Transition to Teaching: Preparing Beginning Teachers for Professional Practice and Reading Instruction

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Abstract

Reading instruction in the elementary classroom calls for a deepened knowledge of content and knowledge of learners. When students enter into today’s classrooms, they enter with differing levels of reading experiences, reading development, and knowledge of print. Although these differences exist amongst the students, the one commonality that must be recognized is that elementary schools and elementary teachers are the foundation for providing students with a comprehensive academic experience in reading. At the forefront of accomplishing this, is insuring that all teachers particularly beginning teachers are prepared for professional practice and the rigors of the adaptive nature of teaching reading. By examining beginning teachers’ experiences teaching reading, new insights can be gained on the professional needs of novice educators.
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Chapter 1

Problem Statement

Learning to read is arguably a child’s most critical academic achievement, while teaching reading is perhaps a teacher’s most complex and challenging endeavor (International Reading Association, 2010). Supporting beginning teachers to successfully accomplish teaching reading requires continued learning experiences as these teachers transition into professional practice. This is vital to implementing rigorous reading instruction and supporting professional growth. Noll and Lenhart (2013) contend that each year, beginning teachers are faced with effectively translating what they have learned into the realities of everyday teaching, and that some are more prepared than others to teach reading well (Noll & Lenhart, 2013).

Today’s classroom requires teachers to be flexible and adaptive to meet students’ needs. Janssen and Erickson (2013) state that to be successful, teachers must possess a depth of knowledge about the reading content, an awareness of their students’ learning needs, and a repertoire of instructional methods. This calls for teachers to enter professional practice with an adequate knowledge base of reading instruction to be effective in meeting the diverse needs of students (Janssen & Erickson, 2013; Hoffman, Roller, Maloch, Sailors, Duffy, & Beretvas, 2005). Kent, Giles, and Hibberts (2013) argue that quality teaching makes a difference in student learning and that quality teachers of reading are those who are knowledgeable, strategic, adaptive, responsive, and reflective. In a similar perspective, Moats (2009) posits that responsive and adaptive teachers decide how to support students and understand how students respond to reading instruction. Recognizing this, it is important to understand that beginning teachers may need continued support in responding to students’ needs as they transition into professional practice.
When students enter today’s classrooms, they do so with differing levels of reading experiences, reading development, and knowledge of print. Despite these differences, however, one commonality that must be recognized is that elementary schools and elementary teachers are the foundation that provides students with a comprehensive academic experience in reading. At the forefront of accomplishing this is insuring that all teachers, and particularly beginning teachers, are prepared for professional practice and the rigors of the adaptive nature of teaching reading. According to Scarborough (2001), effective teachers of reading know the complexity of reading. They recognize that there are many aspects of reading that are intertwined, and that instruction must employ effective strategies to engage the learner. Furthermore, Phelps and Schilling (2004) argue that teaching reading is complex work that demands deep professional knowledge. Phelps and Schilling (2004) further this notion by stating that teachers need a foundational understanding of how students develop as readers and effective methods for teaching reading. A significant aspect of supporting teachers in developing this understanding is through determining what teachers know about teaching reading and ensuring that there are professionals in every classroom who feel confident in meeting the diverse needs of their students (Fitzharris, Jones, & Crawford, 2008).

Over the last few years, reading standards have shifted: they have evolved and now require students to be more flexible in decoding and comprehending text. According to Kamil (2016), Common Core State Standards call for higher levels of proficiency in reading. The author further argues that accomplishing these levels of proficiency requires more intensive adaptive instructional practices in classrooms. Considering the shifts that have occurred in reading standards, teachers must develop a sound pedagogical knowledge base of reading to support adaptive reading instruction. This knowledge base has become a vital aspect in implementing sound reading instruction during the elementary years.
National reports on effective reading instruction have stressed the importance of teachers’ knowledge for teaching reading (Joshi, Binks, Houghen, Dahlgreen, Ocker-Dean, & Smith, 2009). Janssen and Erickson (2013) explain that in an educational atmosphere where teachers are being asked to do more and further increase student outcomes, research has shown that in some cases teachers are lacking a deepened understanding of the complexity of reading concepts as they begin their professional careers (Janssen & Erickson, 2013; Hoffman, Roller, Maloch, Sailors, Duffy, & Beretvas, 2005). Shifts have occurred in the reading curriculum and standards, with the result that teachers need to be more knowledgeable of the intricacies of teaching reading (Bainbridge & Macy, 2008; Kosnik, Beck, & Roswell 2008; Mather, Bos & Babur, 2001; Jansen & Erikson, 2013). This is important for beginning teachers, because of the support they need to further develop the knowledge required to teach reading in a diverse manner. Snow, Griffin, and Burns (2005) note that despite the current obsession with improving national educational standards, a number of teachers still need support in the fundamentals of theory and practice of reading and literacy. Furthermore, the authors argue that when teachers feel they are enabled to succeed with their students, they are more committed and effective in their learning and practice. Being aware of this, it is important to support beginning teachers in continuing their professional growth as they deliver instructional practices that serve as a foundation for developing readers.

Research Problem

Every day, teachers are faced with making instructional decisions about the content that they are conveying in reading. Essential to this decision-making is the knowledge of content matter and the flexibility to be adaptive in instructional practices. For teachers to make these decisions and to convey content in a manner that supports rigorous instruction, they must be prepared with
a specific understanding of reading content (Crim, Hawkins, Thornton, Rosof, Thorton, & Thomas, 2008; Joshi, Binks, Hougen, Dahlgreen, Dean, & Smith, 2009). Joshi et. al (2009) explain that recent national reports on effective reading instruction have stressed the importance of teachers’ knowledge for teaching reading; however, as they transition into professional practice, many beginning teachers have not completely developed this knowledge.

As shifts in reading standards have occurred, it has become apparent that an understanding of reading development is needed to teach reading effectively and that beginning teachers need to be prepared for reading instruction as they transition into professional practice (Bainbridge & Macy, 2008; Grisham, 2000; Grossman, Valencia, Evans, Thompson, Martin, & Place 2000; Clark, Jones, Reutzel, & Andreasen, 2013; Piasta, Connor, Fishman, & Morrison, 2009). Kent, Giles and Hibberts (2013) state that teaching reading is perhaps a teacher’s most complex and challenging endeavor, and that it is nearly impossible for teacher education programs to prepare candidates with all prerequisite knowledge and extensively develop every skill needed to meet the literacy needs of all students. Recognizing this problem of practice, this doctoral thesis explores the challenges and needs of beginning teachers of reading. This thesis also examines beginning teachers’ experiences during their first few years of professional practice. Understanding this problem is important to the national educational framework and to the local educational framework in North Carolina, since 14% of North Carolina’s teachers are beginning teachers who will require professional support as they transition into professional practice.

Justification for the Research Problem

Teachers’ lack of preparation for reading instruction can have a profound impact on students’ academic experiences. When students do not receive the targeted instruction, they need
to become proficient readers, they develop gaps in their reading development. Conye Kame’enui and Carnine (2010) indicate that when students do not establish early reading skills, it is probable that their future reading development will be impacted. Similarly, Duke and Block (2012) state that the lack of development in the elementary grades in conceptual and content knowledge in reading can have a substantial negative impact. For instance, when teachers are inadequately prepared to implement this type of instruction, there can be long-term effects for students, such as deficiencies and gaps in their knowledge of how to read and understand the words on the page. This in turn can have long-term effects on communities and students’ overall academic experience. Keeping this in mind, teacher education programs and stakeholders must ensure that beginning teachers are sufficiently prepared with the knowledge needed to implement instructional practices in reading to support academic development. This is an essential component to implementing effective instructional practices that are adaptive and flexible.

A considerable number of studies have examined teachers’ perspectives of their knowledge of reading and the role that teacher preparation programs have in equipping preservice teachers for reading instruction (Clark, Jones, Pretzel, & Andreasen, 2013; Helfrich & Bean, 2011; Grisham, 2000; Bainbridge & Macy, 2008; Kosnik, Beck & Roswell 2008). Several of these studies have explored reading instruction through the lens of these programs and their effectiveness. For instance, Helfrich and Bean (2011) examined teacher education programs’ effectiveness as it relates to experiences beyond the university setting and literacy. This study emerged from the work of Anders, Hoffman, and Duffy, who explored the notion of preservice teacher preparation. Helfrich and Bean (2011) conclude that preservice teachers have received some instruction in working with diverse learners in reading, but that it may not be enough for the instructional demands of today’s classrooms.
Similarly, Clark, Jones, Reutzel, and Andreasen (2013) investigated preservice teachers’ perceived ability to teach reading as they moved through their teacher preparation program. This longitudinal study examined the perspectives of beginning teachers as they transitioned into professional practice. The authors conclude that learning the theoretical background does not necessarily assist beginning reading teachers in applying theory in situated contexts (Clark, Jones, Reutzel, & Andreasen, 2013). Thus, Clark et al. (2013) argue that teacher education programs provide a great deal of theory but insufficient application of theory in the situated contexts of teaching. Clark et al (2013) further posit that beginning teachers need help in bridging theory and practice. In their study, beginning teachers expressed a desire for more interaction, feedback, and consultation with their teacher educators as they began their professional practice (Clark, Jones, Reutzel, & Andreasen, 2013). Their results also show that it takes time for beginning teachers to develop their skills (Clark, Jones, Reutzel, & Andreasen, 2013). These findings suggest that beginning teachers need opportunities to engage with other educators in the context of the elementary school classroom in an effort to encourage greater learning and growth (Clark, Jones, Reutzel, & Andreasen, 2013). These studies collectively reflect the role of preservice experiences in the preparation of beginning teachers for teaching reading, and the role of ongoing professional support and guidance as a means to enhance these teachers’ reading instruction. The present thesis builds on the work that has already been done on preservice experiences, while providing new insights on the knowledge that beginning teachers identify as being needed to teach reading. Furthermore, the thesis yields insights into instructional practices in reading.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

Although research studies have presented insights into the many facets of teacher preparation programs and their effectiveness in preparing beginning teachers to teach reading, few
authors have examined content knowledge and reading instruction through the lens of beginning teachers and their professional perspective (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Helfrich and Bean (2011) posit that there is a disconnect between research in teacher preparation and research in full-time teaching, because studies rarely follow-up by examining the real world of teaching. From a similar perspective, Clark et al. (2013) state that limited studies have tracked preservice teachers from their training into the classroom to see what their reading instruction actually looks like. They argue that by completing this type of research, insights can be gained into how teacher preparation programs can be enhanced or revised to better train teachers. The limitation in the research suggests that attention should be paid to the practitioners’ perspective as a means of formulating directions for professional practice. In addition, Snow, Griffin, and Burns (2005) argue that it is crucial to conceptualize what teachers need to know to teach reading within a developmental framework. They pose the question of how much knowledge is needed with regard to novice [beginning] teachers’ instructional practices and effectiveness (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Taking this into account, it is necessary to examine knowledge as it relates to instructional practices. The present thesis provides insight into the professional needs of beginning teachers and into ways in which school districts can further support these teachers.

**Relating the Discussions to the Audience**

This study is situated in the context of beginning teachers’ experiences. Insights were gained into the professional needs of beginning teachers as they embarked upon their professional practice and the rigors of teaching reading. This doctoral thesis gave voice to beginning teachers and their experiences, and reflects implications that are advantageous for school districts and higher education institutions as they provide support for beginning teachers. The study is of
particular interest for invested partners such as district leaders, university instructors, and stakeholders in the elementary and university settings, as school districts continue to formulate partnerships with universities’ schools of education. The study is also of interest to teachers because of the collaborative interaction needed to support beginning teachers. These invested partners have been identified because they are instrumental in providing professional support to beginning teachers and serve as a link between preservice and professional experiences. In addition, these audience members provide an avenue for change in the experiences of beginning teachers.

Significance of the Research Problem

Recognizing the diversity that exists in today’s elementary classrooms, it is important for beginning teachers to be knowledgeable and flexible in their delivery of reading instruction. When beginning teachers begin professional practice with a limited understanding of how to teach reading, this can potentially impact students’ academic experiences. Two out of every three students in U.S. schools have reading proficiencies below the level needed to adequately complete grade-level work; hence, it is important that beginning teachers understand the intricacies of teaching reading and of how to deliver content flexibly in a manner that engages all learners (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2009).

When students do not receive the targeted instruction needed to become proficient readers, the impact is that they develop gaps in their reading development, which has the potential to have lasting effects not only on their academic experiences but also on other areas of their lives. Recognizing this, it is important that teachers be prepared with a repertoire of skills that meet the needs of all students. By giving beginning teachers the knowledge that they identify as necessary
to be proficient in teaching reading, impact partners can support these teachers in implementing quality reading instruction that is diverse. This begins with evaluating teachers’ needs as they begin their professional practice and determining the knowledge that they identify as necessary to diversify student instruction. This is particularly important to consider, as accountability levels for teachers and students have increased. In addition, understanding beginning teachers’ needs is important as school districts and universities identify means of supporting these teachers in developing a strong pedagogical knowledge base for teaching reading.

**Positionality Statement**

As I reflect on my identity as it relates to this case study, I must begin by acknowledging that my identities are diverse, complex, and includes being an educator, a doctoral student, a wife, an advocate, and a volunteer. My identities are fluid, continuing to evolve, and have changed throughout my life. As an African American educator and a doctoral student, my identities have informed my perspectives, while providing insight into how to face the challenges present in education. These identities, both personally and professionally, have shaped my understanding of education and have been influential in my advocacy for the implementation of high quality instructional practices to meet the diverse needs of students. These identities have also created a place for me to grow and challenge my own existing perceptions, and to use the knowledge that I am gaining to ground my professional work and understanding of the complexities of education and teaching literacy. This has resulted in me advocating for changes in practices in education that may perpetuate an institution of inequity for students.

In this research process I have carefully examined my ethical bias because of the potential impact it may have on the objectivity of this study and the results. A potential source of bias that
I have identified is my previous coursework in literacy. I have explored teaching reading extensively, which could potentially lead to the development of a premature conclusion about the notions of reading instruction. Recognizing this, it was important for me as a researcher to carefully explore the existing literature and to convey the participants’ responses with objectivity.

Another potential source of bias is my work as a curriculum specialist in a Title I school. Over the last eight years, I have worked extensively to learn about teachers’ instructional practices in reading. Thus, I have previously worked with teachers and discussed with them their experiences with teaching reading and their feelings towards literacy practices. Being aware of this potential bias, I monitored, evaluated, and employed research techniques with fidelity, with the data guiding the interpretation.

One final source of bias is my respect for the teaching profession. As a teacher who loves this profession and who has a vested interest in improving it, I have not let my personal feelings contribute to any bias that could have the potential to compromise the fidelity of the research and the interpretation of the data. Throughout the study, I have acknowledged that bias does exist, but I have confronted it to conduct the research, to fully gain an understanding of the research data and to ensure that the research is not compromised.

**Research Questions**

This doctoral thesis explores the following research questions that underpin the study:

- What are the challenges and needs of beginning teachers as they begin to teach reading?
- What are the experiences of teachers across their first few years as they begin to teach reading?
- What do you believe beginning teachers need to know for reading instruction in the elementary classroom?
Theoretical Framework

Guiding Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the pedagogical and content knowledge aspect of reading instruction that emerged from the seminal work of Shulman’s (1986) pedagogical content knowledge theory. Shulman (1986) transformed instructional practices by interconnecting pedagogical and content knowledge. This work is still relevant to education today because of the role that pedagogical content knowledge contributes to understanding and supporting beginning teachers for effective instructional practices. Shulman’s pedagogical content knowledge framework is significant to this study because it merges educational practices on content and pedagogy. Taking into consideration the importance of knowledge of reading as it relates to professional practice and beginning teaching, it was important to situate this study in a theoretical framework that aligns content knowledge with the art of teaching. Shulman (1987) posits that expert teachers possess a rich body of knowledge, including knowledge of the learners’ curriculum and content and their characteristics and educational contexts. In addition, they have organized problem-solving strategies, and they negotiate “knowing that” and “knowing how” as they plan, predict, anticipate, and solve problems (Shulman, 1987; Anderson, Armbruster, & Roe, 1989).

One of the strengths of the pedagogical content knowledge framework is that it interconnects pedagogy with instructional practices, thus reflecting the connection between content knowledge and how it translates into teaching practice. Another strength of this framework is that it demonstrates an alignment between teacher preparation and pedagogical content knowledge. This alignment is important to teaching, because it provides the foundation for the development of content knowledge for teaching reading prior to beginning professional practice.
Although this framework does align closely with this study, pedagogical content knowledge is not specific to teaching reading but is grounded in developing knowledge for subject matter content.

**Historical Trajectory and Significance**

Understanding the complexity of teaching reading involves exploring and understanding reading development and teachers’ adaptive instructional practices and decision making, and understanding the content and pedagogical knowledge involved in teaching reading. At the foundation of this is recognizing that there is an intersection between content and pedagogical knowledge, and supporting teachers in developing this knowledge. From a historical stance, this notion of content and pedagogical knowledge has evolved a paradigm shift has occurred, from a behaviorist approach to teacher preparation for reading instruction, towards understanding the cognitive processes involved in teacher knowledge and the understanding of teaching reading (Norman, 2008). As a result of this paradigm shift, teachers’ understanding of the intricacies of reading has become stressed (Joshi, et al., 2009). Attention has been given to continuing to improve teacher educator programs and preservice experiences (Joshi, et al., 2009). Shulman’s work with pedagogical content knowledge in the 1980s introduced a new way of thinking about the role of the content knowledge needed for teaching (Phelps & Schilling, 2004). It provided a space for studies to investigate how teachers need to know the subject they teach and what they need to know about it to teach it to others (Phelps & Schilling, 2004).

**Knowledge and Teaching**

Research studies on reading development have examined instruction and the significance of teacher content knowledge for teaching reading as an important aspect of supporting students’
academic development. In 1987, Shulman examined teacher preparation in relation to pedagogical content knowledge and the need for teachers to develop a deepened knowledge of content. Shulman (1987) defined pedagogical content knowledge as knowledge that goes beyond subject matter to the dimension of subject matter knowledge for teaching. Shulman (1986) stated that pedagogical content knowledge consists of the ability to effectively combine content knowledge with effective teaching methods by going beyond content knowledge to the dimension of subject matter knowledge. Shulman further argued that the disciplinary knowledge taught and learned in college was not sufficient for teaching with depth. This reflects the significance of continuing to evaluate the most effective means supporting teachers as they develop the knowledge base needed to be flexible in reading instruction.

Shulman’s work advanced thinking about teacher knowledge by conveying the interconnectedness between content and pedagogical knowledge. Shulman (1987) argued that subject knowledge and pedagogy were being treated as mutually exclusive domains in research. This resulted in teacher education programs focusing on either subject matter or pedagogy. To address this isolated approach to subject knowledge during teacher preparation, Shulman (1987) proposed recognizing the necessary relationship between the two domains.

