves
throughout the year. Because this program was new and teachers didn’t have a great deal of time to communicate and collaborate with one another they were uncertain if they were indeed “doing it right”. One teacher noted above stated that the data was showing that students were making gains, yet she still questioned her teaching. This researcher believes that enhanced communication and collaboration with colleagues will develop teachers’ self efficacy which will promote risk taking and increase teachers’ confidence in what and how they are meeting students’ needs.

**PLCs - Communication and collaboration.** During the interviews, participants stated that opportunities to communicate and collaborate with their colleagues were important elements that they would like to see enhanced in the coming year. Having time to share ideas with each other was beneficial, however, there was not adequate time to do this. The teachers stated that although collaboration time was not optimal, the communication that did occur was more focused when discussing the literacy block.

Cross grade level communication also took place as some students were in literacy block groups that had both first and second graders in them. This cross grade level discussion was seen as a positive addition as teachers hadn’t really communicated across grade levels in the past.

Although grade level meetings were held, many staff members were unfamiliar with the term “professional learning community”. It was noted that grade level meetings were scheduled each month; however, there were numerous items on the agenda that needed to be addressed during these meetings and the focus was not solely on literacy block. Participant one noted, “Most beneficial have been the couple of meetings that we have had with the building principal or just with our group.” Several participants acknowledged that one of the biggest challenges was the lack of time to meet as a group to discuss this new initiative. Participant seven stated,
Unfortunately we didn’t meet often. We could have benefitted from everyone’s ideas. We don’t get to see people during the school day. I would expect to see more collaboration. (Participant seven)

Another teacher echoed,

There was not a lot of room for group collaboration and planning time. This is one thing for us to work on next year. We all sort of took our groups, looked at resources available that we had but we didn’t have a lot of collaboration. There was not a lot of time. We possibly had one or two meetings at the beginning and one or two meetings to say, “How is it going?” (Participant one)

Teachers elaborated on the fact that they needed more time to meet as a group to discuss students’ progress and instruction. Teachers stated that they met “on the fly” on numerous occasions due to constraints in people’s busy schedules. They stated that flexibility to organize meetings before or after school was limited. They noted that the meetings that were held during the day were beneficial. However, budgets did not allow for substitute coverage so that meetings could be conducted during the school day and on a more frequent basis throughout the year. Participants felt that this was certainly a hindrance as they were implementing a new RTI program, which required additional time to discuss teaching methodology and student progress.

All participants commented at some level relative to the lack of time to meet in order to discuss the implementation of literacy block. They articulated several reasons why they were not able to meet before school or after school as well as scheduling issues that hindered them from meeting during the school day. Participants felt strongly that more time was necessary for professional development and sharing of best practices as well as conversations centered on student data and performance.

**Groupings.** Participants noted that once the data team analyzed the DIBELS data, the students were placed into literacy block groupings. The data team that met in October received support from another school in the district. One teacher from each grade level and the special educators at this site were also part of the initial data team meeting. In January, students took the
middle of the year DIBELS benchmark assessment and a meeting was scheduled to discuss the new data. The other school within the district that had originally assisted with the groupings was not part of the data team at this point. New teachers from each grade level were introduced to the process of grouping students based on data. The special educators who were part of the initial data team remained part of the new data team and they were able to share what they had learned during the initial grouping process.

The data team organized students into different groups based on their skill level and needs. Once again, the groups that evolved were comprised of several children not in a teacher’s homeroom class. The teachers were expected to plan instruction for their particular group with a focus on the skills and needs of their students. The building principal identified the literacy block times: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursdays for one hour each day.

Although the literacy block groups were homogeneous in nature, teachers differentiated instruction within their groups to meet individual needs. Instruction for each of these groups focused on different elements of reading acquisition. These included developing beginning phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. Again, teachers selected the components necessary to teach their literacy block groups. They used varied instructional strategies and materials to attend to the needs of their students. Some of the teachers stated that they had materials necessary to teach their literacy block groups and others needed additional materials to address the needs of their students.

In January, a building substitute was added to teach a literacy block group and this resulted in a reorganization of students and a change in focus of instruction for each of the groups. Teachers had to alter their routines and in many instances adjust teaching methodologies to reach the new students in their groups. Teachers had believed that the routines that had been established were
resulting in student gains. Teachers stated that reorganizing at this time was stressful as they had felt that things had just started to settle into a routine. Teachers were being asked to adjust to this change and this resulted in stress and discomfort for many teachers.

Teachers noted that one of the biggest areas of concern at the onset of the program was “letting go” of their students and also “getting acquainted” with new students.

I think now people are more flexible with their students. It’s hard to let your kids go for that hour. People are more open-minded to having different kids come into the classroom. (Participant eight)

In the beginning, before even though they were the same kinds of kids that you’ve had forever, it felt different to have someone else’s kids showing up. We were very nervous and an hour seemed endless. Once we started it was fine. (Participant two)

Initially teachers didn’t feel that the children would be able to physically handle the literacy block transition. Teachers commented that the children actually did very well with this task.

One thing I noticed with students was how quickly within the first couple of days they adjusted. We were trying to imagine how students would transition from point A point B. After a few days they were ready in three minutes. It was like clockwork; like they had always done it. (Participant one)

**Differentiation/resources.** The literacy block is predicated on the principle of differentiated instruction. In order to accomplish this, teachers needed to use a variety of materials and instructional approaches. This involved assessing their students and planning appropriate lessons to meet their needs. Some of the participants gathered resources and taught themselves how to use the various programs, and others sought support from special education teachers, colleagues, or the building principal.

Available resources for differentiated instruction had been organized and housed in the literacy closet at the end of the prior year. This was primarily done by the special education teachers who took on leadership roles when it came to organization of resources. During the
interviews, participants stated that the use of these materials was very helpful because many of the teachers didn’t have adequate resources to address the needs of students experiencing the most difficulty, nor did they have sufficient resources to assist those children requiring more challenging activities. Finally, participants stated that in the past they had not really explored the resources in the literacy closet since these materials had been primarily used by the special education teachers.

Some of the resources used during literacy block that were cited during the interviews included the Telian Phonics Program, Reading A-Z, Explode the Code, Primary Phonics, and Junior Great Books. Teachers also stated that they often created their own materials and activities.

In January, when the groups changed, participants once again reported that finding and using appropriate resources was a topic of great concern. They were being asked to take a new group of students and provide them with differentiated instruction after identifying and addressing their new students’ learning needs. During the interview it was noted that a teacher may have had a group that focused on fluency and comprehension skills at the beginning of the year and in January when the group of students changed, the focus of instruction changed. Teachers were unfamiliar with some of the programs noted above and they had to quickly teach themselves before they taught their students. Some teachers felt that as professionals they were able to read through manuals and quickly train themselves. However, several of the teachers noted that there was a need for additional professional development to support them in this area.

The only thing that comes to mind would be more training with particular programs that might help people teach their groups. Some people were thrown into groups and teaching programs that they didn’t know. (Participant three)
Once they began using the materials the teachers stated that again things settled into a routine and lessons began to run smoothly.

**Special education.** Teachers also commented on the fact that literacy block has impacted the special education referral process in addition to impacting their daily instruction. Participant six stated, “Whereas before, we might refer students right away to the Student Intervention Team. It’s really helped us to give them a chance first with intervention early on before referrals.” Participant two noted, “I think several of us were faster to refer in the past. At the same token, kids that we were on the fence with we didn’t refer and with a little extra boost they were going to be ok.”

In addition, another responded,

> I think for one of the students that I have it really does show that he is making small, small progress. It pushes us to reevaluate because RTI is a good indicator because you are already sending them off for three hours with small group instruction and if he is not making progress then we would need to move forward with testing. (Participant six)

Several students in grade one were tested early on and qualified for special education services. This was done during the first month of school and prior to the implementation of the literacy block. The teachers felt that these students would have qualified even if they had been provided differentiated instruction in the literacy block format. These students continued to struggle throughout the year, and the teachers stated that they felt that these individuals did indeed have a specific learning disability. The supports that the children received during literacy block as well as the additional supports provided by special education during tier III were beneficial.

**Advanced learners.** The literacy block pilot also addressed the needs of advanced or gifted learners. During the interviews, several teachers noted that this population typically receives the
least in the way of differentiated instruction tailored to their needs. Many of the teachers stated that a great deal of their time is devoted to students who are struggling with grade level material. The teachers commented on the importance of reaching all students and they felt that because of literacy block, these students’ needs were now being addressed. Teachers who had this cluster of students were able to meet their learning needs by providing them with challenging activities. The teachers stated that prior to literacy block these students’ were often left on their own. The literacy block format allowed teachers to address this population which was a change in instructional practice.

Teachers reported that parents were very pleased with the literacy block format. Teachers stated that the principal had sent home a letter explaining the program but conference time was the best opportunity to fully explain the benefits of the program and how it impacted each student. The teachers reported that parents were “on board” and very pleased with what was happening.

