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Teacher Perspectives on Content Literacy in Elementary Schools

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Kennesaw State University

November 4, 2019

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education
in the Bagwell College of Education

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family. I am forever grateful for your unconditional love, unwavering support, and encouragement.

To my amazing mother, Lettie, I am forever indebted to you. Thanks for your tough love and your teachings of perseverance and determination. Thanks for the many sacrifices you made and for providing me with the many opportunities that you did not have. I know that my educational achievements would have been an extremely difficult task to accomplish without your guidance and support. You are my biggest cheerleader.

Abstract

Content area teachers are expected to incorporate literacy strategies in their classrooms, despite the fact that all content area teachers do not attend professional learning communities to learn effective literacy strategies. This study is needed because many content area teachers lack the necessary knowledge and skills about literacy to be successful in the classroom.

The goal of this study was to impact 5th grade students' literacy abilities by supporting teacher development by changing their planning, instruction, and assessment practice. This was done by implementing effective research-based strategies in vocabulary instruction, reading and comprehension instruction, writing instruction, and increasing parental involvement to support the home/school literacy connection. The study was a qualitative study so as to provide insight into the participants' thoughts and feelings about content area literacy. The participants participated in a pre-interview, four professional learning sessions, and a post-interview. Data sources included interviews, lesson plans, and anecdotal notes. SPSS Modeler Text Analytics was used to manage the qualitative data. One important finding of this study is the positive impact that professional learning communities have on teachers. It was revealed that teachers feel professional learning communities that focus on content area literacy better prepare them with implementing content literacy strategies in their classrooms. Another important finding this study revealed is that teachers feel that the lack of professional learning communities and time are barriers in successfully implementing content area literacy in their classrooms. The findings of the study have implications for effective professional development opportunities for elementary teachers on implementing content area literacy strategies. Findings from this study support the role of teacher leaders in elementary learning environments.

Keywords: content area literacy, professional development professional learning communities, qualitative study

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Statement of the Problem

In the United States, forty-three percent of adults read at a grade level 8 or lower. Twenty-nine percent of these adults read at an eighth-grade level and the other fourteen percent is at a fifth-grade level or below (Zoukis, 2017). It is crucial that students have access to literacy experiences in every grade and every content area. Research supports that a lack of basic literacy skills is a clear indicator that students may end up in the school-to-prison pipeline (Zoukis, 2017). Schools must address this issue in order to get students to perform on proficient levels and perhaps increase the number of proficient adult readers. Tackling the literacy problem will decrease the school-to-prison pipeline.

Each year, more focus is put on content area literacy. Common Core implementation places more focus on critical thinking and content literacy comprehension. Common Core standards require teachers to implement reading and writing processes across disciplines. Teachers must be able to model these processes and provide students opportunities to practice them. School leaders must be supportive of students and teachers with this effort. School leaders must provide teachers with professional learning opportunities in order for them to gain knowledge and strategies to effectively implement content area literacy in the classrooms. Administrators and teacher leaders must support teachers to ensure that they are able to successfully implement strategies to support content area literacy.

Billions of dollars are spent each year on professional development for teachers in the United States. Researchers examined three large school districts and one network of charter schools to get data on professional development programs. The study revealed that an average of

\$18,000.00 is spent annually per teacher on professional development (The New Teacher Project, 2015). They estimated that eight billion dollars are spent annually on professional development in fifty of the largest school districts (The New Teacher Project, 2015). Although billions of dollars are spent on professional development for teachers, current approaches to teacher training is not having a significant effect on performance.

The focus of this study is to help change teachers' planning, instruction, and assessment practices by providing them with ongoing job-embedded professional development through professional learning communities focused on content area literacy researched-based practices and their impact on student achievement.