Pedagogical content knowledge is based on how teachers relate what they know about teaching their subject matter and what you know about what they teach. It is the integration and synthesis of teachers' pedagogical knowledge and their subject matter knowledge that aligns understanding and translates knowledge into professional practice (Shulman, 1986). Taking this into consideration, it is important that beginning teachers develop this pedagogical content knowledge through ongoing support as they transition into practice.
Adaptive Instructional Practices

Shulman (1987) recognized and argued that pedagogical content knowledge is the intersection of content and pedagogy, and that it supports a teacher’s capacity to transform his or her content knowledge into powerful and adaptive instructional practices. Cochran, King, and Deruiter (1991) furthered this notion and contend that pedagogical content knowledge is unique to teachers and is the premise of teaching. It requires teachers to transform their subject matter knowledge by critically reflecting on and interpreting it, which goes beyond knowledge of the content and encompasses teachers’ abilities to understand students’ developmental levels, attitudes, and motivations (Shulman, 1986; Cochran, King, & Deruiter, 1991). Considering the complexity of reading instruction and its diverse nature, understanding content knowledge can support the implementation of effective instructional practices in reading. Phelps and Schilling (2004) argue that pedagogical content knowledge is advantageous because it identifies specialized ways that teachers need to know a subject to teach it to others. It provides a basis for utilizing knowledge of the content alongside knowledge of pedagogy (Griffith, 2016). By teaching reading in various contexts, teachers can maximize their capacity to meet the needs of individual learners, curricular requirements, and increased accountability. Accomplishing this begins with developing knowledge of the content being taught and understanding how content translates into instructional practices.

Connecting Content and Pedagogy

Shulman’s seminal work on pedagogical content knowledge advanced thinking about teacher knowledge and instructional practices by reflecting the interconnectedness between content and pedagogical knowledge. Shulman (1987) argued that with teachers’ subject knowledge
and pedagogy being treated as mutually exclusive domains in research, teacher education programs focused their instructional approaches on either subject matter or pedagogy. To address this isolated approach to subject knowledge during teacher preparation, Shulman (1987) proposed recognizing the necessary relationship between pedagogy and content knowledge through the integration and synthesis of teachers' pedagogical and subject matter knowledge, and how this relationship translates into professional practice (Shulman, 1986). Recognizing this, it is important that school districts provide teachers with the opportunity to continue to develop their pedagogical content knowledge as they begin their professional practice.

At the foundation of connecting content and pedagogy is examining teachers understanding of reading content. Ward (2013) argues that increasing the level of knowledge and skill that the teacher brings to the instructional process in turn increases in students’ academic performance. Ward (2013) further posits that defining what teachers need to know about how to teach their content is important from both a research and a professional development perspective. It provides insight into what is essential to student learning and what content beginning teachers need to know to implement sound instruction to support reading development. From a similar stance, Ball, Thames, and Phelps (2008) explain that the demands of teaching require knowledge at the intersection of content and teaching. Ball, Thames, and Phelps (2008) argue that teachers must know the subject they teach. This is important to consider regarding content knowledge and the knowledge that beginning teachers require to effectively meet the needs of the students.

**Content Knowledge for Teaching Reading**

When beginning teachers transition into professional practice, they are expected to meet student needs and apply what they learned in preservice. Griffith (2016) argues that one goal of
teacher preparation is to help preservice teachers develop adaptive expertise by raising their metacognitive awareness of what they know and do not know while asking them to develop and refine their skills to deal with the ever-changing demands of the learning context. This involves preservice teachers gaining knowledge of the meaning of reading standards, the developmental aspects of reading, and diverse learners as they prepare for the rigors of professional practice. In addition, this also entails teachers having knowledge of alternate ways to convey content and employ instructional moves that are structured in a manner that is engaging for students (Shulman, 1987; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 2005).

Over the last couple decades there have been changes in the instructional practices in reading. This paradigm shift has transformed how beginning teachers must be supported in developing a deeper level of reading among students. According to Shulman (1986), teachers must not only be able to define for students the accepted truths in a domain, but they must also be able to explain why a proposition is warranted, why it is worth knowing, and how it relates to other propositions, both within the discipline and without, and both in theory and in practice (Shulman, 1986). This notion reflects the significance of a teacher being able to connect content knowledge, theory, and practice. Moreover, it also highlights the significance of teachers having a knowledge base of reading to adequately shape students’ learning experiences and to engage children in reading in a meaningful manner.

A key aspect of ensuring that teachers are well prepared for professional practice is providing a foundation for implementing instructional practices in reading that align with the paradigm shifts occurring in reading. According to Shulman (1986), teachers not only need to understand what they are teaching, but they must also understand the why behind what they are doing. Shulman (1986) that pedagogical content knowledge consists of the ability to effectively
combine content knowledge with effective teaching methods, by going beyond content knowledge to the dimension of subject matter knowledge. Taking this into consideration, Shulman’s theory of pedagogical content knowledge established that there must be an integration of pedagogy and content. The framework of pedagogical content knowledge is significant to the present study because it reflects the importance for beginning teachers to have the opportunity to integrate their understanding of reading, as well as the significance of this framework in supporting a coherent preservice experience.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Effective classroom instruction in reading can create learning experiences that support students’ academic success. Ensuring that teachers begin professional practice with an understanding of reading content and reading development is the foundation for this type of instruction. Moats (2009) explains that contrary to the popular theory that learning to read is natural and easy, it is in fact a complex linguistic achievement. Moats (1999) explains that for many children, reading requires effort and incremental skill development. In turn, this requires teachers to develop considerable knowledge and skill. In addition, teachers must enter into practice with a foundational knowledge base for teaching reading and be able to bridge theory and practical teaching experiences (Hoffman, Roller, Maloch, Sailors, Duffy, & Beretvas, 2005). Recognizing this, it is important for teachers to develop a foundation of knowledge during preservice experiences to teach reading content.

Due to the complexity of implementing effective reading instruction, there must be a union between the practices learned during preservice experiences with the transition into professional practice. This begins by ensuring that preservice teachers begin professional practice with an understanding of reading development and knowledge of how to apply what they learned in preservice. According to Strickland, Snow, Griffin, Burns, and Macnamara (2002), made the argument that teachers in the early grades need to have a firm understanding of how to teach reading. Furthermore, Strickland, et. al (2002) posit that this understanding must rest on a foundation of knowledge. Taking this into consideration, beginning teachers must develop a firm
understanding of how to teach reading by merging their foundational knowledge of this subject with a more specialized understanding of the complexities of reading.

As shifts have occurred in literacy, the notion that specialized knowledge is needed to teach reading effectively has emerged, particularly regarding beginning teachers and their preparation to implement reading instruction (Bainbridge & Macy, 2008; Grisham, 2000; Grossman, Valencia, Evans, Thompson, Martin, & Place 2000; Clark, et al., 2013, Piasta, Connor, Fishman, & Morrison, 2009). Moats (1999) contends that when considering the classroom demands on the teacher, it is evident that teaching reading requires considerable knowledge and skill. In addition, Moats (1999) argues that the teacher must instruct students directly, systematically, and explicitly to decipher words in print, while understanding how to accommodate children's variability. This involves assessing children to tailor lessons to individuals, understanding and interpreting errors to give corrective feedback, and selecting examples to illustrate concepts and explain new ideas in different ways (Moats, 1999). From a similar perspective, Snow, Burns, and Griffin (2005) indicate that teaching reading effectively requires a teacher to know when to scaffold, when to plan and implement systematic comprehension and word identification lessons, and when and how to use assessments. For teachers to make these decisions, they must have underlying knowledge of language, the content being read, and the students’ progress (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). Recognizing that instruction in reading must be diverse, beginning teachers must transition into professional practice with pedagogical knowledge that they can access and use to meet the needs of their students.

Having knowledge of diverse ways to implement reading instruction serves as the foundation for creating learning opportunities that support reading development. Trends in teaching reading have shifted over the years towards a more application based approach.
Beginning teachers must be knowledgeable of how to implement quality instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners. In addition, beginning teachers must understand the instructional framework being implemented in reading at the school and district level to implement reading within that framework.

This chapter examines the literature on reading instruction as it relates to the historical context of teaching reading, teacher preparation, content knowledge, and supporting the development of reading. According to Bainbridge and Macy (2008), the changing world of literacy has created controversy over how preservice teachers should be prepared to meet the needs and challenges of reading instruction as they enter professional practice. The following literature review provides insight into how educational researchers have examined reading instruction, as well as the role of teacher preparation as it relates to the shifts occurring in reading instruction in today’s classrooms. The literature is organized into the following sections: the historical context of teaching reading, the alignment of reading instruction with teacher education programs, teacher preparation and content knowledge, teacher preparation and transitioning into professional practice, the role of content knowledge and emergent reading, specialized knowledge, and instruction. These sections collectively link preservice experiences, instruction, and knowledge needed to teach reading, with the idea of beginning teachers being prepared with a foundation to implement effective instruction in reading through specialized knowledge.

**Historical Context of Teaching Reading**

Over the years, the themes of rigorous reading instruction and the role of teacher preparation programs have emerged in the literature. Researchers have identified teacher preparation as an important factor in equipping beginning teachers with the knowledge needed for
quality reading instruction (Bainbridge & Macy, 2008; Grisham, 2000; Grossman, et al., 2000; Clark, et al., 2013). This notion is grounded in the idea that teachers need to possess a repertoire of instructional methods to meet students’ needs (Janssen & Erickson, 2013; Lyon & Weiser, 2009). Studies dating back to 1962 have explored the idea of teacher preparation. In addition, historical accounts that date back to the colonial era have been used to examine the history of reading instruction. This examination of reading development and preparation over the years reflects a continuing quest to identify the best means of bridging the gap between teaching expectations for reading instruction and instructional practices. It also highlights the parallels between societal changes and their influence on instructional practices in reading. Understanding the historical context of teaching reading is significant because of the influence that societal changes have on educational practices. Understanding how reading has evolved is vital to examining current practices and expectations of beginning teachers.

Historical Context for Instructional Approaches and Initiatives in Reading

The beginning of reading instruction emerged out of educational practices that focused on religion. Barry (2008) states that during the birth of our country, predominant societal values comprised colonial reading materials. The hornbook introduced students to Christian beliefs. This first textbook contained the alphabet, a set of syllables, the invocation, and the Lord’s Prayer (Barry, 2008; Vogt & Shearer, 2013). During the colonial era, reading was taught using the alphabet method. This method was used as the elementary means of instruction until around 1820 (Barry, 2008). It began with children learning the letters of the alphabet, spelling syllables aloud, and then spelling and reciting each word of the printed prayer (Barry, 2008). The New England Primer was also utilized during the colonial era. It was like the hornbook, but it reflected the views
of the Puritans. According to Vogt and Shearer (2013), religion and patriotic views served as the focus of instruction from 1607 to 1840, and the emphasis on knowledge of the alphabet, recitation, memorization, and religious instruction was the core of instructional practices (Vogt & Shearer, 2013). During this timeframe, reading was viewed as a means to teach children how to read religious text (Vogt & Shearer, 2013). By the 1830s however, a new argument emerged that was grounded in the notion that children learned from a whole language approach. This approach was based on the concept that children learn to read by recognizing the whole word as opposed to its individual parts (Barry, 2008). The notion that students read by whole word created a shift in reading instruction. Around this time, the McGuffy Readers were introduced.

By the first half of the 20th century, reading instruction saw another shift as a result of industrialization. Reading instruction during this time emphasized reading for information instead of for religious purposes. The beginning of phonics instruction emerged, and came with the debate centered on the best way to teach phonics. During this time, some advocated for synthetic phonics instruction while others argued for an analytic approach, where students learned words and then analyzed the parts (Vogt & Shearer, 2013).

From the late 1930s to the 1960s, leveled readers were developed that were used to teach children to read using a more behaviorist approach. These readers provided scripted guides for teachers and were comprised of sight words (Vogt & Shearer, 2013). During the same time frame, students were also introduced to the Dick and Jane series, which focused on a whole word approach to reading instruction.

One of the most significant aspects of reading instruction during this time was the ongoing debate centered on the best methods for teaching reading. In an effort to resolve this debate, a study was conducted and concluded that no one method was much more effective in all situations.
(Vogt & Shearer, 2011). Nevertheless, the debate continued as researchers explored different approaches to reading instruction through the years.

Between the 1970s and the 1980s, the use of basal readers as an instructional method emerged. These basal readers provided teachers with scripted lessons, leveled readers, and an instructional format for the whole group of students and instructional groups based on the students’ ability. In 1985, the publication *Becoming a Nation of Readers* was released and challenged instructional practices in reading. In this report, Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985) posited that the value of reading instruction hinges on whether a child's reading improves. This report set the stage for a paradigm shift that would lead to change in instructional practices.

By the 1990s and into the 2000s, instructional practices in reading changed as a result of evolving curriculum standards, standardized testing, and federal legislation. Vogt and Shearer (2011) state that at the beginning of the 21st century, many classrooms were dynamic and process-driven in their approach to reading and writing. Furthermore, although the workshop approach to literacy had existed for years, a new generation of educators adapted it to reflect a more focused and goal-oriented view of instruction (Vogt & Shearer, 2011). This was, in part, a response to more rigid standards and testing requirements, but also a result of better understanding of reading (Vogt & Shearer, 2011). During this time, teachers were introduced to a balanced literacy approach to teaching reading. Balanced literacy is grounded in reading instruction that focuses on teaching students’ specific skills of reading.

Reports on reading such as the National Reading Panel report were also important during this time frame. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Reading Panel published reports during the late 1990s that concluded that effective reading programs include instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text
comprehension (Barry, 2008; Vogt & Shearer, 2011). In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law, requiring states and schools to have more accountability associated with student achievement. According to Dee and Brian (2011), the No Child Left Behind legislation called states to conduct annual student assessments linked to state standards to identify schools failing to make “adequate yearly progress” (AYP).

In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was reauthorized and led to the implementation of Response to Intervention. Then, in 2009, the Race to the Top Initiative was implemented, which focused on the goal of students being ready for college or a career when they graduated (Vogt & Shearer, 2011). Building on this initiative, in 2010 the Common Core State Standards were published based on the principles of rigorous, focused academic content and performance expectations (Massell & Perrault, 2014). The standards placed an emphasis on higher level thinking and supported advanced understanding and analysis of content (Massell & Perrault, 2014). Ultimately, these changes led to the implementation of rigorous instructional practices that called for teachers to teach reading of complex text in a manner that supported independence.

**Historical Context of Teacher Preparation for Teaching Reading**

Much like instructional practices for teaching reading, teacher preparation has also evolved over time. Teacher preparation in relation to reading instruction initially emerged in the seminal work of Austin and Morrison in 1962 which focused on preservice teacher preparation in the United States. Their study, *The Torch Lighters*, was the first exploration of preservice teacher preparation in reading in the United States. This study concluded that undergraduate programs provided insufficient preparation for teaching reading. Fifteen years later, Austin and Morrison revisited this work, and found that although improvements had been made in undergraduate
programs, but there was still a need for teacher preparation programs to continue to be better informed about the components of reading instruction (Austin & Morrison, 1977).

Research studies on reading have examined instruction and the significance of teacher knowledge for teaching reading. In 1986, Shulman examined teacher preparation in relation to pedagogical content knowledge and the need for teachers to develop specialized knowledge. Shulman (1986) argued that pedagogical content knowledge consists of the ability to effectively combine content knowledge with effective teaching methods. Shulman (1986) furthered argued that the disciplinary knowledge taught and learned in college was not sufficient for teaching these subjects. Shulman’s findings reflected the need for teacher preparation programs to continue to evaluate the most effective means of preparing preservice students, and to ensure that preservice teachers develop the knowledge base needed to be flexible in reading instruction.

The examination of preservice preparation has become particularly important as reading standards and accountability continue to evolve. Between 1990 and the 2000s, influential reports were published, including *Becoming a Nation of Readers, The Report of the National Reading Panel*, and the *Report of the Committee on Reading Disabilities*, that have changed the context of reading instruction and the content knowledge needed to support development in reading. Knowing this, teacher preparation programs must help preservice teachers in developing the necessary skills and understanding to support academic progression in reading.

**Alignment of Teacher Preparation Programs with Reading Instruction**

Teacher preparation programs are an important factor in supporting beginning teachers with the foundational knowledge needed for reading instruction (Bainbridge & Macy, 2008; Grisham, 2000; Grossman, et al., 2000; Clark, et al., 2013). Beginning teachers need to be
equipped with a knowledge for teaching reading that emphasizes deeper understanding of reading concepts. In a qualitative study, Janssen and Erickson (2013) explored preservice teachers’ acquisition of content knowledge and self-efficacy for teaching reading. Their results showed that preservice teachers were able to identify the basic components of reading instruction, but that there was evidence of a lack of pedagogical content knowledge. The participants’ interviews reflected that they understood the broad components of teaching reading, but that this alone did not prepare them to implement instruction. Furthermore, according to Janssen and Erickson (2013), more is being asked of teachers in the current atmosphere of education. As a result, teacher preparation programs must prepare teachers to face these challenges by providing them with opportunities to apply the skills and strategies that they are learning in a meaningful manner that relates to professional practice. Janssen and Erickson (2013) further contend that it is critical that teachers leave preservice programs as highly effective and efficacious teachers of reading. Knowing this, teacher preparation programs must cultivate a deeper understanding of the intricacies of reading and how these translate into instructional practices. In a similar vein, Beck, Kosnick, and Roswell (2008) state that beginning teachers need a greater understanding of how to bridge theory and practice. Therefore, it is important that universities support an alignment between preservice and professional practice.

To effectively implement reading instruction that aligns with shifts occurring in reading, teachers must be adequately prepared during preservice. According to Boyd et al. (2009), there is a fierce debate over the role of teacher preparation and the best way to equip teachers to improve the outcomes of their students’ performance. These authors further argue that sound teacher preparation that is directly linked to practice benefits teachers in their first year of teaching and academic achievement. From a similar perspective, Kosnik, Beck, and Roswell (2008) state that
schools of education are being pressured by state and federal legislators to prove that their education programs make a difference in teaching practices and student achievement. This reflects the link between teacher preparation during preservice and implementing quality reading instruction. Moreover, it also highlights the role of teacher education programs in supporting teachers in acquiring a wide array of knowledge that connects theoretical perspectives with instructional practices. According to Hoffman et al. (2005), new teachers often have difficulty transferring what they learned in university. Kosnik, Beck, and Roswell (2008) explain that the prevalent conceptualization and organization of teachers’ learning tends to fragment practice and leaves individual teachers the challenge of integrating subject matter and pedagogy in the context of their work. Kosnik, Beck, and Roswell (2008) further explained that even though teachers develop sound ideas about teaching and learning during their preparation, they sometimes abandon these ideas as they transition into the profession. Taking this into consideration, teachers must make the connection between university experiences and the rigor of today’s literacy instruction. Beginning teachers must be able to utilize the knowledge they gained during preservice as a foundation for their instructional practices. This requires examining the best means of aligning experiences from preservice with the changes occurring in reading, as well as understanding the complex nature of teaching reading.

Teacher Preparation Programs and Reading Instruction

When teachers have a deepened understanding of reading content, they can provide students with adequate support to differentiate instruction. Accordingly, Helfrich and Bean (2011) indicate that quality teacher education programs support the development of strong literacy knowledge. When quality teacher education programs are coupled with practical literacy teaching
opportunities, a balance is created between research, theory, and the knowledge needed to understand the progression of literacy development. The integration of preservice experiences with knowledge of reading broadens the repertoire of instructional strategies that beginning teachers can confidently employ to differentiate reading instruction for learners. Snow, Griffin, and Burns (2005) posit that teacher education programs have a responsibility to ensure that the teacher in every class has a store of well integrated declarative knowledge about language and literacy that can optimize the literacy outcomes of every student.