**Assessment.** Data teams met after each administration of the DIBELS assessments. Teachers reported that only one representative from each grade level was present at the data team meetings. Each time a new meeting was scheduled, a different representative was asked to attend. Participants stated that this was done to give everyone an opportunity to observe how the process of grouping students according to skills was crafted. Teachers administered the benchmark assessments three times per year. Teachers met as a team to coordinate groupings based on this data after each benchmark assessment was given. Homeroom teachers were given the DIBELS benchmark data for their homeroom. This was provided to them three times during the year. Participants who attended the initial grouping meeting saw the results for all of grade one and two, the grade level teachers who attended the January meeting saw all of the DIBELS
data for grade one and two. At the end of the year all teachers met as a group to review DIBELS benchmark data for the end of year and determine student placements for the following year.

The teachers saw that for each period students were making gains however, they were not able to recognize the vast difference in overall statistical scores for the grade levels from fall to January in comparison to January to the end of the year. They reported that students continued to make gains throughout the year but were not aware of the significant gains that took place from the first testing period to January. Teachers were able to articulate the growth that they saw with their students’ skills more holistically, from the beginning till the end of the year. They did not articulate noticing any differences between each of the testing periods from beginning to middle or middle to end.

The greater gains that occurred between the first and second testing period compared to the middle of the year to end of the year on several tests may be due to several factors. First, students’ skills typically regress at the start of the school year because they may not have read during the summer months. The initial testing may actually result in lower scores that are not a true representation of students’ skill levels. In many instances, students are able to quickly “catch up” once they begin daily lessons of review and practice and are back on par with the skills that they had lost during the summer. There is great push and emphasis on learning during the start of the school year. This would result in a larger gain from the first test period to the second test period. Students come back from vacation refreshed and motivated to learn.

In addition, time on learning may be a factor that contributed to this anomaly. During the second benchmark period MCAS testing comes into play. Although students in grade one and two are not involved in these assessments the special education teachers typically take small
groups during the administration of these exams. As a result, literacy block time is cancelled when MCAS assessments are given. There is also more time for learning between the first benchmark testing period and the winter than there is from the winter to spring. Two vacations also contribute to the lack of time on learning which may result in a decrease in academic gains.

Further research into this anomaly may provide additional insight and explanation for the results that were gleaned during this study. Teachers were not provided with statistical representation of their student data comparisons for the three test administrations and were not aware of the anomaly found in the data or differences in academic gains in between the testing periods. However, teachers did report that students made significant gains when they reviewed the year as a whole.

Teachers stated that they needed more time to meet as a group to discuss students’ progress and instruction. Teachers conveyed that they met “on the fly” on numerous occasions due to constraints in people’s busy schedules. They recounted that flexibility to organize meetings before or after school were limited. They commented on the fact that the meetings that were held during the day were most beneficial. However, budgets did not allow for substitute coverage so that meetings could be conducted during the school day and on a more frequent basis. Participants felt that this was certainly a hindrance as they were implementing a new RTI program, which required additional time to discuss teaching methodology and student progress.

**Student academic growth.** Several teachers noted that in the regular education classes there was not enough time to support the students in the same manner that students were presently receiving during literacy block. The instruction and resources that were used during literacy block were specially designed for those students’ needs. Teachers reported student gains and significant improvements among students throughout the year. They attributed this to the
instruction that students received during literacy block. They were also provided with the DIBELS benchmark data for their homeroom which showed student growth.

Well, you know you notice the changes in the skills that they are specifically working on. For example, we’re doing our third round of DIBELS this week, our spring benchmark. I noticed with my own class the kids that were in the really structured phonics groups did so much better on those phonics pieces of DIBELS. Some of them even did better that some of my higher kids who just fluently read but they don’t get as much of the structured phonics skills. When they were breaking down phonemes and blending nonsense words they did fine because they are very strong kids but the difference between the lower kids and the higher kids was not as much as you would think. You just see the progress in those phonics pieces. And then the kids that focused on the comprehension and fluency piece you see it in the reading pieces of the DIBELS. You see how much more fluently they are reading and how much better their comprehension is. I had kids that were strong sight readers who in the middle, winter benchmark would read 100+ words but it was so choppy and the comprehension was so small. That has come a long way for those kids too. Just in the DIBELS alone you see a progression. (Participant four)

Participant two stated,

Even the lower kids that have been struggling; these kids have made a lot of gains. Kids that struggle with nonsense words; that is what they are working on in literacy block. I don’t do that in my own reading groups as I am focused more on literature and it’s not as skills based. When you have reading groups you can get distracted and have a lot of interruptions. The literacy block is more focused.

I’ve seen the DIBELS data for even struggling students, and they have grown. Midway through the year I had 4 or 5 students that I didn’t know what will happen to them in 2nd grade. Now I have just one. Now it’s starting to click with them. (Participant six)

Participant one noted,

In the first groupings that I had, where students were working with the nonsense words, I noticed at the end of the year when we culminated with a readers’ theatre; which was at their level, I could listen and hear during rehearsals that their fluency was great. The phonics skills were great and they were able to carry over what they learned and the phonics skills were paying off. I gave a little assessment at the beginning and just before end I did it again. I wanted to see where they were and I saw leaps and bounds with their ability look at letters and properly pronounce them.
Participant four stated, “I do have some cases where I have seen RTI really help those struggling readers.”

For the most part they are doing really well. To have that much time working exactly on what they need has really, really showed an improvement. Today we looked at all the data. Earlier I’ve only looked at my own class. Today we were trying to group for next year. They are doing really well. It will be interesting to see in the future. I don’t know if I have a really bright bunch this year or not. It will be interesting to see how this continues. A lot of them have jumped up a couple of groups and definitely improved their scores. Even the lower kids that have been struggling; these kids have made a lot of gains. (Participant two)

Another teacher reported,

I think that the level of kids that I work with is tough because I typically work with the sped kids. I do think that we are seeing kids that we a may have wanted to keep back but I don’t think that they will be staying back now. These kids are getting intense instruction three days a week and we are starting to see some progress five)

Participant seven noted,

So far looking this at year alone, looking at my kids it looks like with RTI and my classroom instruction it looks like they are definitely making good progress. We didn’t’ use DIBELS for this before and now we can use the data from DIBELS. That shows they are making progress.

The literacy block impacted how teachers met all learners’ needs and they attribute students’ academic growth to differentiated instruction which was targeted at their students’ learning level.

Teachers did notice and respond to the pattern of improvement that they observed with their students.

**Leadership.** All participants cited the strong leadership of the principal as a positive factor impacting the implementation of the literacy block. Participant five stated,

She was great. When we first took these DIBELS scores we were kind of like a deer in headlights. How do we group them? What do we do? She was able to help us with how to group them. She brought us over to another school that had done this already and those teachers really walked us through it. I mean she could not have been more helpful. She didn’t just throw us to the wolves; she really was guiding us in this process. (Participant five)
Participant three stated,

> She was a major proponent of this. She really wanted us on board to analyze DIBELS assessments and she wanted to instill this and get it going. She is also a proponent of reading and literacy and she wants this to be a success.

The building principal supported one of the special education teachers who was eager to take on a leadership role. This teacher noted,

> I tend to take that role on and put myself in that role to help and I’m vested in it. I wanted it to happen. That’s why I was the one sending out emails and telling teachers that we need to see other schools, “Let’s go!” I felt that we were behind and some people jumped on board and were eager to get started and see it happen. (Participant five)

Participant one responded,

> The sped person has been more active. With the other teachers it hasn’t happened yet. The other thing is our sped person has always been our resource person, our go to person and now I really focus on her.

At the present time one special education teacher has surfaced as a leader within the school. Several participants stated that they felt they needed to “walk through” the program the first year to fully understand RTI. This researcher speculates that additional leaders may have come forward if teachers had fully understood the varying responsibilities of the program which became clearer by the end of the implementation year.

**Professional development.** Teachers commented on the need for additional professional development. They were provided with resources and teachers’ manuals for specific programs and independently taught themselves how to implement them. In some instances the building principal or the special education teachers that were familiar with the programs provided brief trainings. However, teachers felt that they needed more in depth training. They were in essence, doing the best that they could with the resources that they had. Teachers were left with questions related to their competence in implementing the programs due to the lack of
comprehensive professional development support. This researcher believes that this is one area that contributed to the self doubt that teachers were experiencing.

Summary

The pilot RTI literacy block was a new initiative implemented during the 2010-2011 school year. During the interviews, teachers reported that they understood the basic philosophy behind the initiative; however, it appears that many teachers were unable to see the “big picture”. They were in the “learn as you go model” and were very hesitant to embrace this initiative early on. As the program progressed during the year, teachers observed the progress of the students during the literacy block and they also were cognizant of the application of skills and knowledge carried over in their classrooms. Teachers fully realized the academic gains among the students and as a result, the teachers stated that they began to support the new initiative.

Through benchmark and progress monitoring assessment data, teachers were able to appreciate the improved academic achievement that all students were making because of the new initiative. The struggling students were receiving instruction tailored to their needs at an increased level that was not possible prior to the establishment of the literacy block. This aligns with Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development. In addition, advanced learners’ needs were being addressed and teachers noted that they often had difficulty meeting students’ needs in this category.

Teachers reported that the strong leadership of the building principal and the support of the special educators assisted them as they navigated through the year. These factors relate to the distributive leadership lens. The principal and special educator provided them with supports related to implementation of various programs and also provided them with encouragement. There were several issues that constrained the principal from scheduling time for collaboration
opportunities during the year. This was an area that teachers felt was most detrimental. They noted that they desired increased opportunities to discuss various aspects of the literacy block with colleagues and to share best practice. They strongly stated that more professional development for the programs that they were implementing was necessary to best support their endeavors. These factors are echoed by researchers in the realms of Professional Learning Communities and distributive leadership. Teachers need opportunities to collaborate, share best practice and whenever possible provide professional development support to colleagues.

**Triangulation of Data Sets**

According to the PET-R and interviews there were clearly some components that were perceived to be fully implemented during the first year of the pilot RTI literacy block program. Some components were seen to be partially implemented while others were perceived to not be addressed at this time. The teachers in the study have differences in the length of time that they have been teaching which could easily impact how they perceive this new initiative. This could also impact the ease at which teachers were able to learn new methodologies and differentiate instruction to meet students’ needs.

This study tells the story of this particular site for teachers involved in the literacy block for students in first and second grade. Three data sets were used to gain information related to the research questions driving this study.

Some of the interview questions were fashioned in part from the work of Barnhardt (2009) as well as questions created by this researcher. The questions were developed with a focus on implementing an RTI pilot literacy block in first and second grade and how this particular implementation model impacted both the teachers and the students at the school. The interviews
contained questions related to three theoretical lenses: Vygotsky’s Socio-cultural Theory, Professional Learning Communities, and Distributive Leadership practices.

During the interview process participants noted a similar understanding of the goals surrounding the program being implemented. This aligned with the PET-R category of Goals/Objectives/Priorities. There were fourteen points in the PET-R instrument. Participants’ perception regarding implementation of this category was fairly strong with a (M-82%).

In addition, DIBELS student data sets were used to determine if academic gains resulted from the pilot program. During the interviews, teachers reported that they were seeing great gains in their students’ skills and the DIBELS data supports their observation.

Teachers commented that they were using many different types of resources in their classrooms than they had previously used. Teachers stated that they were using student data more effectively and matching resources and teaching methodologies to students’ needs. Literacy block had indeed had an impact on teachers in this area. The DIBELS data supports the instructional changes that teachers had made. Differentiated teaching strategies that teachers were applying in their classrooms were making a difference in student learning. This also supports the following category in the PET-R: Differentiation/Grouping/Scheduling which received a mean perceived implementation rating (M-91%). Teachers commented that the pilot literacy block addressed the needs of the struggling learner as well as students at a more advanced level. Teachers commented during the interviews that they felt that in the past they had difficulty addressing both groups in an effective manner. Teachers noted that they were able to do many activities with the advanced learners during literacy block and felt that in the past this group was often left on their own. Although DIBELS does not provide adequate data to determine the impact that instruction has had on these advanced learners, teachers reported that
they had seen improvements in their skills in the classroom. For students that need extra supports beyond the literacy block timeframe, additional supports were provided in a pull out manner often termed in RTI as a Tier III.

The one-to-one open ended interview was the data set used to answer the second research question: How are teachers impacted by the implementation of a PLC guided by distributive leadership with a focus on literacy differentiation? Many of the teachers at this study site were not familiar with the terminology, “professional learning community”. Although the building principal attempted to set aside consistent time for teachers to discuss literacy block, many factors hindered this from happening on a regular basis. Throughout the year, the building principal had several meetings with staff. However, numerous items were on the agenda and literacy block was only one topic that was discussed. Teachers reported that when they did have literacy block meetings, the time was very focused on student data and the types of resources available to address the needs of their students.

One teacher, a special educator, surfaced as a leader during the pilot year. This researcher speculated that additional staff members will come forward to take on leadership responsibilities in the future now that they have had one year of experience with literacy block. Teachers all reported on the need for collaboration time to share best practice and engage in supportive professional development for teacher growth. This was also noted during in the PET-R in the area of Professional Development. This category received the lowest rating of all seven categories. During the interview, teachers noted the importance of teacher collaboration and are hopeful that additional time will be set aside next year.

Strong leadership from the principal and special educators assisted teachers who implemented the new initiative. Teachers used DIBELS data to inform instruction and to differentiate
teaching methodologies to meet students’ needs. Clustering students into a more homogeneous mix allowed teachers to identify students’ needs and to provide instruction targeted at students’ zone of proximal development.

Some progress monitoring took place to ensure that students were making appropriate gains. It is important to note that classroom teachers were responsible for progress monitoring their own students in their homeroom classes. During the interview process teachers reported that this data was frequently not passed on to the students’ literacy block teachers. Passing along the DIBELS progress monitoring data is essential in order for teachers to match instruction to students’ needs and also to examine student growth.

It was most striking to this researcher that participants discussed the benefit of progress monitoring yet they did not identify the need to share this data with their colleagues. This begs the question whether the teachers fully understood the rationale behind the literacy block initiative. Participant #4 stated, ”Progress monitoring is another thing that is tough to fit in if you ask my opinion.” In some instances teachers mentioned that they only progress monitored a few students. DIBELS benchmark assessments are only administered three times per year. Additional progress monitoring is needed in between these times to make sure that the instruction that is provided results in student achievement. Regular progress monitoring, which is an essential part of a RTI program, allows teachers to readjust their teaching if they determine that students are not making progress.

During the interviews, teachers reported that they felt uneasy about letting their students “go” during the literacy block timeframe. However, they reported that they became more comfortable with it once they saw the gains that their students were making. This researcher speculates that these teachers may not really be ready to adopt a more holistic philosophy of “these are our
students” rather than “these are my students”. This researcher does not believe that teachers realized the importance of sharing the progress monitoring assessment data with their colleagues. This may be in part because they were assessing students in their homerooms at a time other than the literacy block time. Classroom teachers were using the data to inform their own reading instruction outside of the literacy block timeframe. However, teachers did not articulate this information to their colleagues. This is an important disconnect that will need to be addressed in the coming year to ensure that students receive instruction aimed at their zone of proximal development. This researcher speculates that continued development of the PLC would benefit teachers in several areas. Teachers would have an opportunity to share important student data, best practices, and teachers would also be able to support one another’s professional development needs. A cohesive entity is needed for school reform efforts to be maximized and school reform initiatives to be sustainable.

Five key findings were culled from the analysis and triangulation of all data sets.

- Additional assessments are needed to determine if the advanced learner is making gains and instruction is targeting their zone of proximal development.
- It is essential to share progress monitoring data with colleagues to ensure that they are using appropriate data to inform their instruction which is aimed at students’ zone of proximal development.
- A PLC is in the beginning stages of development. It is apparent that a positive school culture exists at the school however; more opportunities for collaboration and professional development are needed.
- The building principal played a significant role in the implementation process of the RTI pilot literacy block.
Distributive leadership practices are in the infancy stage. A leader has surfaced and recognized by those involved in RTI. This individual has been present during data analysis meetings. She has also been a support to teachers needing resources.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Findings

Introduction

The final chapter in this qualitative summative program evaluation will highlight the key findings, connections to the theoretical lenses, implications for literature, implications for educational practice and implications for the educational community. One-to-one interviews were the primary source of data for this study. A Likert scale evaluation instrument, the PET-R, as well as students’ DIBELS data from grade one and two were components that were used to inform the interview process. This study adds to the existing body of research in the areas of literacy, response to intervention, differentiation, professional learning communities, and distributive leadership practices.

This study is a qualitative summative program evaluation (Patton, 2002) of a pilot RTI literacy block that was established in a southeastern Massachusetts elementary school during the 2010-2011 school year for students in grades one and two. Review of teachers’ perceptions of the RTI literacy block, the amount of collaboration that took place, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) data, as well as the aspect of a working professional learning community with a lens on distributive leadership and the principal’s role in this process was examined. The study investigated the effectiveness of the pilot RTI literacy block format in order to determine if this program should be continued. It is hoped that there will be potential to close the achievement gap for all learners in the area of literacy. In order to this to occur, research-based teaching practices need to be implemented, teacher leaders need to surface to support the initiative, and appropriate resources must be allocated.
Research Questions

The following questions were explored by this researcher during this study:

1. How do teachers perceive that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and student learning?
2. How are teachers impacted by the implementation of a PLC guided by distributive leadership with a focus on literacy differentiation?