A significant aspect of preparing teachers for reading instruction is the coursework completed during preservice. Helfrich and Bean (2011) indicate that the integration of coursework and field experiences is crucial to the success of preservice teachers’ ability to deliver effective reading instruction. Helfrich and Bean (2011) further state that together, coursework and field experience form an effective tool for preparing teachers to meet the demands of rigorous classroom instruction. This is significant to reading instruction because it indicates that preservice teachers need the opportunity to apply the knowledge acquired while developing knowledge that can serve as a foundation between preservice and in-service teaching experiences. According to Grisham (2000), teacher preparation programs provide a vision of what ideal instruction looks like, and this vision can serve as a guide for instructional decisions that beginning teachers make for their own classrooms. Taking this into account, teacher education programs and coursework can support beginning teachers in developing a greater understanding of how to bridge theory and instruction.

Teacher education programs are the foundation for ensuring that preservice teachers understand reading content prior to transitioning into classroom instruction. The role of content knowledge is an important factor to consider when connecting preservice experiences to in-service expectations. In a study that explored reading knowledge and the implementation of reading
instruction, Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich, and Stanovich (2004) examined teachers’ knowledge of reading content. Cunningham, Perry, Stanovich (2004) determined that teachers did not always recognize what they did not know in terms of language and literacy concepts. In addition, they found that when teachers had a good understanding of reading content knowledge, they were more likely to seek new and innovative ways to teach reading. Similarly, Ruhama and Tirosh (1995) argued that for teachers to make appropriate decisions to help and guide students, they need to develop content knowledge over several dimensions. Hence, it is important that teachers engage in coursework that helps them develop their own knowledge and skills for teaching reading, through learning opportunities that engage the preservice teacher while providing the foundation for understanding how students develop as readers.

Linek, Nelson, Sampson, Zeek, Mohr, and Hughes (1999) investigated preservice teachers' beliefs regarding reading. Through an ethnographic study, the researchers were able to determine that during a semester long preservice, students were able to gain conceptual knowledge in reading that shifted their beliefs about reading instruction. Linek, et. al (1999) contended that,

During the semester beliefs about learning and teaching literacy demonstrated several key shifts. While preservice teachers' initial theory of instruction featured a simplistic view of the teacher transmitting skills-based knowledge in a prescribed linear sequence, by the end of the semester they developed a more complex view of learners constructing literacy knowledge through varied strategies and materials. While they initially saw learning as rote, decontextualized experience, they later described a meaning-centered situation that allowed for divergent thinking. Fostering student interest and motivation were important components of literacy instruction at the end of the semester. Assessment became a tool to measure progress in the context of classroom activities. Students reported feeling more confident in their ability to teach reading because of what they had learned during the semester.

A critical factor to consider is the link between the teacher’s knowledge and his or her ability to differentiate reading instruction in a manner that support students in developing reading abilities. Fitzharris, Harris, and Crawford (2008) posit that supporting teachers in developing the
link between coursework and professional practice can help them identify their own level of knowledge and skills while evaluating their own performance and beliefs about reading. This is vital to preparing teachers and to providing a foundation that connects theoretical perspectives with the integration of professional practice. Taking this into consideration, Snow, Griffin, and Burns (2005) explain that teacher education programs hold great promise for improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Practice for Beginning Teachers

As preservice teachers begin their professional careers, they are faced with the challenge of implementing instructional practices across a myriad of instructional levels. In addition, they must bridge theory and practice to meet the diverse needs of their students. As a result, teachers must be prepared to move beyond their theoretical understandings of reading content towards a more practical approach that supports student achievement (Ball, Phelps, & Schillings, 2004; Janssen & Erickson, 2013). In a longitudinal study examining preparation for literacy instruction, Kosnik and Beck (2008) found that beginning teachers identified theoretical understandings as important, but that many expressed that they were not thoroughly taught about how these understandings translated into practice. In the study, 22 participants were interviewed about their perspectives on their preservice program and how it prepared them to move into practice. Some participants stated that they were in shock as they transitioned into teaching, and indicated that they needed more guidance from their instructors during preservice. In addition, they expressed that they did not always recognize the links between the topics being taught and that some theories needed to be addressed differently with more depth. Considering this, teacher preparation programs must continue to strive to connect students’ preservice experiences with the rigors of in-
service teaching. This is important because teachers have an impact on students’ academic development in reading. Moreover, when teachers are proficient in teaching reading, they are able to provide students with instruction that is adaptive, and they have the knowledge base needed to support achievement.

As changes have occurred in teacher and student accountability, teacher education programs must identify the best instructional methods to prepare preservice teachers to implement effective reading instruction while they transition to professional practice. Spear-Swerling, Brucker, and Alfano (2005) state that with the evolving changes in teaching reading, teachers need to be diverse in their knowledge of reading content as they begin their practice. From a similar perspective, Lyon and Weiser (2009) contend that proficient teaching in reading requires teachers to develop and apply knowledge about complex sub-skills that must be taught to ensure that students reach mastery. It is also important that teachers understand all the complex components of reading and know how to use this understanding to accomplish the goals of teaching reading prior to professional practice. This calls for teachers to emerge from teacher preparation programs with an integrated knowledge base that connects theoretical pedagogy with professional expectations. According to Levine (2006), however, too often teacher education programs cling to outdated visions of teaching, which results in graduates not being prepared to cope with the realities of today’s classroom. Levine (2006) further contends that many future educators seem to be graduating from teacher education programs without becoming effective teachers, and to have difficulty in today’s accountability-driven education systems.

For beginning teachers to become effective in their reading instruction, preservice programs must examine their curriculum to ensure that the content being delivered aligns with the expectations in today’s schools. In addition, preservice programs must reflect the importance of
experiences that are grounded in a deepened understanding of reading instruction. Lyon and Weiser (2009) argue that teachers cannot be expected to be responsible for independently acquiring the skills needed to be effective reading teachers without being taught specific research based instructional practices during their preservice programs. This notion is particularly important as educational standards in reading have evolved.

**Merging Preservice Knowledge and Professional Practice**

As teachers begin their professional practice, it is important to implement sound instruction in reading that merges content knowledge and instructional expertise. A component of implementing this type of instruction is examining teachers’ knowledge of reading content by exploring the connection between what is learned in preparation and the realities of professional practices. Hoffman et. al (2005) argue that new teachers often have difficulty transferring what they have learned from their university experiences into classroom practices. Knowing this, an alignment between academic programs and the demands of today’s classrooms provide a framework for developing a cohesive knowledge base for teaching reading.

A key factor in accomplishing a cohesive knowledge base for professional practice is to ensure that preservice teachers have a clear understanding of the complexities of reading content and how to align this content knowledge with the implementation of rigorous reading instruction. Moats (2009) argues that teachers must be able to organize and implement instructional practices that reflect good instruction, which must be structured in a manner that reaches students of diverse needs. She further posits that teachers are unfamiliar with the procedures of systematic instruction of reading as they begin their professional practice. Thus, teacher education programs should structure educational experiences in a manner that equips preservice teachers with the foundation
to understand and implement responsive instructional practices. This begins by preparing teachers
for the realities of professional practice as well as determining the level of the knowledge needed
to ensure a strong foundation for teaching reading effectively. Teacher preparation also must be
grounded in developing knowledge around implementing reading instruction, while translating
how this connects to professional practice. Recognizing this, teacher preparation programs serve
as the basis for continued learning about literacy, and also provide a foundation for ensuring that
beginning teachers are exposed to models of good teaching before beginning professional practice
(Snow, Griffin, and Burns, 2005).

Teaching reading in the elementary classroom evolved through the years as a result of
changes in curriculum standards. Schools of education must provide preservice teachers with
knowledge not only about teaching reading, but also about how to merge this knowledge with the
current curriculum expectations. Kervin and Turbill (2003) contend the following:

Preservice training can provide a great deal of pedagogical knowledge. However, "as the
art and science of teaching, pedagogy is evident both in the activity that takes place in the
classrooms ... and in the nature or quality of the tasks set by the teachers to guide and
develop student learning." This makes it crucial to acknowledge that preservice teacher
training or development must not end once a student graduates from tertiary preservice
teacher education. Instead, in alliance with an acceptance that "beginning teachers still have
much to learn about their craft" as stated above, this training or development must continue
into their professional practice.

Recognizing the significance of the interconnectedness of pedagogical knowledge and
professional practice, it is important to ensure that beginning teachers have a solid foundation of
knowledge needed to teach reading and recognize how this knowledge translates into professional
practice.

According to Kervin and Turbill (2003), beginning teachers are exposed to significant
change when they move from their preservice training to professional practice. The authors argue
that it is critical for beginning teachers to be supported through this process because they are
expected to hit the ground running and implement effective instructional practices. From a similar
stance, Spear-Swerling (2007) states that research and educational practice are linked with regard
to beginning professional practice. Furthermore, she posits that without well-informed teachers,
students’ academic experience is hindered. Hence, teachers must begin their professional practice
ready to implement instructional practices that align with curriculum standards and propel the
learner towards proficiency in reading.

Implementing Instructional Practices that Support Rigorous Reading Instruction

Effective classroom instruction in reading creates learning experiences that support
academic success for students and increase student proficiency in reading. Weaver (2009) explains
that reading is a complex process because of how the mind actively processes text as well as social
factors involved in reading. The reading process and the process of learning provide the foundation
of instructional practices for teaching reading. Weaver (2009) argues that it is crucial that teachers
have an in-depth understanding of reading and learning to read so that they can make
knowledgeable decisions about instructional practices.

Considering that reading is a complex process of orchestrating various skills, teachers must
know how to engage students in diverse ways. Block, Oakar, and Hurt (2002) examined teacher
expertise as it relates to literacy growth and the qualities that all exemplary teachers share. that
teaching expertise made a significant difference in the rate and depth of students' literacy growth,
and that highly effective educators shared similar characteristics. Their results show that
exemplary teachers must employ a diverse range of strategies to meet students’ needs. In addition,
their study demonstrates that instruction at different grade levels must be diverse to meet these
needs. Thus, teacher preparation programs must support developing knowledge of curriculum standards and reading development to implement diverse instructional practices.

**Beginning Reading Instruction**

Reading instruction in the early elementary grades is focused on supporting the developments of the reader and of the language process. Language systems such as phonology, syntax, and semantics are critical to reading development and literacy learning (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). As preservice teachers emerge into professional practice, understanding the facets of reading development and how they relate to teaching reading can support the implementation of sound instructional practices in reading. Bursuck and Blanks (2010) explain:

> Early reading skills are progressive, with later skills depending on the mastery of earlier skills. Becoming a proficient reader depends on what students know before beginning a reading task, the accuracy of that information, and the extent to which students access and use that information. Effective teachers of early reading systematically and explicitly remind students about the informational and skill requirements of each task and prompt students to make connections to previously learned information and previously mastered skills.

In line with this explanation, Bursuck and Blanks explain that early reading instruction that makes a difference in student proficiency hinges on the teacher’s instructional interactions and moves as well as on the student’s ability to understand and use new learning.

In a longitudinal study on kindergarten and first grade reading, Morris, Bloodgood, Lomax, and Perney (2003) examined the developmental steps of learning to read and the growth of word knowledge. Morris, Bloodgood, Lomax, and Perney (2003) explained that a body of research supports the notion that a reciprocal and interactive relationship exists between phoneme awareness and early reading skills; however, there is a gap in the literature on how this relationship works. Morris et al., Bloodgood, Lomax, and Perney (2003) explain that teaching children in
kindergarten and first grade to read can be approached in several ways. Teachers can begin by teaching students to blend individual letter sounds, by modeling pointing and matching spoken word, or by providing opportunities to reread familiar texts. In their study, Morris, Bloodgood, Lomax, and Perney (2003) conclude that there is an interactive relationship between beginning readers’ concept of a word in a text and phoneme awareness. This conclusion leads them to determine that instructional practices such as direct explicit teaching of alphabet knowledge and phoneme awareness support students’ development (Morris, Bloodgood, Lomax, and Perney, 2003). Their findings also show that teacher guidance on finger pointing and opportunities to engage in different types of writing provide support in beginning reading development. The implications of this study reflect the significance of teachers’ instructional moves as they relate to reading development.

By implementing classroom instruction that focuses on beginning reading components, such as alphabet knowledge, phoneme awareness, and concepts about print, students have the opportunity to engage in specific lessons that serve as the building blocks for beginning reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009). According to Fountas and Pinnell (2009), students’ reading experiences must comprise an articulated cohesive system of language and literacy experiences. This system can provide students with a rich literacy foundation in beginning their reading experiences.

**Instructional Planning for Reading Instruction**

Instructional planning for reading serves as the foundation for teaching at a level that supports students in developing as readers. When teachers can engage in instructional planning that is meaningful and grounded in understanding content, they can deliver reading instruction in a rigorous manner. Mumba, Chabalengula, Moore, and Hunter (2007) contend that instructional
planning has become recognized as an essential component to effective teaching, and that it provides. Mumba, Chabalengula, Moore & Hunter (2007) further contend that instructional planning provides teachers with a road map for delivering instruction. Specifically, instructional planning fosters an environment of reflection on and the delivery of the content, as well as the instructional tasks that support students in developing proficiency. Recognizing this, beginning teachers must be supported through the process of instructional planning and must have the opportunity to engage in learning experiences that support the development of varied knowledge of reading content.

The Role of Teacher Knowledge in Instructional Decisions

Students’ reading proficiency is influenced by teachers’ ability to provide exemplary reading instruction (Allington, 2002). When teachers have diverse knowledge of the reading process, they can translate this knowledge into instructional practices that are specific to the needs of the students. Griffith, Bauml, and Barksdale (2015) contend that effective reading teachers need pedagogical content knowledge to differentiate their decision making as they work with reading. Griffith, Bauml, Barksdale (2015) further argue that reading requires a complex set of skills and strategies that must be directly taught, consistently modeled, and practiced often and within authentic reading experiences.

Griffith, Bauml, and Barksdale (2015) found that teachers’ in-the-moment decisions varied depending on the instructional context, and that teachers drew upon their diverse knowledge of reading to make these decisions. Griffith, Bauml, and Barksdale (2015) concluded that the implications of the study are that beginning teachers who are learning to work with young readers must understand how to make in-the-moment instructional decisions in various contexts of
teaching reading. In addition, the study implies that these teachers must develop a repertoire of pedagogical content knowledge that is grounded in a strong knowledge of reading (Griffith, Bauml, & Barksdale, 2015). Conclusively, Griffith, Bauml, and Barksdale (2015) explain that to become successful and effective, teachers must acquire knowledge and understanding of reading coupled with knowledge of the pedagogy of reading instruction. In addition, they must understand reading standards and how to use them as a framework for setting high expectations for students and flexible classroom instruction.

**Pedagogical Content Knowledge and Diverse Learners**

Effective classroom instruction in literacy can create learning experiences that support academic success for students. At the foundation of this is insuring that teachers gain the pedagogical content knowledge they need to implement instructional practices that align with meeting the diverse needs of students. According to Shulman (1987), teaching begins with a teacher’s understanding of what is to be learned and how it is to be taught. Teachers must have a depth of understanding of the content and transform content knowledge into forms that are pedagogically powerful and yet adaptive to make ideas accessible to different learners (Shulman, 1987).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pedagogical Content Knowledge Framework</th>
<th>Alignment with Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners</th>
<th>Benefits for Diverse Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of content</td>
<td>• Teachers are able to bridge what they are teaching with how it is being taught.</td>
<td>• Teachers are knowledgeable of reading content and deliver reading instruction clearly with instructional goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Shulman (1987) contends that pedagogical content knowledge is the intersection of content and pedagogy.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of student’s understandings</td>
<td>• Teachers’ instructional practices for reading</td>
<td>• Students are taught specific lessons on beginning reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

43
- The teaching process requires teachers to be able to transform their knowledge of subject matter for the purpose of teaching (Shulman, 1986).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge of instructional strategies</th>
<th>are differentiated in a manner that supports meeting learners’ needs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert teachers possess a rich body of knowledge, including knowledge of curriculum and content (Shulman, 1987).</td>
<td>Teachers utilize a variety of instructional practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shulman (1987) explains that preparation requires examining and critically interpreting [content] in a manner that supports understanding of the subject matter while understanding what is to be learned [by the students] and what is to be taught (Shulman, 1987).</td>
<td>Teachers connect reading content by using the most memorable examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have developed knowledge of the intricacies and cumulative processes of reading.</td>
<td>Increased proficiency in reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers understand content and know how to translate it into instructional practices.</td>
<td>Teachers are able to make instructional decisions flexibly in response to students’ performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are able to explain content in a manner that supports the developmental nature of reading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 1: PCK and Diverse Learners)

Having a deepened understanding of reading and reading strategies is particularly important to meet students’ different needs. Fitzharris, Jones, and Crawford (2008) argue that understanding what teachers know and how they implement classroom instruction is necessary to
ensure that there are professionals in every classroom meeting these needs. Based on their research, Fitzharris, Jones, and Crawford (2008) conclude that educators need to utilize reflective tools to assess teachers’ levels of proficiency in reading and determine areas of need. Moreover, Fitzharris, Jones, and Crawford state that teachers need ongoing learning opportunities to enhance professional growth that support their understanding of the complexities of reading. Grossman (1990) explains that as we prepare teachers to work in schools, we must consider both the content knowledge they bring with them to their professional preparation and the pedagogical content knowledge they will need for teaching. Grossman (1990) further explained that teachers need explicit knowledge about the purposes and strategies involved in teaching a particular subject matter, as well as knowledge about how students learn the content. Recognizing this, beginning teachers need to have an opportunity during their preservice experiences to gain knowledge of reading and how to convey reading content in a manner that supports students, who enter today’s classrooms with diverse academic needs. According to Harvey (2013), effective teachers of literacy have a deep understanding of the complexities and cumulative processes of reading. In addition, they understand the developmental nature of literacy learning (Harvey, 2013).

Throughout the last few years, teaching reading has evolved, and approaches to reading instruction have been developed to increase depth of reading proficiency for students (Mather, Bos, & Babur 2001; Bainbridge & Macy, 2008; Kosnik & Beck, 2008; Lyon & Weiser, 2009; Jansen & Erikson, 2013). These changes call for teaching in a responsive manner that integrates knowledge of teaching reading with recognizing the knowledge that the students bring to the classroom. Lilly-Compton (2008) argues that to meet the unique academic needs of each student, it is important that teachers value, recognize, and capitalize on the differences that each child brings. Taking this into consideration, beginning teachers need the opportunity, prior to
professional practice, to develop an understanding of how to recognize and value these differences and how to teach reading responsively. Baker (2007) explains that providing preservice teachers with technical information to support diverse readers within their own classrooms can increase children’s reading success. Hence, the educational experiences that beginning teachers receive prior to professional practice are essential to understanding how to support diverse learners and teaching in a manner that is responsive to students’ needs. In addition, these educational experiences offer opportunities for beginning teachers to delve further into understanding teaching reading and the knowledge needed to support different learners.

Reading Standards

One of the most significant aspects of teaching reading involves understanding the reading standards that guide the instruction. When beginning teachers transition into professional practice, they must be knowledgeable of the process of reading and the standards that ground the academic experience. Strickland, Snow, Griffin, Burns, and McNamara (2002) contend that teachers need to know where the standards are found, what they mean, and how to apply them in the context of instruction. Furthermore, it is important for beginning teachers to understand how to align instruction with reading standards.

One of the challenges that beginning teachers may face as they transition into professional practice is understanding reading standards and how to transfer them into daily instructional practices. According to Peery (2013), at the elementary level curriculum standards are separated into various subsections, which include Reading Literature, Reading Informational, and Reading Foundational Skills. Collectively, the Common Core State Standards provide a framework for
instructional practices in reading, but significant to this is teachers translating their knowledge of these standards into their knowledge of reading development.

As classroom instruction becoming increasingly rigorous, it is important that beginning teachers understand reading content to skillfully integrate reading standards with instruction. Preservice teachers must have the opportunity to engage with the standards and explore how to translate them into instruction prior to beginning their professional practice. Recognizing this, Luft and Zhang (2014) recommend that new teachers be given sufficient time to become acquainted with reading standards and apply them to their practice as teacher candidates before being inducted into the profession. Luft and Zhang (2014) further indicate that a lack of pedagogical content knowledge and content knowledge can potentially affect beginning teachers’ competence in the delivery of the instruction and application of the standards. Luft and Zhang (2014) further posited that it is necessary to make special efforts to enhance beginning teachers’ content knowledge by providing support for developing the content that they may lack and deepening content knowledge for teaching reading (Luft & Zhang, 2014). Supporting beginning teachers in developing this knowledge creates a space for them to understand all learners.

Summary

This literature review explored the educational literature the role of teacher preparation and beginning teaching as it relates to the shifts occurring in reading instruction. In addition, it investigated the role of equipping beginning teachers during preservice with specialized knowledge for teaching reading.

At the foundation of effective classroom instruction is ensuring that beginning teachers are equipped during their teacher preparation programs to implement instructional practices that align
with diverse reading instruction. With increased concern about the number of children who are unable to read with grade-level proficiency, it is important that teachers begin professional practice prepared with the knowledge needed to meet students’ varied needs. This requires academic experiences at the institutional level that support understanding the complexity of reading and the best means of implementing best practices for teaching reading. To this end, Kosnik and Beck (2008) recommend that teacher preparation programs be more selective about curriculum courses in reading, and consider more deeply the pedagogical practices that are used in coursework. Kosnik and Beck (2008) recommend that instructors share expertise to develop consistency across reading courses. By doing this, instructors can engage preservice students in academic experiences that broaden their knowledge of teaching reading.

Several overarching themes emerge from the reviewed literature. First, teacher preparation for reading instruction is complex and requires a connection between coursework, content knowledge, and current expectations in today’s classrooms. The second theme is the need for a deepened understanding of the complexities of reading. Third, teachers’ knowledge of reading serves as the foundation for instructional decisions and meeting the diverse needs of students.

In conclusion, the literature implies that developing a deepened knowledge of reading practices during preservice equips beginning teachers to teach reading to elementary students. At the foundation of implementing this type of reading instruction are preservice experiences that connect content knowledge to practical approaches for teaching reading. Developing this type of knowledge base begins with teacher preparation programs examining current practices and redesigning them to align with the paradigm shifts occurring in reading. According to the International Association of Reading (2007), effective preparation of teachers is essential to achieving the national aspirations of improving reading instruction. This is driven by merging
theoretical understanding with the realities of professional practice. Hooks (1994) indicates that to educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. Engaged pedagogy does not simply empower but is also a place where teachers can grow professionally. By preparing and equipping beginning teachers to implement instructional practices that align with the paradigm shifts occurring in reading instruction, they are better equipped to teach reading. This type of preparation provides a foundation for effective teaching and classroom instruction that engages all learners.
Chapter 3- Qualitative Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology and research design used in this research study. The research design provided a framework that guided the study and described the application of the procedures involved in exploring the research problem. The research design also served as the connection between the research question and understandings that emerged through the interpretation of the phenomena being explored. By analyzing the participants’ responses, insight was gained into the organization’s real-life activity, which will have an impact on existing practices within the organization (Yin, 2008).

A case study methodology was used to explore beginning teachers’ experiences as they transitioned into professional practice. A case study design was best suited for this study, because it provided insight into teaching reading through the lens of beginning teachers’ experiences with implementing reading instruction in an elementary class. In addition, this methodology yielded insight into the lived experiences of beginning teachers through the participant’s perspectives on their daily work as elementary teachers.

Data for this case study involved semi structured interviews that examined the participants’ perspectives and developed meaning through their responses. According to Yin (2008), a case study is grounded in understanding how and why things happen through an investigation of the realities of what is occurring. Yin (2008) further posited that a case study focuses on a particular issue, feature, or unit of analysis that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2008). Considering the framework for a case study research design, the perspectives of beginning teachers were examined, and an understanding of their experiences was gained. Furthermore, themes were derived that emerged from the research questions. The case study framework was useful to illuminate hidden issues that might exist for
beginning teachers. It provided a space for examining data within a specific set of boundaries. Specifically, the case study included four participants in their first to third year of professional practice. These participants were teachers’ within a district in North Carolina. Furthermore, they were graduates of a university and licensed to teach in North Carolina. They were recruited through an email outlining the context of the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in conjunction with other forms of data collection. This study explored three research questions:

- What are the challenges and needs of beginning teachers as they begin to teach reading?
- What are the experiences of teachers across their first few years as they begin to teach reading?
- What do you believe beginning teachers need to know for reading instruction in the elementary classroom?

These questions were designed to gain insights on beginning teachers’ experiences with reading instruction. The data collected provided implications for strengthening teaching reading as well as determining how school districts and beginning teacher organizations can further support beginning teachers. According to Phelps and Schillings (2004), teachers need usable knowledge that is varied in context, interactions, and practice to define the work of teaching reading. Similarly, Clark, Jones, Reutzel, and Andreasen (2013) contend that it takes time for beginning teachers to develop their skill, and that more time engaging with educators gaining feedback in a situated context encourages greater learning and growth in these teachers. Furthermore, Grossman et al. (2000) and Maloch et al. (2003) argue that beginning teachers need help in bridging theory and practice. Taking this into consideration, factors such as developing a cohesive knowledge base for teaching reading and supporting the transition between preservice and professional experiences are key to supporting rigorous reading instruction.
Research Paradigm

Educational research contributes to the transformation of educational practices, which provides the knowledge needed to evoke change. As the landscape of education and educational research continues to evolve, it is important to evaluate and address problems of practice that create opportunity for change. The knowledge that is developed from research leads to a deepened understanding of the area being explored and contributes to extending the field’s knowledge base, which in turn leads to more questions, explanations, or confirmations concerning areas being explored.

The constructivism paradigm served as the basis for the present study. Its use was well suited to this research because it is based upon the notion that reality is constructed in the mind of the individual, and that people create their own social realities. This idea is in line with this study, since it explored the participants’ views of their reality. According to Ponterotto (2005), in this paradigm meaning is hidden and must be brought to the surface through deep reflection. This reflection occurs through the interactive researcher-participant dialogue that takes place during interviews (Ponterotto, 2005). The meaning that emerges through reflection is vital to fully understanding the participants’ reality. Through participant interviews and interactions, the focus of this research was to understand how beginning teachers translate preservice experiences into professional practice, and what knowledge they identify as being needed to teach reading effectively. By utilizing the constructivism framework to examine beginning teaching experiences, new understanding was gained regarding the participants’ experiences as they relate to literacy instruction. This provided rich insights into the realities of being a beginning teacher and how these teachers’ previous experiences connect with professional practice.
Using the constructivist paradigm to ground the research, understanding emerged through interviews that reflected what it meant to be a beginning teacher implementing instructional practices in line with the demands of reading standards. The social aspect of the constructivist paradigm aligned with this study in that the participants provided insight into their experiences and their point of view regarding the knowledge needed to provide effective reading instruction. According to Ponterotto (2005), the goal of the constructivist paradigm is to understand experiences from the perspective of those who live it from day to day (129). This paradigm was well suited to this study because the researcher gained deeper understanding through dialogue with the participants. The insights gained from the study created a space that led to reflection on reading instruction and a deepened understanding of the experiences of beginning teaching.

Research Design

Qualitative research entails extracting meaning through discovery and understanding. In a qualitative research study, meaning and discovery occur through interactions that yield thick descriptions, which allow the researcher to identify emerging themes. Campbell (2014) states:

A researcher that selects a qualitative research method collects open-ended, emerging data that is then used to develop themes. This method allows for the study to be exploratory in nature. Some of the characteristics of qualitative research include taking place in a natural setting, using multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic, emerging data rather than prefigured data, and being fundamentally interpretive.

A qualitative research design was appropriate for this study since it allowed the researcher to explore beginning teachers’ experiences and create a space for their voices to be heard. In addition, the qualitative research framework provided an interpretative approach that allowed the researcher to discover realities from the participants’ perspectives and to identify meaning and themes from their responses. According to Creswell (2013), we conduct qualitative research to
develop a deepened understanding of a complex phenomenon and learn about the problem from the participants’ perspectives and to engage in best practices to obtain data to inform interpretation.

In this doctoral study, a qualitative research design supported the researcher in developing a complex understanding of the phenomenon through multiple perspectives and interactions. Understanding these multiple perspectives and layers was vital to fully gaining insights into the case. Trainor and Graue (2014) posit that qualitative research methods are useful in the examination of processes and phenomena where the perspectives of multiple stakeholders are central to one’s understanding and practice. Furthermore, Jones and Steen (2013) contend that qualitative research is a potent method used by researchers to gain insight and understanding regarding the thoughts, feelings, views, and experiences of participants. The narrative data that is gained through interviews and observations provide rich and deep descriptions that act as a guide to conduct further research or offer different views and considerations needed to transform existing practices (Jones & Steen, 2013). In the present study, the collected data revealed underlying perspectives that beginning teachers have, and provided the opportunity to reflect on the development of a professional development plan that supports these teachers’ specific needs.

**Research Tradition**

The use of case study methodology in this doctoral thesis allowed the researcher to explore and understand teaching reading through the lens of the beginning teachers’ experiences in an elementary class. This was accomplished through converging data to gain insight into the overall case. This research design was used to explore the research question of what beginning teachers need to know to teach reading in the elementary classroom.
The foundation of the case study methodology is in the works of Stake, Merriam, and Yin: Stake explores the case study from the perspective of the role of the researcher as an interpreter; Merriam examines it from the perspective of gaining understanding of a situation; and Yin provides a comprehensive and systematic outline for the design and execution of a case study (Brown, 2008). Thus, their work provides diverse approaches to implementing a case study design (Yazan, 2015).

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<th>Case Study Theorist</th>
<th>Merriam</th>
<th>Stake</th>
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<td><strong>Yin</strong></td>
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<td>• According to Yin, a case study strategy has five components: the study’s questions; its propositions, which reflect on a theoretical issue; its unit(s) of analysis (the event, entity, or individuals noted in the research questions); the logic linking the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings (Brown, 2008).</td>
<td>• Merriam states that a case study design is a way to gain an understanding of the situation, where the process of inquiry rather than the outcome of the research is of interest to the investigator (Brown, 2008). • Merriam defines the main characteristic of case study research as delimiting the object of study: the case (Brown, 2008).</td>
<td>• Stake (1995) argues that the most important role of the case study researcher is that of interpreter. • His vision of this role includes being a builder of a clearer view of the phenomenon through explanation and descriptions (Brown, 2008). • The researcher is ever reflective (Brown, 2008).</td>
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<td>• Case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life context or setting (Creswell, 2014).</td>
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The works of Merriam and Stake served as the foundation for the research tradition in this study. Brown (2008) contends that Merriam’s perspective on case study design provides a means to gain an understanding of the situation through the process of inquiry rather than outcome. The
process of inquiry was pertinent to this doctoral study, because it provided opportunity for the researcher to seek answers and develop an understanding of the case. Merriam’s and Stake’s conceptualization of case study research created a space for the present thesis to investigate what beginning teachers need to know to teach reading well through inquiry, and then in turn use this inquiry to examine and interpret the meaning of the participants’ responses.

Using Merriam’s and Stake’s conceptualization of case study provided a framework that yielded a thick description of beginning teaching and bridged what was already known about teaching reading with new insights. In addition, the rigor involved in this case study maximized the potential for in-depth insight while supporting the trustworthiness of the conducted research.

Participants

Engaging participants as a part of the research process provided a significant opportunity for the researcher to gain insight while creating a space for the participants’ voices to be heard. With today’s changing landscape in education, teachers’ professional experiences can be transformed by giving them a voice, particularly beginning teachers, and then in turn providing stakeholders with insights on their professional needs. By engaging with the participants through interviews, the researcher gained a clearer perspective of the lived experiences of a beginning teacher.

For this doctoral thesis, the participants included four licensed elementary teachers in their first to third year of teaching. The participants were graduates from teacher education programs from diverse educational institutions. Lastly, they were employees of a school system in North Carolina. This sample size provided the researcher with a variety of responses that served to
broaden the level of understanding and interpretation. Each participant met the following criteria to be considered for the study:

- The participant was a licensed beginning teacher;
- The participant was an elementary teacher of kindergarten, first, or second grade; and
- The participant was teaching reading.

**Recruitment and Access**

The participants for this study were recruited in a school district in North Carolina. This required soliciting participation through email, and followed the following outlined protocol:

- An email was sent to communicate the study to potential participants. This email included the goals and plan of the study, as well as how the results could be beneficial in supporting building teacher capacity for teaching reading.
- After making initial contact, study-specific letters were sent to the potential participants outlining the details of the study.
- Upon agreement to participate in the study, participants were provided with consent forms, which detailed information concerning the study.

The recruitment procedures using electronic media followed the Institutional Review Board guidelines and contained proper notification of confidentiality.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

One of the most significant aspects of the research design is identifying the protection of the participants in the study. For this doctoral thesis, the protection of the participants began with following the guidelines outlined by the Institutional Review Board. To ensure the utmost anonymity, the participants and organizations are referred to by pseudonyms. Furthermore, the participants completed a consent form and were read a confidentiality statement that indicated that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. All
information for the study was kept confidential. The gathered data was analyzed in a collective manner to further support confidentiality.

One way to address the anonymity of the participants’ interview responses, particularly open-ended responses, was to represent them in a more collective manner. A significant aspect of this was respecting confidentiality and ensuring that information or data collected about individuals was anonymous and could not be traced back to the participant by other parties (The British Psychological Society, 2010).

Another way anonymity was ensured was by presenting the analysis of results in themes around the participants’ responses. This supported the dissemination of information in an anonymous manner that integrated responses in a collective manner. McDonnell, Jones, and Read (2000) explain that since the purpose of data is not to portray any single case, it is important to analyze data around key topics and themes that emerge to preserve anonymity and confidentiality. By analyzing the data and presenting the findings in this manner, the researcher protected the anonymity of all involved in the study. Integrating responses into themes that emerged from the data safeguarded participants’ individual responses and provided a broader measure to ensure confidentiality (Taylor, Bogdan, & Devault 2015).

To carry out this doctoral study, an Institutional Review Board application was submitted that detailed the data collection and analysis methods as well as the framework for participant confidentiality. This application included documentation that reflected the consent forms disseminated to the participants. In addition, the participants were read a confidentiality statement that indicated that their participation was voluntary and that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time.
Data Collection

Data collection in the case study methodology involves obtaining evidence from multiple sources. These sources include documents, interviews, and observations, and are used in a converged manner, with the evidence being complementary and adding to the richness of the data. Each piece of data contributes to the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon being explored (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The data collection method in the present study included each participant engaging in a one-hour interview. The use of interviews was well suited for this doctoral thesis, because the interview format offered some guidance in the questioning but also allowed for elaboration in participant responses. Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008) contend that the flexibility of the semi-structured format creates opportunity for discovery and elaboration that may be pertinent to the study. Through carefully crafted interview questions, the participants had the opportunity to describe their experiences by reflecting on their thoughts and memories regarding their transition from preservice into professional practice.

The interviews were conducted virtually utilizing video conferencing. The researcher recorded the interview sessions and used field notes to document responses and observations. The audio from the interviews was then transcribed using the Dragon Dictation application. The transcribed interviews and field notes were compiled collectively and analyzed to identify themes that emerged from the participants’ responses. Participants were emailed copies of the transcripts for verification. Smith (2010) contends that the analysis of participants’ personal accounts provides detailed data and offers opportunity for examination of personal lived experiences. The data collected through the interviews offers insight into the participants’ experiences as beginning teachers implementing reading instruction. Furthermore, the data conveys to stakeholders the
experiences of beginning teachers as they transition into professional practice. The participants’ responses provided meaningful data that can be grouped for analysis and that can capture their different perspectives while illuminating different themes (Creswell, 2014).

To fully understand the participants’ perspectives, the data from the interviews was converged with artifacts, analytic memos, and research journaling. According to Jack and Baxter (2008), the use of multiple data sources ensures that the phenomenon is not explored through a single lens, but rather a variety of lenses. The authors further posit that this allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood. As a participatory researcher, the interviewer gained insights into beginning teachers’ experiences by understanding their experiences with teaching reading and then reflecting and developing a means for action. By engaging in research with a focus on producing useful and sound data along with uncovering patterns, a richness was added to the study (Jack & Baxter, 2008).

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<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
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<td>1. What are the challenges and needs of beginning teachers as they begin to teach reading?</td>
<td>Transcripts of interviews, researcher memos, journaling, artifacts</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What are the experiences of teachers across their first three years as they begin to teach reading?</td>
<td>Transcript of interviews, researcher memos, journaling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What do we believe beginning teachers need to know for reading instruction in the elementary classroom?</td>
<td>Transcript of interviews, researcher memos, journaling, artifacts</td>
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Baxter and Jack (2008) state that in a case study, the data collected from multiple sources is converged, thus providing one piece of the puzzle in understanding the phenomenon. Baxter and Jack (2008) further posit that each piece contributes to the researcher’s understanding, which adds
strength to the findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The data will be thickly presented by using interviews, researcher memos, artifacts, and journaling to provide clear insight into the participants experiences.

Data Storage

Maintaining confidentiality is vital to all aspects of a research study. Ensuring that participants’ responses are securely shielded from accessibility protects their anonymity and confidentiality. The American Psychological Association (2007) states that it is important to develop a plan to ensure that materials are kept securely. This plan should include safe locations to protect paper records, as well as controlling access to confidential data (American Psychological Association, 2007).

Confidentiality

To ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity, all data collected in this doctoral study was kept in a secured cabinet. The documents stored in this cabinet included all hard copies of interview notes and transcribed interviews. All audio recordings were destroyed at the completion of the study. The participants’ identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms for the person, and their organizations were made unidentifiable. Files stored electronically were password protected and only accessed by the researcher. At the conclusion of the study, all files saved electronically were destroyed by deletion. The computer used for these electronic files was also password protected to ensure inaccessibility. Only the researcher had access to participant responses and data collected for this doctoral thesis. Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, and Davidson (2002) explain that ethical considerations are paramount in all research from its design to conclusion. Recognizing this, it is important that all data be carefully maintained to ensure that confidentiality and privacy are not compromised.
Data Analysis

Analyzing data in case study research involves examining, categorizing, tabulating, and recombining evidence to determine findings (Yin, 2003). According to Creswell (2014), data analysis must be comprehensive, attend to all the evidence, and exhaustively cover key research questions. In this doctoral thesis, the analysis began with the researcher transcribing the interview recordings. Using the Dragon Dictation software, the participant responses were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to identify emerging themes. After identifying these patterns, the researcher categorized the evidence by creating data displays to examine the data, and by tabulating the frequency of the different events and putting the information into chronological order (Yin, 2003).

A part of completing an analysis is utilizing analytic strategies that ensure that the data has been thoroughly explored. This requires showing that all the evidence has been attended to and that all interpretations use as much evidence as possible (Yin, 2013). Moving beyond initial analysis, this doctoral study engaged the following dominant techniques:

- Pattern matching, where the researcher compares an empirically based pattern with a predicted one.
- Explanation building, where the researcher analyzes the data by building an explanation about the case and identifying themes.