Lev Vygotsky’s Socio-cultural Theory

Implications for theoretical framework. The following findings align with the lens of Vygotsky’s Socio-cultural theory with an emphasis on the zone of proximal development and the MKO.

Finding: Additional assessments are needed to determine if the advanced learner is making effective gains.

This aligns with Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development and the MKO as assessment informs instructional practice. The implications for this finding affect the MKO as they need appropriate assessment instruments in order to monitor students’ progress which will enable them to design instruction matched to learners’ needs. In this study, DIBELS benchmark data and progress monitoring data were used to identify students who are at risk in the areas of literacy acquisition. It is, however, not the most appropriate assessment tool to monitor the progress of the advanced learner. This can be found in the NWF, PSF, and ORF DIBELS assessments. For example, in the area of ORF, students are timed while reading a passage. If the student completes the passage, s/he starts reading the passage again from the beginning. The total words read correctly in one minute are recorded. Students are not provided with a more complex
reading passage or task. This researcher believes that the DIBELS assessment may not be the most effective instrument to determine if the advanced learner is making effective progress.

An additional finding relates to Vygotsky’s lens:

Finding: It is essential to share progress monitoring data with colleagues to ensure that they are using appropriate data to inform their instruction which is aimed at students’ zone of proximal development.

The major implication is that assessment instruments need to be appropriate for the learner and received by the MKO which would enable analysis to be conducted and effective instructional decisions to be made. In this study, DIBELS benchmark assessments were administered three times per year; fall, winter, and spring. These tools are curriculum based instruments utilized to assess literacy development identifying specific skill strengths and weaknesses. It is important to note that classroom teachers utilized additional formative assessments however, these instruments were not standardized. In addition, progress monitoring assessments, which are part of the DIBELS assessment system, are critical for monitoring students’ skills in between benchmark testing periods. The amount of progress monitoring that took place was not consistent with all grade one and two teachers. Some teachers completed progress monitoring for students in their homerooms and used the data to inform their daily reading instruction. In the majority of cases this data was not shared with the literacy block teachers. This contradicts the premise behind the literacy block. The data gleaned from the progress monitoring is essential to the literacy block teacher so that s/he can plan effective lessons for the students in the literacy block group. The timeframe between the fall benchmark tests and winter/January benchmark tests is too long to wait to determine if students are not
responding to the instruction provided them. It is essential that assessment data is received by
the MKO in a timely manner to ensure that instruction is matched to the learners’ needs.

**Implications for the literature.** The implications surrounding the two findings culled from
this study regarding appropriate assessment instruments are supported in the literature on this
topic. These findings were consistent across several studies and literature contained in the
literature review. In one study, Leslie & Allen (1999), teachers working with at risk students
identified areas of weakness for their students. Once they identified the weakness, they were
able to provide appropriate games and activities to address the concepts of rhyme and alliteration
where students were having difficulty. In addition, a qualitative study by Gallant & Schwartz
(2010) examined both pre service and experienced teachers and how they perceive,
conceptualize, and infer information based on their close observation of a child’s reading
behaviors. This can have a significant impact on how teachers are assessing their students and
the types of interventions that they are using which can directly affect student outcomes. The
MKO needs to assess where students are in their learning as well as know how to bring them to
the next level.

McTighe & Brown (2005) also emphasized the importance of teachers’ key content
knowledge and the importance in the delivery of instruction. This information is also supported
by the National Reading Panel (2000). Teachers must constantly review what they are teaching
and how they are going to teach it so that every learner is able to maximize their learning
potential. These authors further state,

Because students construct meaning and attach all new learning to previous
cognitive schema (Vygotsky, 1934/1986), classrooms that promote high levels of
standards mastery emphasize experiential learning activities that are both multi-
sensory and sensitive to the range of leaning styles and intelligences present
within the student population (p. 240).
In addition, Tomlinson and others confirm the need to differentiate instruction in response to student needs. The basic philosophy behind RTI aligns succently with differentiated instruction and Vygotsky’s thoughts relative to the zone of proximal development and the role of the MKO. Teachers must get to know the learner, assess their learning, and design appropriate tasks to develop learners’ skills. The learner is the primary focus and teachers adjust their teaching strategies to meet the learners’ needs which also align with Vygotsky’s ZPD and MKO.

**Implications for practice.** The implications for this study site include the need for appropriate assessment instruments to measure literacy acquisition for the struggling learner as well as the gifted learner in order to match instruction to the learners’ needs. Teachers reported that students in the advanced group were making progress however; there was no data to support this statement. It is important to provide these students with appropriate learning tasks which will bring them further along with literacy skills. Teachers need a way to measure progress for the advanced learner so that they can be assured that the teaching methods that are being implemented result in improved student achievement. Teachers need to rely on a formative assessment tools that will target the advanced learner. This data will provide information that will allow teachers to design lessons that meet the needs of all students’ zone of proximal development. This practice hold true for the struggling student as well as the advanced learner.

This researcher believes that teachers were not seeing the “big picture” and the importance of sharing progress monitoring data. Did they envision that students that they instructed during their literacy block time were no longer their responsibility once they returned to their homerooms? Did the teachers understand that the philosophy behind literacy block spreads beyond the three sixty minute periods? This is an area that needs to be addressed as the new year
approaches. A more holistic approach needs to be present in order for continued growth to occur with the RTI literacy block program. Teachers may have started the process with the implementation of the literacy block, but need to further develop this mindset. This is essential in order to have the school work cohesively as a community of leaders and learners.

**Implications for the educational community.** The implications are that educators need to be mindful in selecting the most effective instruments to use to assess students’ progress. Assessments are designed for a specific purpose and teachers need opportunities to explore these instruments to determine if they are the most effective tools to assess their students. Many assessments target certain aspects of skill acquisition and focus on students that are struggling with grade level skills. Students who are at the advanced level need assessments that will tease out the areas that they need to develop. Opportunities to collaborate regarding the assessments on the market and the appropriate instruments to utilize would allow teachers to have a clear picture of their students’ needs. In this way educators will be able to differentiate instruction and provide activities that are suitable for the learner.

Just as educators need to be aware of students needs relative to assessment, educational leaders need to be cognizant of the subtle changes that may take place within the schoolhouse when a new initiative is implemented. Throughout the implementation of the pilot literacy block, a new culture began to surface. Although it is in a beginning phase, the school is building a more holistic approach towards its student population. This approach promotes a shared responsibility. Instead of thinking of a child as “my” student, teachers are transitioning to these are “our” students. Bridging over to this new mindset will take some time.
Professional Learning Communities

Implication for theoretical framework. The following findings align with the work of DuFour, DuFour & Eaker (2008) related to professional learning communities.

Finding: A PLC is in the beginning stages of development. It is apparent that a positive school culture exists at the school however; more opportunities for collaboration and professional development are needed.

The implication of this finding relates to the importance of establishing PLCs to improve practice which cannot be underestimated and current research confirms this statement. Sergiovanni (as cited in Servage, 2008) notes, “…developing a community of practice may be the single most important way to improve a school” (p.63). School administrators must be creative with today’s fiscal constraints to set aside time and provide coverage for teachers to meet as a community of learners. DuFour (as cited in Graham, 2007) states, “The best staff development happens in the workplace rather than in a workshop” (p. 2). School principals play a vital role in the development of PLCs by ensuring that the correct conditions are present in schools so that PLCs can flourish. (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006) In addition, DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008) state,

Research shows that the kinds of professional development that improves instructional capacity display four critical characteristics… They are: ongoing, embedded with content-specific needs of a particular setting, aligned with reform initiatives, grounded in a collaborative, inquiry-based approach to learning. (p. 367)

School leaders are responsible for creating the right conditions for PLCs to take place in their buildings. They take a pulse of their staffs’ readiness to work as a community of leaders and learners. Leadership sets the right tone and invites staff to work in a unified manner towards a common vision of improved student achievement. Teachers need to
embrace this culture of collaboration in order for PLCs to be effective in the workplace.

**Implications for literature.** The Implications behind PLCs and the important role that they can have in the schoolhouse are supported in the current research. McLaughlin & Talbert (2006) state, “The work lives of teachers in school learning communities illustrate ways in which new professional cultures can be established to improve student achievement” (p.22). In addition, DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008) state,

> Research shows that the kinds of professional development that improves instructional capacity display four critical characteristics… They are: ongoing, embedded with content-specific needs of a particular setting, aligned with reform initiatives, grounded in a collaborative, inquiry-based approach to learning. (p. 367)

One of the concerns echoed throughout the interview process was the need for professional development. PLCs provide the structure and venue for professional growth based on the needs of the school culture and the individuals in the school. Hord & Sommers (2008), state, “In just about every school improvement technique and strategy that is promoted by the literature, research, and consultants, collaboration is mentioned” (p. 33). Schools and teachers benefit in a variety of ways when teachers work together.