By using descriptive coding to analyze the data, themes emerged that yielded insight into the participants’ experiences and provided opportunity for the researcher to share the experiences of beginning teachers more explicitly with readers. According to Bowen (2009):

Thematic analysis is a form of pattern recognition within the data, with emerging themes becoming the categories for analysis. The process involves a careful, more focused rereading and review of the data. The reviewer takes a closer look at the selected data and performs coding and category construction, based on the data’s characteristics, to uncover themes pertinent to a phenomenon. Predefined codes may be used in the study. The codes
used in interview transcripts, for example, may be applied to the content of documents. Codes and the themes they generate serve to integrate data gathered by different methods. In this study, the researcher utilized the computer software NVIVO to uncover connections and themes in the data. The analysis of the participants’ responses connected the data in a manner that provided a rich understanding of the phenomenon while aligning the existing themes. Zucker (2009) contends that researchers using a constructivist paradigm, such as case study research, utilize data to attempt to reconstruct participants’ understanding of the social world. In the present study, the use of NVIVO provided insights into the participants’ realities by connecting the themes that emerged from the data. Yin (2002) states that case studies seek to understand social phenomena by allowing the researcher to examine characteristics of real life events. By analyzing the participants’ responses in this study, the data generated themes that captured the realities of beginning teachers. A significant part of this was utilizing analytic strategies that ensured that the data was thoroughly explored. This required ensuring that all the evidence was attended to and that all interpretations utilized as much evidence as possible (Yin, 2012).

The use of multiple sources of evidence serves as a means of capturing the distinctive perspectives of the participants in a case study (Yin, 2013). By using different sources, evidence is converged in a manner that is complementary and adds to the richness of the data. Each source contributes to the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon being explored (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In this doctoral thesis, the researcher utilized interviews along with researcher field notes and artifacts as a means of collecting data from multiple sources. By converging these different forms of evidence, the researcher was able to add strength to the findings and promote a greater understanding of the case (Baxter & Jack, 2008).
Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is grounded in giving privilege to the perspectives participants and in illuminating the meaning and context of those being studied (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). Qualitative data provides an opportunity to gain richer insights through discovery of the participants’ realities. At the foundation of qualitative research is engaging participants, and developing and providing a space for these participants to be open about their experiences. Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, and Davidson (2002) indicate that the criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research includes ensuring good research practice and methodological rigor as well as the trustworthiness of interpretations being made. Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, and Davidson (2002) further posit that central to the quality of qualitative research is how authentically the participants’ perspectives are reflected and how they fit within the social context from which they were derived (Fossey et al., 2002).

To ensure trustworthiness in this doctoral study, the researcher provided the participants with an opportunity to review the interview transcripts for accuracy in responses. According to Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, and Davidson (2002):

The quality of qualitative research and standards for ethics in qualitative research are interconnected, which is central to whether the subjective meaning, actions and social context of those being researched is illuminated and represented faithfully. The principles of good practice in the conduct of qualitative research and the trustworthiness of the interpretation of information gathered are both essential to judgments about its quality.

Sound qualitative research utilizes practices that support validity of the study. Creswell (2016) explains that validity is the outcome goal of research and is based on trustworthiness and external reviews. To maintain the validity of the present study, the researcher shared the research findings with the participants for feedback and validation of the interpretation of the data (Goldblatt, Karnieli- Miller, &Neumann, 2011). By using this member check, the researcher was
able to ensure credibility of the study and accurately reflect the participants’ responses. This ensured that the study was conducted in a manner that offered confidence in the research findings, with quality and validity (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). The researcher also sought to eliminate any potential threat to the internal validity by controlling any variables that might compromise it. According to Guba (1981), the qualitative researcher should implement a model to assess the trustworthiness of data when considering the case study approach. Guba (1981) developed a model of trustworthiness that reflects credibility and proposes four criteria of trustworthiness:

- Truth value
- Applicability
- Consistency
- Neutrality

In alignment with Guba’s model of trustworthiness, the present study follows a framework that ensures that the collected data is credible and grounded in evidence-based conclusions. Regarding the truth value, the study was evaluated by peers to assess the truthfulness of the data (Mcgloin, 2008). Applicability was ensured through a sample size that was reflective of the makeup of the organization being studied (Mcgloin, 2008). Consistency of the data will be ensured through assessing data and data collection methods strengthened the consistency of the data. Lastly, neutrality will be ensured in this study through triangulation and reflexivity (Mcgloin, 2008). Through triangulating of the data, every effort was made to contain any potential bias. By designing a methodology that was rigorous and encouraged reflection and peer examination of the data, the research can be carried out in a manner that is credible and trustworthy (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

By conducting this doctoral study, rich insights were gained into the realities of being a beginning teacher, and into how beginning teachers’ previous experiences connect to professional
practice. Feiman and Nemser (2001) contend that teachers need to know subject matter, students, curriculum, and pedagogy in a manner that is usable for practice and flexible to understanding and skills. By analyzing the participants’ responses and identifying themes, insights will be gained into the organization’s real-life activity. These insights have the potential to transform existing practices within the organization (Yin, 2008).
Chapter 4

Report of Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify and explore the challenges that elementary teachers encounter as they start their professional careers in a school district in North Carolina. The school district examined in this study has implemented professional support through instructional facilitators and provides ongoing support for beginning teachers, professional development, and accountability for the implementation of the instructional practices that align with the Common Core State Standards. The school district has also implemented beginning teaching support programs through human resources and through its elementary education department. Through these programs, teachers are provided with a trained site-based mentor who offers support. In addition, the school district works with two outside agencies that also provide beginning teacher support.

Data was collected using interviews with five beginning teachers. Although the interviews followed a semi-structured format, participants had the opportunity to share their perspectives. The researcher delved further into participants’ responses through probing questions to gain further insights. The goal of the data collection was to identify the challenges that beginning teachers face in implementing reading instruction, and to understand their experiences. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

- What are the challenges and needs of beginning teachers as they begin to teach reading?
- What are the experiences of teachers within their first few years as they begin to teach reading?
- What do you believe beginning teachers need to know regarding reading instruction in the elementary classroom?

This case study reflected the perspectives of five participants. All participants voluntarily participated and engaged in semi-structured interviews. All participants, with the exception of one
also participated in observations of reading instruction. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and all participants were provided with a copy of the transcribed interview to review for accuracy. Every participant involved in the study met the following criteria:

- beginning teacher within the first three years of professional practice;
- elementary teacher of reading; and
- licensed to teach in North Carolina.

This chapter is divided into two sections: participants’ narrative and thematic analysis. First, an introduction presents the participants’ narrative. The thematic analysis then reflects the themes that emerged from the participants' collective responses. The primary focus for the data analysis was to identify themes that emerged in the responses with regard to their instructional practices for reading, along with converging this data with observations.

**Participants**

**Ariana**

Ariana (participant pseudonym) was a fifth-grade teacher in the second year of her career. She was working in a new grade level this year and had taught the fourth grade during her first year. Ariana expressed that the best part of teaching was the relationships she established with the children. She stated, “It’s so great to see the different types of personalities that they have. And just being able to talk to them almost at the adult level and knowing that they’ll understand me.” Ariana explained that she became interested in teaching in high school and based on her experience doing an observation of an elementary class. She explained:

There was one instance where we took this trip to an elementary school. We were doing a bunch of observations and working with different students. There was this one kid and he was taking a test and he was bubbling in the answers wrong. I was trying to make sure that he was doing the right work. He started crying and I calmed him down and talked him through how to fix it. The teacher that was with at the time was like wow I have never seen kids your age so good with kids.
With the revelation that she liked helping and working with kids, Ariana decided that she wanted to become a teacher.

In her interview, Ariana focused on initiatives being implemented in the school district, online resources, and professional support related to teaching reading. She stated, “our emphasis for the entire school has been gradual release,” which means “modeling what you want the kids to do [in reading] and then having them practice.” She also stated that “working in small groups and working one on one” is where she feels most effective; however, she felt that meeting the needs of all students was challenging. Furthermore, Ariana expressed that her preservice coursework had partially helped her in preparation for professional practice. She indicated that “not everything I learned in college was helpful and I wished I could have gotten more instruction or a warning on how much paperwork […] has to be done [for reading instruction].” As Ariana transitioned into the profession, her experiences with reading instruction were developed through her work with the other teachers of the same grade. She also relied on the pacing guides that are set up online as an instructional tool. Her grade-level team met weekly and one teacher was responsible for creating the lesson plans that the team utilizes.

Amber

Amber was a second-grade teacher in her first year of teaching. She was a lateral entry teacher who did not enter the teaching profession through the traditional path. Being a lateral entry teacher means taking an alternate route for qualified professionals working outside of the teacher education field to obtain an education degree to obtain a teaching position. Amber was currently enrolled in coursework for teacher education. She expressed that the best part of teaching was the support she was receiving and “being on a supportive team.” Amber stated that she felt lucky to have two mentors. One of them was a site-based mentor provided through the school district and
a second-grade teacher whose classroom was adjacent to hers. The other was provided through an outside organization from a local university that offered support to beginning teachers. Amber explained: “the mentor from the university comes once a week and they do a lot of communicating about how she can get better.” Prior to becoming a teacher, Amber graduated from college with a degree in journalism. Upon graduation, finding work was difficult so she began working as a teacher assistant.

In her interview, Amber focused on instructional practices, instructional support, and the challenges of being a lateral entry teacher with regard to teaching reading. She indicated that she taught whole-group and small-group reading lessons daily and used the online resources that the district provides. Furthermore, she explained that she was also in contact with the lead teacher after school hours as she prepared her reading lessons. Amber’s class received instructional reading support daily for an hour. The reading support provided small-group instruction to the students. However, Amber indicated that she did not feel proficient in teaching in any area of reading “At times it can be overwhelming.” She explained that “understanding what is expected of the students” was the most difficult aspect of implementing reading instruction. Moreover, she expressed that her teaching needs included a “real in-depth understanding of teaching of reading” and how to do guided reading correctly.

Jayla

Jayla was a first-year teacher, and taught the second grade. She became interested in teaching when she was a young child, and said that since then she had “always wanted to be a teacher.” She stated that she had had “really great elementary school teachers” who inspired her to become a teacher and with whom she remained in contact. Jayla indicated that the best part of teaching was “seeing the light bulb moment” for the students. She also expressed that she liked
“forming relationships with the students and getting to know the students inside and outside the classroom.”

In her interview, Jayla focused primarily on instructional practices. She indicated that she gave both whole- and small-group instruction daily. She prepared for reading instruction during grade-level planning. Jayla explained that “we [grade-level team] use the content resources page to choose which teaching points we are going to use for each unit.” Furthermore, she indicated that she was responsible for planning reading for the grade level. She made the flip charts and went over them in planning, and then sent them out so that the team was on the same page. Jayla prepared anchor charts and identified suggested mentor texts prior to the meeting. She stated “we [grade-level team] talk about how we are going to start the lesson.” Jayla prepared for the delivery of the instruction by reviewing the lesson plans the night and morning before teaching them. She wrote her teaching points on the board where they were visible to the students.

Jayla’s whole group reading instructional practices were grounded in following a gradual release of responsibility. Jayla explained that reading conferences and small-group instruction were the areas in which she was most proficient. In contrast, she felt that [modeling] think aloud was the area where she needed the most support. She explained that she “did a lot at the beginning of having them discuss and not really modeling her thinking.” To help overcome this, Jayla asked administrators for specific feedback and asked to observe other teachers. She also expressed that she “learned a lot from her mentor teacher.”

Continuing to focus on instructional practices, Jayla indicated that it would have been beneficial to know useful books to use when modeling reading strategies for students. Furthermore, it would also have been beneficial to know ways to keep data on her students related to reading. She indicated that she had tried several different methods and wanted to know different ways to
keep track of the students’ data. Moreover, Jayla said that the ongoing support that she needed was feedback “because reading is my worst subject in teaching.” Jayla stated that she received a great deal of feedback in math, because school leaders observed her in the morning during this subject, but they seldom observed her when she taught reading. Formal observations provided detailed and specific feedback that Jayla needed to continue to develop instructional practices. Jayla indicated that she also needed ongoing support “on how to grow kids that are kind of stagnant” during the middle portion of the school year. She stated that beginning teachers need to know the importance of being prepared, and that it is important to “think ahead about what you are going to ask and what you want the students to know and understand what they are capable of.” This helps you be able to better to support meeting the student’s needs.

**Kristiana**

Kristiana was a first-year teacher of exceptional children, she taught students with different disabilities. These disabilities impacted the students’ reading development. Kristiana entered the teaching profession as a second career after working in the computer technology field for many years. She explained that she became interested in teaching because of her own children and wanting to work with a schedule that aligned with their own school schedule. She stated that “teaching gives me some access to their [her kids] schedule.” Kristiana also stated that she enjoyed teaching her children throughout the years and that “teaching just felt like a natural choice.” Kristiana stated that the best part of teaching is the moments when you see them internalizing and you know they're actually learning something. She also stated another highlight of teaching is “when a student has struggled for a long time and they're finally making the desired progress that you're wanting to see.” Kristiana’s narrative was grounded in the challenges that she faced when
teaching reading to diverse students and how she utilizes instructional resources for teaching reading.

As an exceptional children’s teacher, Kristiana taught across grade levels simultaneously. Her students have Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) that outline the specific services and accommodations that they are to receive, and also detailed time requirements for the students. Kristiana indicated that she was able to meet the needs of these students by working in smaller groups and having the remaining children work on computerized tasks that reinforced reading and math skills. Kristiana utilized an intensive reading intervention program called Spire. Spire is designed for nonreaders and students who struggle with reading. Kristiana explained that it was challenging to teach reading to students from different grade levels and reading text levels. She stated “It's crazy, but okay. I have an hour and 15 minutes with them in the morning together. I do Spire for about 35 minutes with first grade and I have third grade go work on their reading skills with a game called Teach a Monster to Read on the computers.”

Kristiana explained that her college coursework related to reading instruction had not adequately prepared her to teach reading. She stated that she felt as if she was “just completing a series of tasks and she did not know why.” Kristiana said that she had not completed her practicum hours, which are hours in the field observing other teachers. The previous training for teaching that she received was in another school district in North Carolina. However, in this school district, Kristiana explained that she participated in mini-training sessions for several weeks to prepare for classroom instruction. Since beginning professional practice, Kristiana has been assigned a mentor to provide her with support. She explained that she liked having the support from her mentor. Kristiana stated that she had some reading professional development at the beginning of the year,
but she could not recall what was covered because it was before she started teaching and was not relevant yet.

Kristiana went on to explain that classroom instruction was different from coursework because of the limitations of translating her knowledge to make decisions in the moment. She also explained that she had difficulty identifying the right expectations for students’ reading abilities. Kristiana indicated that recognizing that students will learn in their own way and that you and that you cannot use instructional content to force students is important for beginning teachers to understand as they start to transition into professional practice

Carly

Carly was another first-year teacher of exceptional children, and she served second- and third-grade students. She became interested in teaching in the seventh grade when she met an exceptional children’s teacher who was also her dance teacher. This teacher taught a special needs student from Germany who did not speak English. Carly began to assist the teacher and student, and soon recognized that although the student had some deficits, he had other strengths and was able to speak three different languages. After interacting with the teacher and student, Carly decided that she would eventually go into the teaching field. She explained that the best part of teaching was “seeing the incredible growth in the students.” Carly also expressed that she had seen “incredible growth in standardized tests and classroom activities.”

In her interview, Carly’s responses focused on reading programs that provide opportunity for differentiation in reading instruction for students. Carly’s class comprised of “two nonverbal students and three verbal students.” She indicated that she prepared for instruction using a program called Read Well, which is a phonics-based program that has all the components prepared. These components include phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading fluency, and
comprehension, all of which build the foundation necessary for students to develop as readers. Carly said that she had tried three reading programs when she first started teaching, and that she did not know which one to choose. It was through trial and error that she determined that Read Well best met the needs of her verbal students. Carly stated “for nonverbal students I run guided reading groups. I have the students find letters and they make their own book based off the book that we are reading and using their sentences that are read aloud to them.”

Carly felt most proficient when providing reading instruction from the Read Well program. She indicated that the materials were included with the program and that she had adapted them to meet the needs of the students. Furthermore, she stated that “the materials and the content are there but there are a few things that would just confuse the students.” She explained that she added things and took things out to support the students’ development and understanding as readers. Carly also explained that to meet the needs of her students, she did not follow the lessons verbatim.

One of the challenges that Carly faced as a beginning teacher of reading was not knowing the depth of the programs that she was using and whether the programs would be adequate to improve the students’ proficiency. Carly indicated she has considered using other types of reading programs and wonders “what else is out there and what is the best thing for her students that is going to get them the most growth.” She also indicated the need for specialized professional development for teachers with students who have diverse learning needs. Carly stated, “I go to professional development obviously but there is not enough professional development [in reading] for teachers that are self-contained that teach us what we can do for specific content areas reading or math. I had three curriculums in there (classroom) and I went through all of them and kind of did my best judgment based off of what I saw and read online. Carly further stated, “My biggest challenge is, am I doing it right, is this what is best for those students,” To overcome the
challenge Carly identified in determining what was best for her students, she indicated that she was supported by the program specialist from the exceptional children’s department. The program specialist assisted her in understanding the different reading programs that were used in her classroom, and answered her questions.

Carly’s preservice coursework had a behavioral focus on the management of students with disabilities. Carly explained that although she was “prepared for a lot of things” she was “not prepared for reading” instruction. Carly stated that the “classes were not content driven.” Carly explained that because her coursework did not delve into how to teach reading, when she began teaching in the classroom she was unsure of what strategies to use to teach reading. Carly indicated that it would have been beneficial to know specific skills or strategies to support the implementation of reading instruction. She indicated that she went through “trial and error for a while to figure things out.” She further stated that as teachers begin professional practice, “it is important to know that [instruction and plans] do not always work the first time or the second time or the third time. It takes a while to get it figured out.”

Thematic Analysis

After reviewing and coding the interview transcripts, several themes emerged from the participants’ responses about reading instruction and preservice preparation. These themes are listed and described below.

- **Teacher Preparation for Reading Instruction is Complex and Requires Connection Between Coursework and Application:**
  
  Several of the participants mentioned the significance of the connection between teacher preparation and reading instruction. They indicated that their reading coursework focused
on theory instead of how to deliver reading instruction. This theme reflects the significance of teacher preparation and reading coursework being instrumental in providing the knowledge base to beginning teachers as they transition into professional experiences.

- **Planning for Teaching Reading:**
  Instrumental to teaching reading is planning that is grounded in best practices for reading instruction. A significant aspect of preparation for reading instruction is recognizing best practices and translating them into classroom instruction. The participants’ responses reflected areas of planning in which they were proficient and areas where they needed more support. This theme reflects the role that planning plays in reading instruction.

- **Teacher Knowledge Serves as the Foundation for Instructional Practices and Decision Making:**
  The role of teacher knowledge as the foundation for instructional practices and decision making was another theme that emerged from the participants’ responses. Several participants indicated the need for more understanding of reading instruction to be more flexible in making decisions in the moment. This theme reflects the relationship between knowledge and instructional delivery and spontaneous decisions. Furthermore, it highlights the challenges associated with being a beginning teacher and determining best practices for reading instruction.

- **Recognizing the Challenges and Needs of Beginning Teachers:**
  Beginning teachers face many challenges as they implement reading instruction. These challenges are related to instructional content, instructional delivery, and overall instructional delivery of reading instruction. The theme of instructional challenges
emerged in the participants’ responses, reflecting the diverse needs of beginning teachers and the challenges they face with instructional practices related to teaching reading.

- **Differentiated Support for Beginning Teachers:**

  The need for differentiated support was another theme that emerged from the participants’ responses. Several participants expressed the need for different support for teaching reading. This theme reflects the role of ongoing differentiated support in supporting beginning teachers in navigating reading instruction.

The themes that emerged in this study are the outcome of coding, analysis, and analytic reflection regarding the participants’ interview responses.

Tools of the Trade

Construction of a structurally sound building requires a solid foundation and the use of the right tools. These tools must be appropriate and align with the demands of the job, and should help make the job easier. Similarly, in terms of reading instruction, teacher preparation programs must provide preservice teachers with a solid foundation in reading instruction knowledge and the necessary tools to meet the demands of teaching reading in the classroom.

One of the initial themes that emerged from the study was the complexity of teacher preparation as it relates to coursework on reading instruction and application to professional practice. This preparation requires a connection between coursework and application of the content taught. The participants’ responses reflected that in some instances there is a disconnect between the content taught during preservice and the expectations of professional practice.

Jayla, a second grade teacher stated:

“It is very different going from being a student to being a teacher. I feel like we learned a lot of the pedagogy but really didn’t learn how to apply it. So I think that a lot of first year
teachers may go into it not prepared. I was lucky to student teach at the school so the transition was easy and I knew the expectations. A lot of my friends are not that lucky. I think a lot of it was more researched based and a lot more reading, while teaching reading is a lot more in the moment and you have to think on your toes. That’s different from being a student.”

Jayla’s response reflects the empathy that she felt for other beginning teachers. By stating that “a lot of my friends are not that lucky,” her words indicate that some beginning teachers that she knows have experienced the challenges of not being prepared as they transitioned into professional practice. Her words tell the story of her personal experience with preparation, and that of beginning teachers that feel unprepared and the appreciation that she felt for being able to remain at the school that she student taught in. Her response made it clear that pedagogy was the basis for her preparation for teaching reading, but there was a disconnect with instructional decisions and expectations.

From a similar perspective, Carly, an exceptional children’s teacher stated, “No, not for reading, I was prepared for a lot of things but not reading. My classes dealt with how to deal with behavior, how to collect data and different evidence-based practices. It was not content driven… It was touched on but I never had classes that went into it.” Her comment about coursework not being content driven is reflective of her teacher education program focusing on preparation for the behavioral aspect of teaching. It also indicates that the content was introduced but not delved into in a manner that provided a deepened understanding of the complexities of reading and the delivery of instruction. Carly offered the following explanation of her preservice experiences “because I am teaching reading and math and I didn’t have those classes, the expectations that I was taught was for other things…so when I got there I was like wait what am I going to do for reading. What am I going to do for math? I didn’t necessarily have strategies in my head that I could use.”
Carly’s responses highlight a gap between how to deliver reading instruction and what strategies to use to best meet students’ needs. However, Carly concluded her responses about coursework by stating, “don’t get me wrong I learned a lot.” This statement acknowledges that Carly gained some benefit from her coursework, but that what was learned did not fully support what she needed for reading instruction. This same notion also became evident when Carly asked, “How do I teach things? How do I teach the reading? How do I teach the math?” Her inner thinking about how to deliver instruction entails the need for coursework that prepares beginning teachers for implementing reading instruction.

Two of the participants, Amber and Kristiana, entered the teaching profession through nontraditional paths as lateral entry teachers. Their responses reflect how they experienced difficulties in implementing what they were taught in their coursework about reading instruction. Amber indicated that learning education content and simultaneously implementing it was challenging. When asked about her coursework and preparation, she candidly stated, “Right now it [previous coursework] isn’t helping. However, the course that I am currently taking is helping a lot because it is teaching me how to dive into your lesson plan and it provides research based skills of how to teach.” This offers insight into how coursework that aligns with professional demands is helpful to beginning teachers.

In a later response about reading instruction, Amber said, “I need to get a real in depth teaching of teaching. The ins and outs of it.” This response reflects Amber’s need to understand reading instruction. It also reflected the significance of coursework in preparing teachers for implementing reading instruction. Amber’s statement “the course that I am currently taking is helping a lot because it is teaching me how to dive into your lesson plan and it provides research
based skills of how to teach.” offers insight into how coursework that aligns with professional demands is helpful to beginning teachers.

Kristiana’s responses indicate that she also faced challenges in making connections between coursework and professional practice. She made it clear that her original background was in computer technology and that teaching was a second career. Kristiana’s responses show that the online aspect of being in a teacher education program contributed to some of her challenges in teaching reading.

When asked specifically about education coursework and how it aligned with professional expectations, Kristiana responded, “I did take coursework for it [education] but it was online coursework and it wasn’t really beneficial. I have already taken almost all of them [classes] and I don’t feel like they prepared me in anyway. I was just completing a series of tasks and it just felt like I wasn’t sure why.” Kristiana further expounded on her experience, indicating that she did not complete observation hours through her school but trained in the school district. She stated, “I think it was a two week thing [training] that they had me to do so it was like a little mini training session. That was somewhat useful because the information about what was going on in the [school] district.”

From a differing perspective, Ariana stated that the coursework aligned somewhat with her professional practice, but commented, “not everything I learned in college was helpful. I wish that I could have gotten more warning on how much paperwork I would have to do. Don’t sell me the dream, just tell me.” Ariana presented multiple perspectives, and her responses reflect that she felt somewhat prepared yet also thought that an understanding of the realities of teaching was not communicated in terms of coursework. The same day of her interview, Ariana indicated that she had “three meetings in the same day,” adding that “finding the balance is hard.” This is an example
of the realities that she felt. It was also a reflection of how college coursework must extend beyond content and delve into exposing preservice teachers to the planning and preparation that is involved in reading instruction.

Collectively, the participants’ responses reflect a disassociation between the alignment with college coursework for reading and professional practice expectations. Furthermore, their responses highlight the need for balanced coursework in reading that explores in-depth techniques to teach reading, as well as reading coursework that engages with the realities of teaching expectations. Ariana commented, “don’t sell me the dream, just tell me,” and Kristiana stated, “I was just completing a series of tasks and it just felt like I wasn’t sure why.” These responses indicate that there are gaps in preservice experiences which may be a result of preservice teachers not fully understanding the expectations of profession practice and the practical aspect of teaching reading. Recognizing this, bridging these gaps will require a deepened understanding of reading instruction and ensuring that this understanding supports instructional delivery.

The theme of teacher preparation is complex and analogous to the themes presented in the literature. In a longitudinal study examining preparation for literacy instruction, Kosnik, Beck, and Roswell (2008) found that beginning teachers believed that theoretical understandings were important, but that many of these teachers expressed that this was not thoroughly taught. In addition, these teachers did not see how theoretical understandings translated into practice and did not always recognize the links between the topics being taught. Taking this into consideration, the alignment between reading coursework and professional practice expectations is vital to preparing teachers with the foundation needed for professional practice and effective instructional delivery. Without this alignment between coursework and professional practice expectations, beginning teachers face challenges in planning and implementing instructional practices to teach reading.
The Blueprint

Constructing a building without blueprints is inconceivable, and without construction drawings there is no formal way to reflect the overall layout of the structure. Any good contractor or construction worker knows the importance of a blueprint. It provides a detailed plan that defines the specifications of the structure. Much like a blueprint, planning for reading instruction serves as the overall layout for how the teacher will implement and deliver rigorous instruction for the students. Throughout the interviews, the participants’ responses reflected the importance of planning. This theme of planning highlights the different ways that beginning teachers prepare for reading instruction.

Jayla, a first year teacher, references planning for reading instruction from the perspective of writing grade level plans. She stated:

“So we do grade-level planning. After that we come up with our teaching points. We use the content resources page to choose which teaching points we are going to use for each unit. I am planning reading now for my grade level. I make the flip charts and we go over them in planning so I have them prepared before we get there. Then I send them out so that we are all on the same page. I come ready with anchor charts they can use and mentor texts. We talk about how we are going to start the lesson. We talk about their prior knowledge of what we have already taught.”

Jayla’s responses indicate that she contributed to her grade level’s planning by preparing materials. Interestingly, Jayla later commented on how reading was her worst subject, “I need more feedback especially since reading is my worst subject in teaching.” Jayla’s comment suggests that she prepared very intently for reading instruction because of the challenges that she faces with teaching reading. Jayla also stated that teachers needed to know that “to be prepared [involves] thinking ahead about what you are going to ask and what you want students to know.”

Throughout Jayla’s classroom, there was evidence of translating planning into instructional practices. Curriculum standards were posted with lessons goals that were visible to the students.
Students gathered in a meeting area as Jayla introduced them to the reading lesson. Jayla’s marked places throughout the book that she read aloud to the class indicated that she had planned beforehand specific places where students would have the opportunity to engage with what she was reading.

Jayla’s lesson plan also reflected the prior planning that she had done for the reading lesson. For example, Jayla asked the students specific questions that encouraged the students to connect what they knew about the character to what they would be learning. This detailed lesson planning reinforced Jayla’s response that “to be prepared [involves] thinking ahead about what you are going to ask and what you want students to know.” Jayla’s response that “The night before I usually go over my lesson plans beforehand and then I get there early in the morning and do that again.” Jayla’s response demonstrates that Jayla valued the role of planning for reading instruction, despite still learning the best methods of delivering this instruction. Jayla’s responses also indicate that she did the majority of the planning for her grade level team, while other members of the team contributed minimally yet had the responsibility of delivering the same instruction.

Amber, another first year teacher, also referred to planning from the perspective of a grade level planning. She stated, “the first thing we do is look at the content resources to see what we are covering. Then the lead teacher, she paces everything out and sometimes we help her. Being that I am brand new and did not go to school for education, I depend heavily on my mentor and my lead teacher.” Amber expounded on her experiences with planning by stating that she planned at home. She stated that “me and the lead teacher text back and forth. We do meet daily Tuesday through Thursday during related arts. We plan it [reading] out and if we have questions we can ask her.” Amber’s responses indicate that her planning was supported by the lead teacher, who had a significant role in helping her with reading content. This also suggests that as a lateral entry
teacher, she needed more support with planning outside of the typical working hours. This was reflected in her comment that at home, “me and the lead teacher text back and forth.” Amber’s planning for reading instruction was evident in her lesson through a focus on questioning to support the main idea. Although Amber did not have visible lesson standards in the lesson area, the questions being asked reflected the purpose of the lesson. The students were familiar with the lesson structure and responded to questions.

When asked about planning for reading instruction, Amber stated, “The Reading Strategies book is a lifesaver as far as The Continuum of Literacy Learning. [I use that too] I have that at home. The Reading Strategies book helps a lot because it shows what you should be doing.” Amber’s reference to these resources showed that her planning was based upon using instructional resources as a tool. This response also reinforced the notion that to be prepared for reading instruction, she had to continue to plan beyond outlined time within the school day. Ariana also referred to planning from a grade level team perspective. She stated, “We refer a lot to the pacing guides that are set up online. Our team in fifth grade, we do a lot of planning. So each teacher is responsible for a subject. So I am responsible for math and there is another teacher responsible for reading. Her plans are usually very helpful. Also, I like to refer to the Lucy Calkins guides. I have to take and water down what she does because my kids are not that level.”

Ariana’s planning for reading instruction was based on the plans provided by a team member. Interestingly, she commented that she referred to the Lucy Calkins (Reader’s Workshop Units of Study) guides, but acknowledged that she watered down their content when implementing instruction. Her planning was reflected in her reading instruction. She taught a lesson that focused on reading text closely to develop a deeper meaning. The purpose of the lesson was to support strategies that students could use when taking tests. To begin the lesson, Ariana communicated the
goals of the lesson for the students. She planned a short read aloud of an excerpt of text and identified specific places that she wanted students to summarize and infer their thoughts. Ariana marked places on her guide that reflected the prior planning she had done to prepare for the lesson.

From a different perspective, Kristiana, a teacher of exceptional children, explained that her planning was grounded in a program that she used with her students. She stated, “I’m mostly using a program called Spire right now. I prepare the lessons based on the books that are provided ahead of time. It’s about 45 minutes per lesson…that’s not the only thing I use, I also use a lot of stuff from Teachers Pay Teachers©.” Kristiana’s comments reflect that her planning was based upon utilizing materials for teaching reading that were provided or available online.

Kristiana’s reading lesson was based on teaching the students phonics. The materials for the lesson were prepared, but the goals of the lesson were never communicated. The students had difficulty engaging with the instruction. This was evident when one student walked around the classroom during instruction and others questioned why they had to participate in the lesson. The observation of this lesson reinforced the notion that planning involves content, materials, and the delivery of instruction. When asked about reading preparation, Kristiana stated, “I prepare lessons based on the books that are provided ahead of time… it [takes] about 45 minutes per lesson.” She explained that her planning involved gathering and utilizing materials, yet the delivery of instruction was an area of need. Her use of materials purchased from the online also brought into question the quality of these materials with the alignment to student needs for reading instruction.

To teach in a manner that meets the rigor of reading expectations, planning must be targeted to the instructional goals. The above responses demonstrate that planning is vital to reading instruction, although the participants utilized different approaches. Recognizing the role of
planning, one must consider how important it is that beginning teachers have opportunity to engage with instructional leaders on planning lessons that align with targeted goals.

Completing the Task

The use of appropriate tools is necessary to get the job done. Workers must be knowledgeable of the different tools in their tool box and know when and how to use them. They must be flexible in their understanding and know which tools will help them to best complete their task. The same is true for teaching reading. Teachers must be flexible in their decision-making and be able to recognize which instructional practice meets the needs of the students and supports in-the-moment decision-making. Taking this into consideration, the participants’ responses reflect diverse approaches to teaching reading, while also showing that beginning teachers do face challenges regarding decisions and flexibility of instruction.

Amber indicated that she implemented Readers Workshop and guided reading daily. She stated, “my main goal for small group time is to make sure that I reach each of my groups.” She also said, “to be honest, I feel that reading is my struggling point because there is so much to it. There are so many research-based techniques that I know nothing about. At times it can be overwhelming.” Amber’s response reflected the challenges that she faced with instructional practices. These challenges became evident throughout Amber’s responses about reading instruction. When asked about professional needs, she stated, “I am receiving so much support that I don’t know because I am getting so much right now… My lead teacher is great but she can’t be in my classroom every day…[I need] just support or that go to guided reading person.” The first part of Amber’s statement demonstrates that because she was learning how to teach reading, it
could be challenging to target her professional needs for reading instruction. The latter part of her response reflected that she needed a person that was accessible to her to provide individual support.

When asked about the challenges with instructional decisions, Jayla stated, “my [reading] conferences and small group instruction is my strongest. I have a hard time with my think aloud when modeling. Reading came really easy to me as a kid so it is hard for me to understand what they don’t know. So I think that knowing what they don’t know and what they really need is hard when I am doing my think aloud.” Jayla’s response about the challenges she faced was in line with her comments regarding planning and preparation for reading instruction. Jayla stated that teachers need to know that “to be prepared [involves] thinking ahead about what you are going to ask and what you want students to know.”

Carly explained how she utilized different reading programs for her reading instruction to meet the diverse range of needs in reading for her exceptional children’s class. She stated, “the processing time for my kids is sometimes a lot longer. Some kids are already there and some are still processing what I said. So I have tried to incorporate things for the kids that are processing faster but I feel like since they are in such different levels that it’s hard to reach all their needs with one body.” Carly explained that “it would have been beneficial to know how to teach reading instruction…I trialed and error for a month before I really figured it out.” Another challenge that Carly faced was needing support with “finding texts that are right where the students are in their reading levels. Carly stated, “we have book rooms [but] I need help finding the books that they can read on their levels.” Carly’s response brings insight into the experiences that beginning teachers face with reading instruction while addressing the diverse needs of students.

Several participants’ responses reflected the challenges that beginning teachers face with the decision making needed for instructional practices in reading. Ariana indicated that the most
difficult aspect of implementing reading instruction was “making sure that everyone gets it and just teaching to the level where I notice that everyone is engaged.” Interestingly, Ariana also referenced engagement as it related to her reading instruction. Although the lesson being taught covered reading content that was targeted to students’ needs, students were distracted throughout, the lesson which at times went unnoticed. This brings to light the challenges of even balancing the delivery of instruction with monitoring student engagement. It also highlights the significance of making spontaneous decisions that follow the students throughout the lesson and support engagement.

Kristiana and Amber both expressed the need to become more proficient in decision-making during reading instruction. Kristiana felt like she lacked in ability in “making in-the-moment decisions during reading lessons… like in the instruction to make the lesson better in that very moment.” Having difficulty with in the moment decision making connects with Kristiana’s responses about her coursework. She stated, “I don’t feel like they prepared me in any way.” Her lack of preservice preparation directly related to the challenges that she faces with spontaneous decision-making and instructional delivery.

Amber stated that teaching reading was an area that was difficult because there was so much complexity to it. She indicated that the most difficult aspect in implementing reading instruction was understanding what was expected of the students. She explained that her “students are all over the place. Some are high, some are low, and some are in the middle. I have to figure out if I take this route because if I focus on this student am I going to leave the other student.” Amber and Kristiana both responded from the perspective of in-the-moment decisions that meet students’ needs. Their developing understanding of how to teach reading and the complexities of
reading provided insight into the reason for the challenges they faced with in-the-moment decisions.

The participants’ responses showed that they were implementing instructional practices in reading that were vital to meeting students’ needs, but they still faced challenges with the decision-making aspect of instructional delivery. Taking this into consideration, it is important to recognize that beginning teachers require ongoing support to develop the tools needed to successfully implement reading instruction. With two out of every three students in U.S. schools having reading proficiencies below the level needed to adequately do grade-level work, it is important that beginning teachers understand the intricacies of teaching reading and how to deliver content flexibly in a manner that engages all learners (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2009).

Challenges Along the Way

In the construction of any structure, challenges along the way make the development of the project difficult. These challenges can create bumps in the road that impact building the structure. With reading instruction, beginning teachers face challenges related to knowledge of content, best use of resources, and instructional practices. These bumps in the road can present challenges that beginning teachers must overcome to successfully meet the needs of their students.

Ariana spoke candidly about the challenges that she faced as a beginning teacher teaching when she previously taught with mostly other beginning teachers. She stated, “I am teaching fifth grade now. My team is a bunch of veteran teachers. They have been teaching for like 30 years. I am so much more comfortable with where I am now. Last year I was in fourth grade. I was teaching with a bunch of beginning teachers there, five years or under. Not having much support made it
really hard. Then with the team that I was on, I really didn’t feel comfortable asking questions.” Ariana further explained that reaching every student was a challenge that she now faced in teaching reading. She stated, “Right now I have 20 kids. Meeting all their needs [in reading], it’s really demanding. Making sure that everyone gets it and just teaching to the level where I notice that everyone is engaged. Where it’s not too hard, where they aren’t disengaged or bored. That’s a challenge for me.” Ariana indicated that receiving resources earlier in the year would have helped her the most.

Amber faced a different set of challenges in implementing reading instruction. She stated, “I didn’t know how to do running records. Things have changed so much…I told my lead teacher, I don’t know if I can do this. It was a struggle to learn. Another struggle that I faced is Response to Intervention. I have a great Instructional Facilitator that gives me strategies [but] sometimes I feel lost.” Amber stated she needed “in-depth teaching of teaching. The ins and outs of it. Also, how to teach Response to Intervention and guided reading. I want to make sure that I am doing it right because it does not feel right to me with the way that I am teaching it.”