Teachers stated that the building principal was supportive throughout the implementation of the pilot RTI literacy block. She provided opportunities for teachers to meet during the school day however, teachers noted that they did not have enough time to meet to collaborate on this new initiative. The literature also supports the important role that principals place in establishing the culture which would allow for collaborative structures to occur. In a study by Leonard and Leonard, (2005) they report, “Teacher collaboration requires sufficient administrative support.” (p. 32) Principals can promote collaboration by developing schedules where entire grade levels, or discipline teams have common planning time. MacMillan, Meyer, and Northfield (as cited in Williams, Brien, Sprague & Sullivan, 2008) state,
…trust between a principal and teacher in a school is a reciprocal relationship that is not automatic but is negotiated and earned. They claimed that without trust some teachers might retreat to the minimal requirements with regard to instruction and resist becoming involved in school improvement efforts (p. 5).

Building this type of trust can take place when the principal sets a supportive tone in the building and provides necessary resources for teachers. This may involve training for the staff members as well as words of encouragement during this process. It is important to note that this was the first year at the study site for the building principal. She had been a grade two teacher in another school within the district prior to this point. This researcher speculates that a strong PLC was not in place and just beginning at this school due to the fact the principal was new to the position and at the same time she was implementing a new initiative.

**Implications for practice.** The implication for this site is that the principal must work in a creative fashion in order to find the much needed time that teachers’ desire in order for collaboration to occur. The site in this study has just begun the process of developing PLCs. Although time was set aside for teachers at this site to collaborate, all teachers echoed that they needed additional time to communicate with one another during the implementation of the literacy block initiative. As this site moves forward in its efforts to reach all learners, it will be imperative that structures are put in place to support teachers. This aligns with the work of DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker on PLCs and question two driving this study.

**Implications for the educational community.** The major implication is that strong communication skills and collaboration are essential elements to school reform initiatives. Teachers need opportunities to support one another and share best practice. School leaders who are in the planning stage of new initiatives should take note of the importance of providing opportunities for staff to work collegially. PLCs provide this opportunity for collaboration and
communication and professional development which are so vital to school improvement initiatives. Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant (2009) state,

Regardless of the collaborative structure being used (e.g. one-on-one interactions, co-teaching, collaborative consultation) successful collaboration requires planning time, effort, and administrative support (p. 60).

As educational leaders move forward with school reform efforts they should ensure that adequate time is built in for teachers to communicate and collaborate with one another. Murawski & Hughes (2009) highlight the importance of collaboration,

Implementing RTI without collaboration and co-teaching is like moving a canoe through an eddy at the confluence of two rivers. The result is two systems trying to go in the same direction but they both end up just going around in circles. It’s far better to work together to navigate the currents and to pilot our children down the river of success (p. 274).

Communication and collaboration are essential components needed in school reform initiatives in order to build a sense of community and urgency towards a common goal.

**Distributive Leadership**

**Implications for theoretical lens.** The following finding aligns with the work of Fullan (1997, 2001, 2004, 2007) related to distributive leadership practices.

Finding: The building principal played a significant role in the implementation process of the RTI pilot literacy block.

The implication is that administration plays an essential role in the process of developing school based reform efforts. A strong leader lays the foundation and culture where teachers’ voices are being heard. The building principal was seen as the leader of this reform initiative. She provided teachers with information on RTI and explained how it would look at their school. She also provided teachers with an opportunity to view an RTI literacy block being implemented in another school within the district. The principal was present during data team meetings and
also provided supports related to the various programs that were used in order to differentiate instruction. It is important to have such a strong leader driving a new initiative. Her vast knowledge of reading and first hand experiences teaching as a grade two teacher within a similar RTI literacy block program assisted the teachers as she explained the transition to this new practice. Throughout the interview process teachers stated that the building principal was supportive, knowledgeable, and always willing to assist them if they needed support.

The building principal took on a great deal of the responsibilities related to implementing the new pilot literacy block. However, a teacher did surface as a resource person and leader within the school. The following finding also relates to distributive leadership practices.

Finding: Distributive leadership practices are in the infancy stage. A leader has surfaced and recognized by those involved in RTI. This individual has been present during data analysis meetings. She has also been a support to teachers needing resources.

The major implication is that distributive leadership practices need to be cultivated with staff and embedded in the day to day interactions taking place within the schoolhouse. In order to build this capacity and create sustainability teacher leaders will need to surface and become contributors of the reform initiative. Teachers at this site were in the “learn as you go mode”. It is difficult for a leader to surface when one does not know where they are going. During the interview process teachers shared a common thread related to the goals of literacy block. It appears that they had an understanding related to differentiated instruction but in many instances did not possess the skills needed to carry out instruction in their literacy block groups. Teachers reported that they had to learn a program quickly and then apply these new strategies in the classroom. One of the special education teachers surfaced as a resource person during the implementation of the RTI literacy block initiative. She gathered resources and also supported
teachers by educating them on how to implement the various programs. It will be important for additional staff members to surface as leaders at this site in order for continued growth to occur within the organization. (Harris, Brown & Abbot, 2006) state,

Distributive leadership is a shift away from one person or a top down approach to a more comprehensive model of leadership that fosters development of a broad base of leaders that are able to move as a connected entity towards improvement.

**Implications for literature.** The implications for distributive leadership practices to be employed within the school in order to create a collaborative culture and increase the potential for sustainability with reform initiatives are supported in the literature. In this study, the building principal played a significant role in the implementation process of the RTI pilot literacy block. In addition, one teacher surfaced as a resource person and leader within the school.

Teachers can no longer take their teacher manuals back to their classrooms and close the door. The expectation is that they are members of a community of learners focused on specific goals and it is their responsibility to be active and engaged in this process. Mary Buckingham (as cited in DuFour, Dufour & Eaker 2008) has concluded,

…one thing leaders must always remember to be effective is the importance of clarity – clarity regarding the fundamental purpose of the organization; the future it must create to better fulfill that purpose; the most high-leverage strategies for creating that future; the indicators of progress it will monitor; the explicit standards; rubrics, and exemplars that illustrate the quality of work expected in the organization; and the specific ways each member of the organization can contribute both to its long-term purpose and short-term goals. (p. 358)

In a study by Anderson (as cited in Rafoth and Foriska, 2006) they discuss three different styles of leadership: buffered principal, interactive principal, and contested principal. Different leadership styles lend themselves to varying levels of distributive leadership practices. Gordon & Patterson (2006) state the following about network
leadership, “Everybody is moving in the same direction. And that’s a function of leadership and a function of the faculty and staff” (p. 220).

Fullan (2004) states, “The main mark of an effective principal is not just his or her impact on the bottom line of student achievement but also how many leaders he or she leaves behind who can go even further” (p. 31) Effective leaders find ways to highlight leadership talents in others and encourage participation of staff members in decision making. The research confirms the importance of distributive leadership practices and the need for teachers to be both learners and leaders in the schoolhouse. Block (as cited in Leech & Fulton, 2008) state, “…organizations must embrace democratic participative structures to effect cultural change. These structures demand a new vision of leadership in which the decisional ownership and accountability is distributed among all member of the organization” (p. 2).

**Implications for practice.** The implication is that principals’ roles and responsibilities have changed over time and now more than ever, in our system of accountability, it is paramount that principals surface as strong instructional leaders as well as drivers of reform initiatives. Principals take on responsibility in the areas of instruction and work to assist teachers to improve their teaching practices in their classrooms. During the next phase, it will be important for additional leaders to surface within the school in order for the RTI literacy block to continue to grow. This aligns with the lens of distributive leadership and Fullan’s work. Distributive leadership practices build on the talents of teachers and strengthen their capacity to both lead and learn within the organization.
It is also important to note that teachers at this site have navigated through their first year with this new RTI literacy block initiative. Additional supports need to be in place during the second phase in order for continued growth to occur. Teachers will need to step forward to take on leadership responsibilities so that the school can move forward in a united capacity. This site does not have the benefit of having a reading specialist on staff. Staff members will need to respond to this void and assist one another in developing a system of organizing and sharing data with one another.

**Implications for the educational community.** The implication is that school leaders must recognize and embrace the talents of teachers within their schools. A school reform initiative that is solely directed by and carried out by the principal will perhaps only last as long as the principal’s tenure at that school. Leaders within a school assist with many facets that surface with reform efforts. It will be imperative for principals to tap into the expertise of staff members and acquire their assistance in the beginning stages of the reform plan. Gaining staff members support and participation creates a wheel that begins to move slowly at first and then gains momentum when others join in, thus driving the initiative forward.