Jayla described the challenges she faced with reading instruction through the lens of student engagement. She commented, “with book clubs I really want him [the student] to participate…finding different ways to get him to do the assignment and share his thinking.” Jayla stated that she needed “more ideas on how to keep data. So I have a small group data sheet that works well for when I am pulling my reading groups, but more of the conferencing sheets… just different ways to keep data on my students.” From a similar perspective, Kristiana stated that a challenge that she faced when teaching reading regarded motivation. Kristiana stated that “I have a lot of kids who do not want to participate and motivation is tricky sometimes. It’s always been difficult
and even though this program is very good for them they have already gotten the mindset that they can’t do this and they are not willing to try.”

Carly’s challenges were based upon determining the best instructional practices for teaching reading. She explained, “while the curriculum that I am using is fantastic, what else is out there? What is the best thing for them [students] that is going to get them the most growth? … So I guess my biggest challenge is, am I doing it [teaching reading] right?” Carly stated that she needed the most support in “finding text that is right where they are at their reading levels.” Similarly, Kristiana indicated that she wanted to know more about student expectations. She stated, “I wish I understood better how hard it was for them so that I would have the right amount of expectation, I guess.”

Kristiana also presented another challenge that she faced with reading instruction as it relates to management. She said, “I need more time with certain groups of kids without other kids in the room. If I could have just one group at a time, I think I could be more effective.” During her reading lesson, students arrived at varying times. In a 30-time frame, students entered the classroom every few minutes, which led to the disruption of the classroom environment. The constant interruptions caused confusion for the students working independently and for the students working in the small group. The lesson that Kristiana was teaching was interrupted as students needed redirection and assistance with knowing which tasks to complete. The interruptions throughout the lesson made it difficult for the content being conveyed to be fully understood.

Throughout the interview, Kristiana reiterated the challenges of needing more time to delve further to support the diverse needs of her students. In another instance, she stated, “I just need more time, I need my groups to be a little more separate so that we could really go further into the
lessons and get more retention.” Kristiana’s response resonated the challenges that she faced with the management with the instructional time for reading. This provides insight into how even before reading content can be delved into, there must be effective management for reading instruction.

All in all, the participants’ responses reflect a range of challenges that beginning teachers face when teaching reading, and the needs that they have professionally. In construction, challenges arise as work begins. Teaching reading is very similar. Challenges will emerge that make the task of implementing reading instruction difficult for beginning teachers. When this occurs, these teachers must have the right tools to overcome the challenges.

Building the Framework

The construction of a building requires the use of materials and specialized tools to assemble the building’s framework. This framework must be constructed on a sturdy foundation with these elements working together to support the overall load of the structure. Supporting beginning teachers with reading instruction is similar to constructing a building. Providing differentiated support offers beginning teachers a sturdy foundation to construct a framework for teaching reading. The need for differentiated support emerged as a theme from the participants’ responses. Their responses reflected their desire to continue to grow professionally and to learn more about how to implement rigorous reading instruction that aligns with the expectations of curriculum standards.

Ariana explained that the beginning teacher meetings implemented by the school district helped her to grow professionally, but that differentiation was needed. She stated, “The beginning teacher meetings are helpful. I think that there should be a beginning teacher one meeting and that the beginning teacher two meeting should be separate because some of the things [addressed] are
redundant.” Ariana also stated that “differentiated professional development for the different levels of beginning teaching would also be helpful.”

From a different perspective, Jayla examined differentiated support through the lens of feedback and observations. She stated that she needed “more feedback because reading is my worst subject in teaching...I also need more information on how to continue to grow my students that are stagnant.” Jayla indicated that she has overcome the challenges of teaching reading by seeking support. She explained, “I asked my administrators and curriculum support to come and give me feedback as much as possible. I like constructive criticism, so the feedback is always helpful.”

From a similar perspective, Carly indicated that she needed specific support for her classroom environment. Carly stated that “I would like to observe teachers in my setting teach reading... I would like professional development specific to kids with cognitive delays. We do have professional development, but it is usually gaged for teachers that have students that are resource.”

The participants who had entered teaching in a nontraditional manner highlighted a different set of professional needs and another perspective on differentiated support. Amber stated, “it would be beneficial to know more about reading instruction. I need to know how to teach it. When we sit in planning and discuss what we are teaching, I have no idea what they [the grade level] are talking about.” Amber indicated that she did not know what ongoing support she needed. She stated that “I don’t know because I am getting so much right now. More of the guided reading. My lead teacher is great, but she can’t be in my classroom every day. [I just need] that support or that go-to guided reading person.”

Kristiana indicated that being on a different calendar as a beginning teacher impacted the support that was provided. She explained, “by the time I got to the BT meetings I had already been teaching for a for a while because we started in the summer. It’s kind of like we were a bit ahead
of everything in the meetings.” Kristiana also commented on having a mentor teacher, “I like the support I have from my mentor and I hope that never goes away.” Amber and Kristiana’s responses reflect the challenges that beginning teachers face when entering the profession in a nontraditional manner. In both instances, their professional needs for reading instruction were grounded in developing knowledge of reading and the need for personalized professional support.

Summary

The participants’ responses reflect themes that connect understanding reading with instructional practices. All participants interviewed were already implementing components of reading instruction that support student development, yet they still collectively had specific needs regarding knowledge of reading, reading instruction, and professional development. Kervin and Turbill (2003) posit that beginning teachers are exposed to significant change when they move from their preservice training to professional practice. Kervin and Turbill (2003) made the argument that it is critical that beginning teachers be supported through this process because they are expected to immediately implement effective instructional practices. Recognizing this as a factor, teacher preparation must continue to evolve to aid in the transition between preservice and professional practice. There must be an alignment between coursework and professional practice expectations. Teachers must emerge from their preservice programs with a clear understanding of reading and how to implement specific strategies for teaching reading. Furthermore, to continue to support beginning teachers as they enter professional practice, school districts must have differentiated support that meets these teachers’ needs as they implement reading instruction. By analyzing the experiences and challenges that beginning teachers face as they implement reading
instruction, this study has gained insights that provide a space for developing initiatives to meet their professional needs.
Chapter 5-Discussion of Research Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

This chapter presents the conclusions, implications, and recommendations based on the findings of this doctoral thesis. By analyzing the participants’ responses, insight was gained into the organization’s real life activity. Based on this insight, the following conclusions and recommendations have the potential to transform existing practices in the organization (Yin, 2008). The chapter examines how the findings relate to the research question, the relationship between the findings and the literature review, and the theoretical framework as it relates to supporting the analysis. Griffith, Bauml, and Barksdale (2015) contend that children bring a wide range of competencies to reading instruction. This diversity causes teachers to constantly negotiate gaps among multiple students’ current understandings, curriculum goals, and standards. Being able to support students’ understanding is key to implementing effective instructional practices in reading.

In the examined school district, a framework has been developed to support beginning teachers as they transition into professional practice. The professional supports provide beginning teachers with ongoing professional development opportunities as well as education through Effective Teacher Training, which is implemented prior to the start of the school year. The Effective Teacher Training offers opportunity for beginning teachers to become familiar with instructional practices associated with reading and other content areas. Prior to the present study, no research had examined beginning teachers’ experiences with teaching reading in this school district in North Carolina. Thus, it was important to conduct a study within this school district in order to yield insights into a means for developing and refining existing practices to meet the professional needs of beginning teachers. The purpose of this case study was to identify and explore the challenges that beginning teachers encounter as they start their professional careers as
elementary educators in this school district in North Carolina. This doctoral study examined beginning teachers’ challenges and professional needs, their professional experiences as they related to their preservice coursework, and daily instructional practices. The following research questions were explored:

- What are the challenges and needs of beginning teachers as they begin to teach reading?
- What are the experiences of teachers across their first few years as they begin to teach reading?
- What do you believe beginning teachers need to know for reading instruction in the elementary classroom?

The case study methodology provided insight into teaching reading through the lens of beginning teacher’s experiences. Additionally, this methodology also yielded insight into the experiences of beginning teachers in the context of the participants’ work. The participants involved in the study were in their first three years of teaching in an elementary school setting. All were licensed to teach in North Carolina, and they taught within a school system in the state. The school system is comprised of nine clusters, which span across a large rural area and are diverse in economic makeup. The participants represented three of the clusters. Four out of the five participants worked in schools that have been identified as high-needs schools. This means that these schools receive additional funding to support meeting academic standards. Collectively, the participants’ schools were implementing district initiatives for reading.

Research Questions Findings:

The research questions were answered by analyzing the participants’ responses in a semi-structured interview. These responses yielded insights into their experiences, thus uncovering findings that support themes present in the literature as well as new perspectives.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1: Teacher Preparation for Reading Instruction is Complex and Requires Connection Between Coursework and Application</th>
<th>Finding: There are disconnects that exist between translating preservice academic experiences with the expectations of professional practice.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Planning for Teaching Reading</td>
<td>Finding: Beginning teachers engaged in diverse means for planning reading instruction that included utilizing district resources as well as planning that extends beyond the designated planning time during the school day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3: Teacher Knowledge Serves as the Foundation for Instructional Practices and Decision-Making</td>
<td>Finding: Flexibility of instructional decision making is grounded in having depth of knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4: Recognizing the Challenges and Needs of Beginning Teachers</td>
<td>Finding: Beginning teachers face diverse challenges as they begin professional practice, and require instructional support through instructional coaching and mentors to support the implementation of reading instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 5: Differentiated Support for Beginning Teachers</td>
<td>Finding: To meet the diverse needs of beginning teachers, the school district must offer differentiated support that provides that targets the needs of exceptional children’s and lateral entry teachers.</td>
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The findings of this thesis demonstrate that beginning teachers face diverse challenges and needs regarding teaching reading. Furthermore, the results also show that teaching reading can be challenging when there are disconnects between preservice and professional practice. The research questions were answered by examining and analyzing the participants’ collective responses.

One of the findings that emerged from the participants responses was that there is a disconnect that exists between preservice academic experiences and professional practice regarding teaching reading. In several cases, the participants indicated that their preservice experience had not aligned with professional practice expectations. Jayla, a regular education teacher stated, “It is very different going from being a student to being a teacher. I feel like we learned a lot of the pedagogy but really didn’t learn how to apply it. So I think that a lot of first year teachers may go into it not prepared. I was lucky to student teach at the school so the transition was easy and I knew the expectations. A lot of my friends are not that lucky.” Similarly, Carly an exceptional children’s
teacher indicated that her preservice experiences had not prepared her for reading instruction: When asked about her preservice experiences she stated that, “No, not for reading, I was prepared for a lot of things but not reading. My classes dealt with how to deal with behavior, how to collect data and different evidence based practices. It was not content driven… It was touched on but I never had classes that went into it.” Considering that teacher preparation for reading instruction requires beginning teachers to make the connection between the coursework and the application of the content, it is imperative that school districts identify specific means of merging these experiences. The results indicate that some participants’ preservice experiences did very little to prepare them for the implementation of reading instruction. They entered the profession to some extent lacking the knowledge needed to implement instruction flexibly. Thus, there is a need for professional development that targets the specific needs of beginning teachers.

Another finding of this study concerned the role that planning plays in supporting reading instruction. The participants’ responses clearly reflected that as a beginning teacher, planning extends beyond the designated planning time and requires instructional support that guides the relationship between instructional planning and delivery of reading instruction. Several participants stated that they utilized the online resources provided by the district as an instructional tool to support their reading instruction and planning. Jayla commented, “we [grade-level team] use the content resources page to choose which teaching points we are going to use for each unit.” Similarly, Amber indicated, “the first thing we do is look at the content resources to see what we are covering. Then the lead teacher, she paces everything out.” This demonstrates that the resources provided by the school district were utilized as an instructional tool for teaching reading. Furthermore, several participants referenced their instructional coach or lead teacher and mentors as a form of support for teaching reading. Jayla stated that she “learned a lot from her mentor
teacher.” In addition, Amber explained that she was also in contact with the lead teacher after school hours while she prepared her reading lessons.

Flexibility of instructional decision making is grounded in having a depth of knowledge for teaching reading. One of the findings of this study was the need for a better understanding of how to teach reading to make flexible decisions. This became evident when some participants reflected on the challenges that they faced with instructional delivery. Kristiana and Amber both expressed the need to become more proficient in decision-making during reading instruction. Kristiana felt like she lacked in ability in making in-the-moment decisions during reading lesson.” She stated that “during instruction it is difficult to make decisions that would make the lesson better.” Similarly, Amber stated that “teaching reading is an area that is difficult because there is so much complexity to it.” She indicated that the most difficult aspect in implementing reading instruction was understanding what was expected of the students. These responses uncover the significance of having an in depth knowledge for teaching reading. This finding calls for ongoing opportunities at the school and district levels to engage in learning experiences that support a deepened knowledge for teaching reading.

The participants’ responses reflect that they faced diverse challenges and needs regarding their professional experiences and instructional delivery. These challenges included the implementation of reading instruction, instructional decisions, and knowledge of content. These challenges have led to the need for ongoing and differentiated support to meet their professional needs. An example of this is reflected in Jayla and Amber’s responses. Both participants spoke specifically about reading instruction as one of the challenges that they faced. Jayla stated, “I have a hard time with my think aloud…. So I think that knowing what they don’t know and what they really need is hard when I am doing my think aloud.” Amber commented, “There are so many research based
techniques that I know nothing about. At times it can be overwhelming.” Furthermore, Kristiana and Amber both expressed the need to become more proficient in decision-making during reading instruction. Kristiana explained that she felt like she lacked in ability in “making in-the-moment decisions during reading lessons. The decisions that make the lesson better in that very moment.” Kristiana and Amber’s responses relate directly to knowledge of content and best practices for reading instruction. The findings from the participants responses to their challenges present a window for recognizing the complexity of reading and how knowledge of reading guides in-the-moment decision-making. The findings also reflect the vital role of instructional coaching and mentoring, providing professional development, and supporting knowledge development of teaching reading as vital to supporting beginning teachers.

An insight that was uncovered was the need for differentiated support for those who had entered the profession in a nontraditional manner. These participants seemed to have the most difficulty with making connections between content and instructional delivery. Amber indicated, “it would be beneficial to know more about reading instruction. I need to know how to teach it. When we sit in planning and discuss what we are teaching, I have no idea what they are talking about.” Amber’s response provides insight into how unfamiliar it is to teach reading when one enters the profession from a different background and has had limited opportunity to learn how to do it. Her answer also reflects the importance of the school district providing ongoing differentiated support that is targeted for diverse professional needs. This potentially entails providing specific professional development sessions that address the needs of lateral entry teachers or teachers coming into the profession in a nontraditional manner.

The experiences of the participants across their first few years teaching reflected the significance of instructional support and instructional resources. Their responses also led to the
finding that instructional support through instructional facilitators and mentors play a significant role in assisting beginning teachers with the implementation of reading instruction. The participants collective responses were varied, however carried a similar theme that instructional support and access to resources, and understanding how to use these resources were vital to their reading instruction.

Relating the Findings to the Literature Review

The results of this study are in line with the literature. Findings such as the disconnect between preservice and professional practice expectations, knowledge of teaching reading, and the need for differentiated support reflect the synthesis of the participants’ responses and align with previous research studies conducted on teaching reading. According to Feinman-Nemser (2001), policy-makers and educators are coming to see that what students learn is directly related to what and how teachers teach, and how teachers teach in turn depends on the knowledge, skills, and commitments that they bring to instruction. Considering the significance of reading instruction as it relates to students’ academic performance, it is important for beginning teachers to have opportunities to link academic experience and knowledge of teaching reading to professional practice.

Preservice Academic Experiences and Professional Practice

Preservice experiences serve as the foundation for professional practice. During preservice, teachers develop the knowledge needed to implement reading instruction and deliver reading content in a manner that meets students’ needs. In this study, the participants’ responses reflected a disconnect in translating preservice experiences into the expectations of professional practice. In
most instances, the participants indicated that their coursework had not prepared them for professional practice. The participants responses also reflected the need for balanced coursework in reading that explores in-depth techniques to teach reading as it relates to the implementation of different reading instruction components.

The results of this study reflect the findings in the literature. In a qualitative study on beginning teachers and faculty and their views and practices regarding literacy, Kosnik and Beck (2008) concluded that there was a disconnect between what was taught and what the new teachers wanted to learn. Based on interviews with 10 faculty members of the preservice program and 22 graduates of the program, the study uncovered that what was taught was not always what the students learned. This resulted in new teachers struggling with program planning and needing more direct instruction on the link between theory and practice. Similarly, in this present study the participants indicated that there was a disconnect in the translation of theory taught in classes and the implementation of reading instruction. Several participants stated that the coursework did not support their professional needs, which resulted in facing challenges with delivery of instruction and instructional decisions. Based on their study, Kosnik and Beck conclude (2008) that an approach to teacher education is needed that focuses on topics and concepts that are appropriate for preservice students and beginning teachers, rather than ones that are beyond their abilities. Kosnik and Beck (2008) also argue that there is a need to provide opportunity for students to understand, assess, modify, and make connections. This leads to developing an understanding of content that beginning teachers can name, understand, own, and enact in their classroom instruction. All in all, the findings of the present study as well as that of Kosnik and Beck (2008) demonstrate that current approaches during preservice experiences may not fully equip beginning teachers with the knowledge they need for literacy instruction.
Instructional Planning for Teaching Reading

For beginning teachers just entering the profession, instructional planning provides a basis for understanding concepts being taught, and an opportunity to engage with other teachers on the delivery of the content. Ball, Knobloch, and Hoop (2007) explain that instructional planning is essential to teaching because it is the process by which teachers link the curriculum to learning. In the present study, beginning teachers engaged in diverse means of planning reading instruction that included utilizing district resources as well as planning that extended beyond the designated time during the school day. These findings are in line with those of Ball, Knobloch, and Hoop (2007), who found in their study that there were many similarities in the ways that intern and novice teachers planned. In this study, both groups spent nearly the same amount of time on instructional planning, totaling 10 or more hours. Similarly, the participants in the present study indicated that planning for instruction often occurred outside of school allotted time frames. The participants also had varying approaches to planning. In one instance, a beginning teacher was responsible for developing reading plans and identifying resources for the grade level. In another instance, a participant engaged in planning with a lead teacher and the grade level team. For those who taught exceptional children planning reflected some isolation although they communicated with classroom teachers. The diverse approaches to instructional planning show that planning for reading instruction is based on the school and the structure of the grade level. This indicates that planning is vital, but that there is variance in how beginning teachers engage in planning based on their context. Similarly, Ball, Knobloch, and Hoop (2007) identify similar implications and conclude that regardless of the authenticity of the student teaching internship, teachers will face and be influenced by different contexts and thus different constraints and opportunities with different teaching experiences concerning planning for instruction.
Teacher Knowledge Serves as the Foundation for Instructional Practices and Decision Making

The ability to make in-the-moment decisions extends beyond delivering reading content to a more responsive manner of teaching that is specific to student needs. The findings in this study reflect that beginning teachers had difficulty with the flexibility of in the moment instructional decision making. This was particularly reflected in the responses of those who had entered the profession in a nontraditional manner. This difficulty directly relates to depth of knowledge for teaching reading and the flexibility of knowing which instructional move to employ. Griffith, Bauml, and Barksdale (2015) affirm this notion by stating that to make decisions flexibly, one must draw upon specialized knowledge of the students, the reading text, and the task (Griffith, Bauml, & Barksdale, 2015). Griffith, Bauml, and Barksdale (2015) found the following in their study:

Reading requires a complex set of skills and strategies that must be directly taught, consistently modeled, and practiced often and within authentic reading experiences. According to our findings, these skills and strategies become the focus of teachers’ in-the-moment teaching decisions in whole-group, small-group, and individual contexts. Although our findings cannot be generalized, they offer important insights about the roles instructional contexts and teacher knowledge play in successfully teaching reading in the primary grades.

The findings from the study are in line with those of the present thesis. When beginning teachers lack the complex set of skills and strategies needed to teach reading, challenges arise that impede their ability to address specific student needs during the lesson. According to Griffith, Bauml, and Barksdale (2015), children bring a wide range of competencies that call for teachers to negotiate gaps in student learning and understanding, and curriculum goals in reading lessons. Teachers must identify the balance between supporting learning goals and providing feedback throughout the reading lesson. Similar to this thesis, Griffith, Bauml, and Barksdale (2015) uncovered that for beginning teachers to develop into effective reading instructors, they must acquire knowledge and
understanding of reading coupled with knowledge of the pedagogy of reading instruction. This calls for ongoing opportunities at the school and district levels to engage in learning experiences that support ongoing professional development to develop and extend pedagogical content knowledge.

Recognizing the Challenges and Needs of Beginning Teachers

One of the findings of this study was that beginning teachers face diverse challenges as they begin professional practice. Challenges such as implementing reading instruction, meeting students’ needs, and determining best practices require school districts to provide instructional support through instructional coaching and mentors in order to support beginning teachers in facing these challenges. The challenges that the participants identified in this study related to the difficulty of translating theory taught during coursework into everyday teaching practice. These findings correspond to Kervin and Turbill’s (2003) work on professional learning and the relevance of preservice training on professional practice.

In their study, Kervin and Turbill followed a beginning teacher, Kate, who had limited support at the onset of her transition into professional practice. After having the opportunity to work closely with a mentor, Kate’s teaching began to change. Kervin and Turbill (2003) stated that for Kate's teaching to be as effective as possible, the cognitive components and understanding of teaching practice needed to be made explicit. Kate demonstrated the need for her preservice teacher training to be linked explicitly to her classroom practice (Kervin & Turbill, 2003). Similarly, in the present study, several participants acknowledged that the support that they received from mentor and instructional coaches was vital to overcoming the challenges associated with teaching reading. Thus, the participants’ responses are in line with Kervin and Turbill’s
(2003) conclusion that beginning teachers are exposed to significant change when they move from their preservice training to professional practice, and that it is crucial that they be supported through this process through a partnership mentality (Kervin & Turbill, 2003).

**Differentiated Support for Beginning Teachers**

Differentiating support for beginning teachers offers an opportunity for professional partnership that is specific to the needs of the beginning teacher and also supports the transition from preservice to professional practice. The literature shows that ongoing professional support is needed to meet the needs of beginning teachers (Kervin & Turbill, 2003). This support must be diverse and provide opportunity for growth in understanding reading development and implementing effective instructional practices.

The findings of the present study reflect that school districts must offer differentiated support that targets ongoing professional knowledge. Moreover, this support must address a wide range of needs, particularly those of exceptional children’s and lateral entry teachers. In a study on professional development and the role of school leaders, Clement and Vandenberghe (2001) conclude that school leaders play a significant role in creating conditions that offer learning opportunities and experiences. These experiences are critical to the development of beginning teachers and build on the knowledge developed during preservice. Kervin and Turbill (2003) indicate that reflection and dialogue around content also create opportunity for learning experiences. In line with the present thesis, these studies conclude that ongoing professional development plays a significant role in the development of teachers. Recognizing this, school districts must provide diverse approaches to meeting the needs of beginning teachers. Moreover, these learning opportunities must create a space for ongoing professional learning and opportunity
to work in partnership with a mentor and instructional coach who can facilitate reflection and dialogue.

Relating the Theoretical Framework

Effectively teaching reading as a beginning teacher calls for preparation and ongoing support to develop the specialized knowledge needed to be able to effectively deliver reading instruction. With rigorous curriculum standards that call for students to think critically, beginning teachers must transition into the profession with a clear understanding of reading development and curriculum standards.

Shulman’s pedagogical knowledge theory served as the theoretical framework that guided this thesis. Pedagogical content knowledge is the specialized knowledge that teachers must develop for teaching reading. According to Shulman (1986), pedagogical content knowledge consists of the ability to effectively combine content knowledge with effective teaching methods. Shulman (1986) argued that the disciplinary knowledge taught and learned in college was not sufficient for teaching these subjects. Shulman’s findings indicate the need for teacher preparation programs to continue to evaluate the most effective means of preparing preservice students, and to ensure that preservice teachers develop the knowledge base needed to be flexible in reading instruction. Shulman’s theory of pedagogical content knowledge is in line with the present thesis, in that the participants’ responses reflect the need for a deepened knowledge base for teaching reading. The participants responses reflected that they felt a disconnect between their preservice coursework and the realities of teaching reading This prevents them from fully being able to make instructional decisions during the lesson.
The findings of this thesis reflect the interconnection between pedagogy and instructional practices. Although the participants’ responses indicate that they held some understanding of reading development, what must be considered is whether the knowledge was specialized enough to implement instructional practices that would meet the rigorous nature of curriculum standards for teaching reading. The pedagogical content knowledge framework corresponds to this study by connecting instructional practices and knowledge of reading content as follows.

- **Knowledge of content:** Pedagogical content knowledge consists of the ability to effectively combine content knowledge with teaching methods. In this study, the participants’ responses reflected their knowledge of teaching reading and instructional delivery, as well as the need for additional opportunities to further their knowledge.

- **Knowledge of instructional strategies:** Pedagogical content knowledge is grounded in specialized knowledge of teaching reading content. In this study, the ability to diversify instructional strategies emerged from the participants’ knowledge of reading content.

- **Knowledge of student understanding:** Pedagogical content knowledge fosters an understanding of students’ ability. In this study, the participants acknowledged that they needed more support in translating the curriculum into instructional practices specific to students’ needs.

The use of the pedagogical content knowledge framework was a strength for this study in that it interconnected pedagogy with instructional practices, thus reflecting the connection between content knowledge and how it translates into teaching practice. The findings suggest that without a strong pedagogical knowledge and understanding of the relationship between coursework and
instructional delivery, beginning teachers are faced with challenges with regard to teaching reading that impact quality reading instruction.

Implications

The findings from this study demonstrate that beginning teachers recognize that there is some disconnect between preservice coursework and classroom instruction for teaching reading. The findings also reflect that beginning teachers need ongoing support as they transition into professional practice in order to continue to develop the deepened understanding required to teach this subject. Kosnik and Beck (2008) contend that a lack of clearly developed priorities is a major problem in teacher education. This leads to coursework that tries to cover so much material that student teachers and new teachers are unable to develop a focused, coherent pedagogy. Kosnik and Beck (2008) further posit that teachers should emerge from their preparation program with an integrated set of pedagogical pursuits that, to the extent possible for a new teacher, they can name, understand, own, and enact. Recognizing this, supporting beginning teachers in further developing an understanding of reading is vital to the success of their career.

Implications for Future Research

The literature on reading instruction and beginning teaching encompasses the complexity of reading and the professional needs of beginning teachers when implementing reading instruction (Kosnik & Beck, 2008; Griffith, Bauml, and Barksdale, 2015). The literature has also addresses the demands of teaching reading in today’s classrooms. The findings of the present study are in line with previous studies and add a new layer of understanding regarding beginning teachers and their professional needs. The analysis of the participants’ responses demonstrates the need for additional research on merging preservice and professional practice expectations. Moreover, more
research is also needed that focuses on the experiences and challenges faced by teachers entering the profession in a nontraditional manner.

The responses of the two lateral entry teachers highlight the need to further examine the experiences and challenges faced by teachers who enter the profession in a nontraditional manner. Their responses uncovered a new layer of understanding with regard to being a beginning teacher without preservice and teaching reading experience. Furthermore, their responses indicate the need for specialized support targeted specifically at their identified professional needs. Through a case study or a quantitative research study, data could be collected that could further shed light on the experiences of lateral entry teachers. Such a qualitative study could candidly uncover their everyday experiences, and could provide an outlet to investigate the long-term implications of being a lateral entry teacher. These studies would be beneficial to any school district because of their potential to offer insights into meeting the needs of teachers who enter the profession in a nontraditional manner.

**Implications for Professional Practice**

Differentiating and identifying targeted professional development provides a means of supporting beginning teachers as they transition into professional practice. Throughout the study, the participants’ responses reflected that they had received coursework in teaching reading, but that they needed additional support to translate pedagogical theory into professional practice. This implication calls for developing a way to offer beginning teachers ongoing support specifically in reading that extends beyond the required professional development for licensure. Furthermore, initiatives should also be developed that seek to close the theory practice gap across all content areas.
In Texas, a collaborative has been developed to increase the knowledge of teacher educators who teach reading preservice courses (Joshi et. al, 2009). The Texas Reading First Higher Educator Collaborative (HEC) provides ongoing professional development and collaborative opportunities for teacher educators to engage in seminars to further support evolving reading research coursework (Hurford, Hurford, Head, Keiper, Nitcher, & Renner, 2016). This type of initiative reflects the significance of higher-education educators continuing to develop their instructional practices to meet the rigorous standards for teaching reading in today’s classrooms.

The participants’ responses in the present study reflected the variety of their experiences and level of preparation for teaching reading. Although they were from diverse elementary schools and had different university experiences, a factor that became apparent was their need for ongoing differentiated support for teaching reading. This reflects the necessity to continue to identify ways for school districts and universities to align expectations during preservice and professional practice. Porche, Pallante, and Snow (2012) state:

We know that how teachers practice instruction is as important as the content they cover, and that ongoing professional development and support are crucial to ensuring that all teachers know how to implement excellent literacy instruction the challenge is to devise professional development that helps teachers incorporate effective elements into their teaching, supports their continued use of them, and then percolates the elements throughout a school and ultimately a district.

Considering the implications of this study, to fully support beginning teachers with their reading instruction requires professional development and targeted goals. In addition, opportunities for school districts and universities to align coursework and professional practice can create a foundation that closes the theory practice gap.

Implications for Professional Practice
At the individual level, the findings from this thesis reflect the need for targeted professional development at the school level for beginning teachers that targets a deepened understanding of content, resources, and instructional delivery. Beginning teachers need the opportunity to engage with curriculum coordinators and mentors to identify the best means of implementing reading instruction.

The findings from this study reflect that beginning teachers face diverse challenges as they transition into professional practice. Recognizing this, it is important to implement professional support that is targeted to the needs of teachers while building their knowledge of reading instruction. Beginning teachers need the opportunity to set targeted goals for themselves along with opportunity to engage in observations that provide feedback and reflection. Gersten, Dimino, Jayanthi, Kim, and Santoro (2010) contend that professional development based upon supportive, collaborative environments is most effective in bringing about change. The change occurs when teachers feel supported as they implement new learning from professional development into their classroom practices. By engaging in professional development that supports beginning teachers with developing a deepened understanding of reading and coaching that provides feedback, beginning teachers are able to reach targeted goals.

At the building level, I plan to begin this process with a needs assessment (see Appendix B) for beginning teachers. By completing the needs assessment, I can identify specifically what areas beginning teachers view as proficient and which areas they feel need further development. Upon completion of the needs assessment, specific professional development will be designed that targets those aspects of reading identified by the beginning teachers. This professional development will include coaching opportunities where I will go into classrooms and support teachers in developing a specific goal and the implementation of this goal. The coaching session
will also include an opportunity for reflection on the targeted goal to determine progress being made towards reaching it. Then, at the completion of the professional development cycle, the beginning teachers will engage in reflection and identify a new goal to work towards. Thus, beginning teachers will be supported through a cycle of professional development that encourages growth.

(Table 2: Professional Growth Cycle)

Although there is opportunity for beginning teachers to engage in professional development through the requirements of licensure, specialized professional development implemented at the school level has the potential to offer an additional layer of support to improve the quality of practice. By identifying the specific support needed, a wide range of professional development can be offered at the school level that targets specific topics with regard to reading, and addresses the challenges that beginning teachers face. This is reflective of a practice-based approach to professional growth and begins the process of extending the deepened knowledge that beginning teachers need to implement reading instruction.
Recommendations

The following recommendations are identified for universities, school districts, and educational leaders wishing to further develop their beginning teacher programs or create initiatives that support beginning teachers as they transition into professional practice. These recommendations are based upon the analysis of data, the theoretical framework, and the implications of this thesis.

- University New Teacher Support Program: In an effort to aid in the transition from preservice to professional practice, universities could implement a support program for recent graduates from their school of education. This support program could follow teachers through their first three years of teaching to identify areas where they feel proficient and areas that require development. By utilizing surveys to track recent graduates, the university could further align its instructional practices with the demands of professional practice. The university could utilize this data to offer professional development or conferences for beginning teachers.

- New Teacher Collaborative: The development of a nonprofit agency that focuses on supporting beginning teachers could offer opportunities to support school districts in meeting the needs of these teachers. A new teacher collaborative could provide resources, training, professional development, and conferences throughout the year to targeted school districts. This additional layer of support could work collaboratively with school districts to identify specific needs and then utilize their resources to support teacher development.

- Lateral Entry Professional Development: The implementation of professional development targeted for lateral entry beginning teachers could offer specialized support in line with the professional needs of educators entering the profession in a nontraditional manner.
Professional Development Needs Survey: To fully meet the needs of beginning teachers, a needs assessment should be conducted to specifically identify the professional development that these teachers identify as needing the most. By conducting a needs assessment, school districts could develop and implement professional development targeted towards these needs.

Summary

In conclusion, the findings from this study reflect the diverse needs of beginning teachers. Throughout the last few years, teaching reading has evolved and approaches to reading instruction have been developed to increase the depth of reading proficiency for students (Mather, Bos, & Babur, 2001; Bainbridge & Macy, 2008; Kosnik & Beck, 2008; Lyon & Weiser, 2009; Jansen & Erikson, 2013). Recognizing these changes calls for teaching in a responsive manner that integrates knowledge of teaching reading with recognizing the knowledge that the students bring to the classroom. As beginning teachers transition into professional practice and start to implement reading instruction, it is imperative that they receive targeted support that addresses their professional needs and supports deepening their understanding of reading content. Considering the complexity of teaching reading, school districts and universities have an obligation to identify diverse approaches to meeting the needs of beginning teachers as well as ensuring that they have a solid foundation for understanding reading development. When teachers have a deepened understanding of reading content, they are able to provide students with adequate support to differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of their students.
Epilogue

The journey of a qualitative researcher is filled with exploration, inquisitiveness, and opportunity to grow an understanding through participants’ everyday experiences. Florczak (2017) explains that to truly grasp the nature of something, one must understand just what undergirds that something. The researcher must engage on an intimate level to discover the personal meaning of the phenomenon (Florczak, 2017). This notion was the very essence of this research study. As a scholar practitioner and researcher, I had the opportunity to engage with the participants in a manner that placed me within their everyday experiences as beginning teachers. Through interviews, observations, and reflection, I gained a new understanding of teaching reading and how beginning teachers transition into professional practice. I was immersed into the participants’ experiences and professional world, and was then able to provide a meaningful account of their stories.

Writing this doctoral thesis over the last couple of years has redefined my definition of education. It has given me new insights and understandings of how education and preservice experiences are connected, and how beginning teachers have a unique experience. When I began this journey, I was employed as a literacy interventionist. I worked with students, parents, and teachers on supporting reading development. This was the beginning of my interest in reading and understanding more about teachers’ and students’ experiences with reading. My experiences engaging with teachers in different places professionally led me to want to understand more about how preservice experiences inform professional practice. Ultimately, this doctoral thesis emerged from working with teachers on the implementation of reading standards. By providing professional support for classroom teachers in an elementary setting, I felt a professional push to learn more about reading and about best practices for teaching reading.
At the onset of this doctoral thesis, my identity as a researcher was grounded in being an African American educator and a doctoral student. These identities both personally and professionally shaped my understanding of education and were influential in my advocacy for the implementation of high quality instructional practices for teaching reading. Since conducting this study and engaging in the research, I feel that being a researcher now means giving voice to those in the profession and making a difference for students daily. It means giving voice to those educators who may believe that they have been silenced and honoring them through making their voices an important aspect of the study. Schwarzer, Bloom, and Shono (2006) state that as researchers, we should be committed to using our participants’ voices as a means for change. Furthermore, Ashby (2011) explains that there must be a commitment to voice that uncovers and brings forth access to the worlds of people that would not be uncovered without telling their stories. Taking this into consideration, my newly defined meaning of being a researcher is grounded in honoring my participants by presenting their lived experiences as beginning teachers in a manner that creates opportunity for reflection on existing practices while presenting insight on ways to advance education.

As I engaged with the participants, I felt empowered as an instructional leader that I could give voice to their experiences and utilize these experiences as a means for creating opportunity for professional growth. As I conducted this research, one notion that continued to emerge was the idea that beginning teachers need a platform to engage and continue to build their understanding of reading. A professional platform where they can explore teaching reading yet also have a safe space to share their experiences. This became apparent to me when one of the participants, Amber, asked for additional help with reading instruction after the interview. This interaction resonated with me as a researcher and scholar practitioner because it reflected the relief she felt in being able
to candidly share her experiences. Having these types of opportunities for beginning teachers can create a space for new learning and dialogue that encourages professional growth.

As a scholar practitioner, my next step is to share the data with instructional leaders of the school district to ensure that beginning teachers are provided with opportunities for professional growth. I also plan to present the data at reading conferences to continue to engage others in conversations about beginning teachers and reading instruction. Through these conversations, beginning teachers’ professional experiences can be transformed to present opportunities for change.
Appendix A:

Interview Protocol:
- Introduction/purpose of the interview
- Identification of the problem of practice
- Explanation of data collection and the ethical practices associated with the use of the data
- Copy of the interview transcript
- Opportunity to view final product
- Follow up meeting addressing any questions or concerns from the interview transcription

Interview Questions:
I. Background Questions
- How did you become interested in teaching?
- What year are you in your career?
- What has been the best part of your teaching experience?

II. Reading Instruction
- Describe how you prepare for reading instruction in your classroom
- What instructional practices are you implementing for whole group and small group instruction?
- What area of teaching reading do you feel most proficient? What area do you feel you need the most support?

III. Student Learning
- How do you diversify reading instruction in your class? How do you determine what the student need?

IV. Challenges & Needs
- What are some of the challenges that you faced as you began teaching reading?
- How did you overcome these challenges? What are some challenges that you face now teaching reading? What is the most difficult aspect of implementing reading instruction?
- Do you think that your college coursework aligned with professional practice expectations? How was your preservice coursework different from classroom expectations?
- Do you teach reader’s workshop and small group lessons daily? If so, how do you plan your instruction?

V. Future Implications
- What are some of your needs for teaching reading?
- What would have been beneficial for you to know before you became a teacher that would have helped you with your reading instruction?
- What ongoing support do you feel is needed to help you continue to grow professionally?
- What do you believe that teachers need to know for reading instruction in the primary classroom?
Appendix B:

Professional Development Needs Assessment

Name: ________________________________________________________________

Which of the following best describes the level at which you currently teach?

☐ Primary Level (Grades K-2)    ☐ Intermediate Level (Grades 3-6)

It would be beneficial for me to engage in professional development that addresses the following aspects of reading:

☐ Reading standards across grade levels
☐ Accessing resources and materials for teaching reading
☐ Reading minilesson
☐ Small group instruction (guided reading)
☐ Small group instruction (strategy groups)
☐ Reading Conferences
☐ Developing teaching points for reading instruction
☐ Other

1. The most beneficial professional development that I engaged in so far is:


2. I engage best in professional development that is:


3. The biggest need that I have for teaching reading is:


References