As educational leaders move forward with new initiatives it will be important for them to ensure that all arrows are pointing in the same direction. Today there are so many factors facing education and principals must remain focused and stay the course in order to sustain school reform efforts. Strong communication skills, content knowledge, and openness to assist staff are essential factors that contribute to school reform efforts. Research has found that principals who were successful in leading reforms found that creating and communicating a shared vision with all stakeholders assisted them as they implemented changes. (School Principal, 2009)
Conclusions

Vygotsky’s theoretical lens with a concentration on the MKO and ZPD are critical factors associated with teaching and student learning. From the research of DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) educators have come to understand the importance that PLCs play in the workplace. PLCs provide a venue for collaboration and sharing of best practice and in many instances provide professional development support to colleagues. Fullan’s (2001; 2004; 2007) work on distributive leadership practices emphasize the need to develop teachers to become leaders and learners within their buildings creating a culture that is ripe for sustainability of school reform efforts.

Learning to become an instructional leader is complex and multifaceted. The responsibilities of building principals have changed dramatically over the years and currently include managerial responsibilities as well as being a leader of teacher leaders. School reform focused on creating professional learning communities has come to the center of current reform initiatives aimed at developing teacher pedagogy which results in improvement in student learning outcomes. The building principal is seen as a key figure in the development of these professional learning communities. The RTI pilot literacy block was created for first and second graders to close the achievement gap in the area of reading with an emphasis of meeting the specific needs of all students. Many schools are reviewing the ways that teachers are delivering instruction. Differentiated instructional practices are increasingly used in classrooms across the country. Some schools are establishing professional learning communities in their schools to address the needs of their schools or grade levels. This collegial sharing of expertise benefits teachers as many of the professional development opportunities needed are being addressed right in the workplace. This results in better teaching and improvements in student learning.
Fostering a positive school culture which includes nurturing and supporting staff can begin the process of creating schools where teachers are supported in their own learning which results in improvements in student learning outcomes. If principals believe in the concepts of professional learning communities, they will work to create these centers of growth in their schools.

Principals must also be aware of roadblocks that can hinder the success of professional learning communities. With this knowledge in hand, twenty-first century leaders can progress forward with urgency, purpose, and a collaborative approach to leading school reform.

Building principals are playing a substantial role in fostering the type of school culture that embraces the use of professional learning communities. Using distributive leadership, they empower staff to take an active role in school reform. This creates a community of learners with a key objective focused on improved student learning. Many building based RTI programs that are implemented require staff to work collegially. This promotes efficacy within the building and establishes a framework for sustainable improvements where active staff members would be willing to step out of their comfort zones and rid themselves of barriers that prevented them from trying new instructional strategies in the classroom. It also promotes a sense of community within the school.

Change needs to occur and sustainability will be the key for long-term success. In order for leaders to be effective, they must learn to balance both continuity and change, balance leading from in front and from behind, and have a willingness to distribute leadership with others. (Collinson & Cook, 2007, p. 208) This style of leadership can influence literacy instruction at the primary level.
The principal at this site was new to her role yet it did not hinder her from moving forward with an initiative that she felt would benefit students. In this instance, this researcher was able to delve into the new initiative and catch a glimpse of factors that may hinder its future success as well as recognize some of the positive aspects that were developing within the building. Future research is needed to ensure that all students’ literacy needs are being met. Through the use of data analysis, differentiation, collaboration, and a RTI program in place, students may be provided with literacy instruction that will set them on the course for a promising future.
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Appendix A

The interview will be conducted during the school day and teachers will receive the interview questions prior to the actual interview. This researcher will take copious notes during the interview. The following is a list of the standardized open-ended interview questions that teachers will be asked along with the initial interview introduction:

Introduction: The pilot literacy block program was put into place in order to better meet our students’ diverse learning needs. This initiative, part of the annual school improvement plan, was developed to address struggling learners as well as those learners at the advanced level. The DIBELS 2008 data and increased number of referrals to special education contributed to the need for a program where teachers differentiated instruction to improve learners’ literacy skills and decrease the achievement gap of struggling learners. As you answer the following questions, please keep in mind the goals of the program.

1. Please describe what the pilot RTI literacy block program “looks like” for first and second graders.
   a. Probe: Describe your role as a stakeholder within this model.
   b. Probe: Who are the other stakeholders?
2. What do you see as the main goal of implementing an RTI literacy block model?
   a. Probe: Do you think all stakeholders share the same goal(s)? Why or why not?
   b. Probe: Do you think that the RTI literacy block accomplished this goal?
   c. Probe: Describe the role that the principal had during the implementation process?
3. What kind(s) of changes did you notice with students’ skills during the implementation of the pilot RTI literacy block program?
4. Since the pilot RTI literacy block PLCs began, what kind(s) of change(s), if any, have you noticed within the building?
   a. Probe: Can you describe the culture of the school during this implementation? Beginning, middle, and end of the year
   b. Probe: What role, if any, did the principal have in fostering either a positive or negative culture in the school?
   c. Probe: What types of collaboration took place during the pilot RTI literacy block program? What aspects of the school day made it possible for collaboration to take place or hindered collaboration from taking place?

5. Do you think that the school community members (Parents, faculty, staff, students) are “on board” with the implementation of RTI? Why or why not?

6. Can you discuss progress monitoring and its impact in your classroom/work, since the implementation of the literacy block?
   a. Probe: What information does the progress monitoring give you? Does this information change instructional practices?
   b. Probe: How have you used the DIBELS data during the pilot literacy block in comparison to the way you utilized in prior?
   c. Probe: What are your reactions to our grade level meetings to discuss the results of progress monitoring and the pilot literacy block RTI implementation?

7. In what ways do you feel that students who are above grade level have received differentiated literacy instruction during literacy to meet their needs?

8. In what ways do you feel that students below grade level have received differentiated instruction during literacy to meet their needs?
9. Proponents of RTI say it can help improve schools on two fronts – both with early intervention and appropriate assessment/placement in special education. Has the pilot RTI literacy block affected the process of referring students to receive special education services? 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 of literacy block RTI? Can you explain?

10. Do you think the PLC is “working”? Why or why not?
   a. Probe: Describe the implementation of the PLC and the impact it has had on you in conjunction with the literacy block.
   b. Probe: What impact, if any, has the PLC had on student learning in conjunction with the literacy block?
   c. Probe: What role has the principal had in the implementation of the Literacy Block PLC?
   d. Probe: Tell me about any changes in roles and responsibilities that have come about as a result of or in conjunction with the PLC.
   e. Is there anything that we haven’t talked about with regard to the pilot RTI literacy block program that would be important to know? (Patton, 2002, p. 379)
## Appendix B

### Table 3.1

Alignment of Research Questions with Data and Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do teachers perceive that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and student learning?</td>
<td>Open-ended Interview, Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) data, Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective School-wide Reading Programs (PET-R) Evaluation Tool</td>
<td>First Grade teachers, Second grade teachers, building substitute, moderate special needs teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are teachers impacted by the implementation of a PLC guided by distributive leadership with a focus on literacy differentiation?</td>
<td>Open-ended Interview</td>
<td>First Grade teachers, Second grade teachers, building substitute, moderate special needs teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Table 3.2

Coding System Used for Open-ended Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
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| How do teachers perceive that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and student learning? | 1. Differentiation  
2. Grouping  
3. Achievement  
4. Decline  
5. Goal  
6. Assessment  
7. Communication | 1.1.1 LBD (Literacy Block Differentiation)  
1.1.2 LBDP (Literacy Block Differentiation Planning)  
1.1.3 LBDR (Literacy Block Differentiation Resources)  
1.1.4 LBDPD (Literacy Block Differentiation Prof. Dev)  
1.1.5 LBDS (Literacy Special Education)  
1.2.1 LBG (Literacy Block Grouping)  
1.2.2 LBGD (Literacy Block Grouping Dynamics)  
1.3.1 LBA (Literacy Block Achievement)  
1.4. LBDA(Literacy Block Decline)  
1.5. LBGC (Literacy Block Goals Clear)  
1.5.2 LBGU (Literacy Block Goals Unclear)  
1.6. LBAS (Literacy Block Assessment)  
1.7.1 LBCC (Literacy Block Communication Colleagues)  
1.7.2 LBCP (Literacy Block Communication Parents/guardians) |
| How are teachers impacted by the implementation of a PLC guided by distributive leadership with a focus on literacy differentiation? | 1. Time Management  
2. Collaboration  
3. Student Academic Growth  
4. Leadership role  
5. Professional Development  
6. Resources  
7. Group Dynamics | 2.1 PLCTM (Professional Learning Community(PLC) Time Management)  
2.2 PLCDC (PLC Collaboration)  
2.2.2 2PLCCS (PLC Community Collaboration Structured)  
2.2.3 PLCCU (PLC Collaboration Unstructured)  
3.1 PLCSAG (PLC Student Academic Growth)  
3.1.2 PLCSAGI (PLC Student Academic Growth Increase)  
3.1.3 PLCSAGD (PLC Student Academic Growth Decline)  
4.1 PLCLT (PLC Leadership Role Teacher)  
4.1.2 PLCLR P (PLC Leadership Role Principal)  
5 PLCPD (PLC Professional Development)  
6 PLCR (PLC Resources)  
7 PLCGD (PLC Group Dynamics) |

*Note: adapted from Myles & Huberman, 1994, p. 54*
Definitions:

Table 3.2 is set up in the following manner: the first number in the code represents the corresponding research question; the second represents the theme and the third represents the code system within the theme. For example, in the code of 1.1.1, the first digit (1) would represent the first research question: How do teachers feel that the reorganization of literacy instruction has impacted teaching and student learning?, the second digit (1) would represent the theme: Differentiation, and the third digit (1) would represent the topic within the theme.

1.1.1 LBD (Literacy Block Differentiation) – differentiated instruction in place targeted at students’ specific learning needs

1.1.2 LBDP (Literacy Block Differentiation Planning) – using data to inform instruction, planning lessons according to student data

1.1.3 LBDR (Literacy Block Differentiation Resources) – variety of resources used in providing differentiated instruction

1.1.4 LBDPD (Literacy Block Differentiation Prof. Dev) – colleagues providing professional development support

1.1.5 LBDS (Literacy Special Education) - students referred for special education testing by a teacher

1.2.1 LBG (Literacy Block Grouping)- how students are grouped during initial meeting

1.2.2 LBGD (Literacy Block Grouping Dynamics) – movement between grouping

1.3.1 LBA (Literacy Block Achievement)- student data, gains

1.4.1 LBDA(Literacy Block Decline)- student data regression

1.5.1 LBGC (Literacy Block Goals Clear) – teacher knew what students’ academic needs

1.5.2 LBGU(Literacy Block Goals Unclear) – teacher unclear about students’ academic needs
1.6.LBAS (Literacy Block Assessment)- progress monitoring

1.7.1 LBCC (Literacy Block Communication Colleagues) – when did communication take place around student data

1.7.2 LBCP (Literacy Block Communication Parents/guardians)

2.1PLCTM (Professional Learning Community (PLC) Time management)

2.2 PLCDC (PLC Collaboration) – communication during unstructured meeting times

2.2.2 PLCCS (PLC Community Collaboration Structured) – communication during grade level meetings

2.2.3 PLCCU (PLC Collaboration Unstructured) – communication outside of regularly scheduled meetings

3.1 PLCSAG (PLC Student Academic Growth) – data showing improvement

3.1.2 PLCSAGI (PLC Student Academic Growth Increase) – data showing improvement

3.1.3 PLCSAGD (PLC Student Academic Growth Decline)-data showing regression

4.1 PLCLRT (PLC leadership role teacher) – teachers taking on a leadership role within the PLC

4.1.2 PLCLRP (PLC leadership role principal) – leadership responsibilities of the principal

5PLCPD (PLC Professional Development) – Teachers assisting teachers to learn a new skill

6 PLCR (PLC resources) – any and all academic resources utilized to differentiate instruction during the pilot literacy block

7 PLCGD (PLC group dynamics) – discussions related to working as a group
Appendix D

Table 3.3

Contact Summary Analysis Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting: Who, what group</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Date Coded:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview with whom, by whom</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Site</td>
<td>Date Coded:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group with whom, by whom (if applicable)</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Site</td>
<td>Date coded:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Pick out the most salient point in the contact. Number in order on this sheet and note page number on which point appears. Number points in text of write-up. Attach theme or aspect to each point in CAPITALS. Invent themes where no existing ones apply and asterisk those.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Salient Point</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: adapted from Myles & Huberman, 1994, p. 54*
### Appendix E

#### Table 3.4

**DIBELS Research Findings Sub-tests**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Reliability/validity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)</td>
<td><em>(Kaminski &amp; Good, 1996)</em>. *<em>(Good et al., 2004).</em></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*. 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><em>(Kaminski &amp; Good, 1996, 1998; Laimon, 1994)</em></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 <strong>with the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery Total Reading Cluster score This test repeated 4 times results in an average reliability of .91</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)</td>
<td><em>(Marston and Magnusson, 1988)</em> <em>(Good et al., 2004).</em></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>The DIBELS</td>
<td><em>(Kaminski &amp; Good, 1996).</em></td>
<td>test of the alphabetic principle - including</td>
<td>The one-month, alternate-form reliability for NWF in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)</td>
<td><strong>(Good, Kaminski, Shinn, Bratten, Shinn, Laimon, Smith, &amp; Flindt, 2004)</strong></td>
<td>Letter-sound correspondence in which letters represent their most common sounds and the ability to blend letters into words in which letters represent their most common sounds.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)</td>
<td><em>(Tindal, Marston &amp; Deno, 1983)</em></td>
<td>The number of correct words per minute from the passage is the oral reading fluency score.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>(Good &amp; Jefferson, 1998)</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retell Fluency (RTF)</td>
<td></td>
<td>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. 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...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and (d) increase the face validity of the ORF.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>administered to students who are reading at least 40 words per minute.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Note: data in the table adapted from [https://dibels.uoregon.edu/](https://dibels.uoregon.edu/)
The asterisks noted for a particular research study in the second column relate to the reliability and validity noted in the fourth column.
Appendix F

Table 3.5

Reliability and Validity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIBELS assessment</th>
<th>Reliability and validity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Sound Fluency</td>
<td>Alternate-form reliability, Concurrent criterion validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoneme Segmentation Fluency</td>
<td>Alternate-form reliability, Concurrent criterion reliability, Predictive validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsense Word Fluency</td>
<td>Alternate-form reliability, Concurrent criterion reliability, Predictive validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Naming Fluency</td>
<td>Alternate-form reliability, Median criterion validity, Predictive validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Reading Fluency</td>
<td>Median alternate form reliability, Concurrent validity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G

Table 4.1
Mean Participant Ratings for PET-R Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Participant Ratings for PET-R Categories</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated instruction/grouping/scheduling</td>
<td>91.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals/Objectives/Priorities</td>
<td>82.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>77.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Time</td>
<td>72.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Programs &amp; Materials</td>
<td>71.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration/Organization/Communication</td>
<td>68.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>46.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H

Table 4.2  Grade One Benchmark Goals PSF and NWF for Three Assessment Periods

*Grade One Phoneme Segmenting Fluency and Nonsense Word 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>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>
## Appendix I

### Table 4.3  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</th>
<th>Middle of Year</th>
<th>End of Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Month 1 - 3</td>
<td>Month 4 – 6</td>
<td>Month 7 – 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORF</td>
<td>44 and above</td>
<td>68 and above</td>
<td>90 and above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J

Table 4.4 First Grade PSF and NWF Results from DIBELS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSF</th>
<th>DIBELS assessment</th>
<th></th>
<th>PSF</th>
<th>DIBELS assessment</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>End</td>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>Beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NWF</th>
<th>DIBELS assessment</th>
<th></th>
<th>NWF</th>
<th>DIBELS assessment</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>End</td>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>Beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.5  The Second Grade ORF Results from DIBELS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORF 2009-2010</th>
<th>DIBELS assessment</th>
<th>ORF 2010-2011</th>
<th>DIBELS assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>104.9</td>
<td>108.3</td>
<td>124.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>108.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>124.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix L

Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs - Revised

School: ___________________________________________  Date: ____________

Position (check one):  Current Grade(s) Taught (if applicable):

_____ Administrator  _____ Kindergarten

_____ Teacher  _____ First

_____ Paraprofessional/Educational Assistant  _____ Second

_____ Grade Level Team  _____ 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>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. <strong>Goals, Objectives, Priorities</strong> – 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.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Goals and Objectives:**

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

__/14 Total Points__

Percent of Implementation:
## 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 followup 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Not in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Partially in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fully in place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7 = 50%</th>
<th>11 = 80%</th>
<th>14 = 100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not in place | Partially in place | Fully in place
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%

0 1 2
Not in place Partially in place Fully in place
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A comprehensive or core reading program with documented research-based efficacy is adopted for use school wide (x 3).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Programs and materials are implemented with a high level of fidelity (x 3).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>/22 Total Points</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 = 50%</td>
<td>18 = 80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in place</td>
<td>Partially in place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### IV. Instructional Time

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<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>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ 2. Reading time is prioritized and protected from interruption (x 2).</td>
<td></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>
<td></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>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_____ 5. Additional instructional time is allocated to students who fail to make adequate reading progress.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_____ /14 Total Points  _____%

### Percent of Implementation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</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>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Not in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Partially in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fully in place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### EVALUATION CRITERIA

#### 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></th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Student performance is used to determine the level of instructional materials and to select research-based instructional programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Instruction is provided in flexible homogeneous groups to maximize student performance and opportunities to respond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Cross-class and cross-grade grouping is used when appropriate to maximize learning opportunities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

______/10 Total Points  ____%  

### Percent of Implementation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5 = 50%</th>
<th>8 = 80%</th>
<th>10 = 100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Not in place</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Partially in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fully in place</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VI. **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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Administrators or the leadership team maximize and protect instructional time and organize resources and personnel to support reading instruction, practice, and assessment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Grade-level teams are established and supported to analyze reading performance and plan instruction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Concurrent instruction (e.g., Title, special education) is coordinated with and complementary to general education reading instruction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A communication plan for reporting and sharing student performance with teachers, parents, and school, district, and state administrators is in place.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

______/12 Total Points  ____%  

**Percent of Implementation:**  
6 = 50%  
10 = 80%  
12 = 100%
### VII. Professional Development

- Adequate and ongoing professional development is determined and available to support reading instruction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<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></td>
<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></td>
<td>3. Time is systematically allocated for educators to analyze, plan, and refine instruction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<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:**

- 4 = 50%
- 6.5 = 80%
- 8 = 100%

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

---

**/8 Total Points**

**%**
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>
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<tr>
<td>III. Instructional Practices and Materials</td>
<td>/22</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>IV. Instructional Time</td>
<td>/14</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>V. Differentiated Instruction/Grouping</td>
<td>/10</td>
<td></td>
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<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.
## Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs

### Average Schoolwide Overall Scores

<table>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Points Possible

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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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)

Institute on Beginning (IBR)

### Reading Goals and Priorities

1. **What:**
   
   [Blank Line]
   
   **Who:**
   
   [Blank Line]
   
   **When:**
   
   [Blank Line]

2. **What:**
   
   [Blank Line]
   
   **Who:**
   
   [Blank Line]
   
   **When:**
   
   [Blank Line]

3. **What:**
   
   [Blank Line]

---

**Name of School, District**

**City, State**
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


https://dibels.uoregon.edu/docs/pet_r_form_user.pdf
### Appendix M

#### Table 3.6

**MAXQDA and the Thematic Reduction Process—an Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview quotes from Participant #1</th>
<th>Original Code System</th>
<th>Reflective Memo Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>For: Literacy Block differentiation, Literacy Block planning, Literacy Block differentiation resources, PLC Resources</strong></td>
<td>Literacy Block differentiation, Literacy Block planning, Literacy Block differentiation resources, PLC Resources</td>
<td>Thought process to theme reduction: <em>Differentiation/Resources</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use <strong>phonics games, phonemic awareness games</strong> so I supplement with this.</td>
<td>6 PLCR (PLC resources) – any and all academic resources utilized to differentiate instruction; 1.1.1.LBD (Literacy Block Differentiation) – differentiated instruction in place targeted at students’ specific learning needs</td>
<td>In order to differentiate instruction, resources are needed that match with the learning needs of the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use <strong>Explode the Code, Primary Phonics, Phonic books</strong> and I also pull in a lot of my own stuff.</td>
<td>6 PLCR (PLC resources) – any and all academic resources utilized to differentiate instruction; 1.1.1.LBD (Literacy Block Differentiation) – differentiated instruction in place targeted at students’ specific learning needs</td>
<td>In order to differentiate instruction, resources are needed that match with the learning needs of the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You look at <strong>nonsense words</strong> and try to figure out what do they know, what they don’t know.</td>
<td>1.1.2 LBDP (Literacy Block Differentiation Planning) – using data to inform instruction, planning lessons according to student data</td>
<td>In order to differentiate instruction, resources are needed that match with the learning needs of the students. Assessment becomes a part of the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had <strong>mid-high group</strong> and we are working on <strong>readers theatre, literature circles, and Junior Great Books</strong></td>
<td>6 PLCR (PLC resources) – any and all academic resources utilized to differentiate instruction; 1.1.1.LBD (Literacy Block Differentiation) – differentiated instruction in place targeted at students’ specific learning needs</td>
<td>In order to differentiate instruction, resources are needed that match with the learning needs of the students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is where my **students should be** or this is what we are going to do to **help support him**.

**Reading A-Z**

| 1.1.1.LBD (Literacy Block Differentiation) – differentiated instruction in place targeted at students’ specific learning needs |
| In order to differentiate instruction, resources are needed that match with the learning needs of the students. |

**Lower Group**

| 1.1.1.LBD (Literacy Block Differentiation) – differentiated instruction in place targeted at students’ specific learning needs |
| In order to differentiate instruction, resources are needed that match with the learning needs of the students. |

| 6 PLCR (PLC resources) – any and all academic resources utilized to differentiate instruction |
| In order to differentiate instruction, resources are needed that match with the learning needs of the students. |

| Kids **above grade level** are reading material at their level they are able to do **Junior Great Books, Readers Theatre** and **Literature Circles**. |
| In order to differentiate instruction, resources are needed that match with the learning needs of the students. |

| In the **lower group** we really need to try to isolate what the **phonics skills** were that they were having a challenge with and try to remediate that. |
| In order to differentiate instruction, resources are needed that match with the learning needs of the students. |

| **The first group is one the group that needs phonics skills and phonemic segmentation.** The next block is for the children that need help with the **work attack and word knowledge**. We also **worked on fluency and comprehension** and even the top group worked on **expanding the fluency** |
| In order to plan to differentiate instruction, one must use student data to inform the process. |

| 6 PLCR (PLC resources) – any and all academic resources utilized to differentiate instruction; 1.1.1.LBD (Literacy Block Differentiation) – differentiated instruction in place targeted at students’ specific learning needs |
| In order to differentiate instruction, resources are needed that match with the learning needs of the students. |

This is where my **students should be** or this is what we are going to do to **help support him**.

| 1.1.1.LBD (Literacy Block Differentiation) – differentiated instruction in place targeted at students’ specific learning needs |
| Planning is an essential component to differentiated instruction. In order to differentiate instruction, resources are needed that match with the learning needs of the students. |

| That’s what I like about this homogeneous setting. You can **capture the audience** that you are teaching to and it is **that audience** that needs it. |
| Planning is an essential component to differentiated instruction. In order to differentiate instruction, resources are needed that match with the learning needs of the students. |
I knew he was going to be in good hands and also he was going to get literacy block where he was going to have her as his coach as well. It is **because of that support** that he has come as far as he has. If we didn’t have literacy block, three hours a week, **just what he needed**, as well as other kids in his group, I don’t this we would have seen as much progress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.1.1 LBD (Literacy Block Differentiation) – differentiated instruction in place targeted at students’ specific learning needs</th>
<th>In order to differentiate instruction, resources are needed that match with the learning needs of the students. Planning is an essential component of differentiated instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

When you take a look at **data** and where and can see where students are **struggling** you are able to **put together a phonics lesson** where you are working on same skill.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.1.2 LBDP (Literacy Block Differentiation Planning) – using data to inform instruction, planning lessons according to student data</th>
<th>Planning is an essential component to differentiated instruction. Assessment becomes part of the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

We had to reach for **necessary tools** to be effective with it but we are seeing leaps and bounds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6 PLCR (PLC resources) – any and all academic resources utilized to differentiate instruction; 1.1.1 LBD (Literacy Block Differentiation) – differentiated instruction in place targeted at students’ specific learning needs</th>
<th>In order to differentiate instruction, resources are needed that match with the learning needs of the students.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

His scores were spiking high and then dropping. I went to Jen to ask why and she told me that this was very typical of ADD kids. He was **poor with phonics skills** and he was a sight reader. He is the only one right now that I **progress monitor**. I do him every week and the other two I was doing every two or three weeks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.1.2 LBDP (Literacy Block Differentiation Planning) – using data to inform instruction, planning lessons according to student data</th>
<th>Planning is an essential component to differentiated instruction. Assessment becomes part of the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I felt that I wanted to **stay on top of how he was doing because he was so low**

| 1.1.2 LBDP (Literacy Block Differentiation Planning) – using data to inform instruction, planning lessons according to student data | Planning is an essential component to differentiated instruction. Assessment becomes part of the process |
With the **words that they either omit or can’t pronounce** I make a list and **find what phonics skill** that they are not utilizing and **work on that phonics piece**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.1.2 LBDP (Literacy Block Differentiation Planning) – using data to inform instruction, planning lessons according to student data</th>
<th>Planning is an essential component to differentiated instruction. Assessment becomes part of the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

When you take a look at **data** and where and can **see where students are struggling** you are able to **put together a phonics lesson** where you are working on same skill.

| 1.1.2 LBDP (Literacy Block Differentiation Planning) – using data to inform instruction, planning lessons according to student data | Planning is an essential component to differentiated instruction. Assessment becomes part of the process |

---

*Key words were highlighted from the transcript. An original code system was used and four themes noted above emerged: 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.1.3, & 6. During subsequent reading of the transcripts this researcher noted that each of these were subsets of the original code system and therefore this researcher reduced the code system accordingly to: “Differentiation/resources”*