Problem on National Level

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) provides a set of frameworks that describe the specific knowledge to be assessed in each subject. At the elementary level, students in grade four participated in this national assessment. In 2017, the NAEP reported that the average reading score of fourth-grade students in 2017 was not significantly different compared to 2015. The NAEP (2017) also reported that lower performing students scored lower in reading in 2017 compared to 2015. In comparison to 2015, the 2017 reading scores were significantly lower for fourth-grade students at the 10th and 25th percentiles. In reading, only 37 percent of fourth-grade students performed at or above the Proficient level in 2017.

The information that NAEP provided proves that there is a need for the nation to address factors that impact content area literacy. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study is an assessment given to fourth-graders in schools around the world every five years. In 2016, the average score in the United States dropped to 549 out of 1,000, compared to 556 in 2011 (Balingit, 2017). In 2011, the United States' ranking fell from fifth to thirteenth with twelve

education systems outscoring the United States significantly. This data indicates that the United States is declining as other education systems increase on assessments. The United States must do a better job of moving students to higher achievement levels.

Problem on State Level

In the spring of 2018, the Georgia Department of Education awarded \$61,579,800.00 to school districts through the *Literacy for Learning, Living, and Leading in Georgia* (L4GA) grant. The grant was awarded through the federal Striving Readers grant competition. This grant offers a unique approach to improving literacy by unifying community-driven action with research-proven instruction. Georgia promises to improve literacy learning by establishing partnerships that improve student learning, teacher learning, classroom literacy instruction, school climate, and community-school partnerships (Georgia Department of Education, 2017). The L4GA plan builds on Georgia's previous Striving Reader's Comprehensive Literacy grant and the Get Georgia Reading Campaign, which is a part of a national campaign. The L4GS plan seeks to improve literacy outcomes across all age ranges within feeder systems.

Georgia's *College and Career Ready Performance Index* (CCRPI) was implemented in 2012. It was an alternative to the *No Child Left Behind's Adequate Yearly Progress*. Recently, Georgia's *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* waiver provided an opportunity to implement a new accountability system that included many measures, provided a more holistic picture of school performance, and addressed several shortcomings of the adequate yearly progress model. The *College and Career Ready Performance Index* was designed with a focus on increasing achievement for all students. Students in grades 3-12 take the Georgia Milestones assessments to generate data required for CCRPI. CCRPI is a tool that measures how well schools, districts, and the state are helping students achieve their goals. The four main

components are: Achievement, Progress, Achievement Gap, and Challenge Points. Performance Flags and Star Ratings are two informational components. Achievement refers to content mastery, post readiness, and graduation rate. The Progress component measures student growth at a typical high level compared to academically-similar students from across the state. Achievement Gap refers to how much progress the lowest-achieving twenty-five percent of students are making and what is the gap between the lowest-achieving twenty-five percent of students and the state average. Challenge Points refers to the student subgroups meeting achievement performance goals. It also measures schools implementation of other practices to prepare students for college and careers. Performance Flags refer to student subgroups meeting state and subgroup targets for participation, performance, and graduation rate. Star Ratings measure the schools' climate and financial expenditures.

The Georgia Milestones is a comprehensive summative assessment program. It measures how well students in grades 3-12 have learned the knowledge and skills outlined in the state-adopted standards in ELA, math, science, and social studies (Georgia Department of Education, 2018). Students in grades 3-8 take the test at the end of the year. Students in grades 9-12 take the test once they complete specified courses.

There has been an increasing need for content area literacy at the elementary level. For the 2018 Georgia Milestones, sixty-eight percent of third-graders were reading at grade level or above. Thirty-two percent of third-graders were reading below grade level. Sixty-three percent of fourth-graders were reading at grade level or above. Thirty-seven percent of fourth-graders were reading below grade level. Seventy percent of fifth-graders were reading at grade level or above. Thirty percent of fifth-grade students were reading below grade level (Georgia Department of Education, 2018). Content area literacy was once associated exclusively with

middle and high school instruction. Now, educators are directing their attention to the importance of incorporating content area literacy instruction at the earliest levels. An emphasis on standardized-test performance, standards-based education, and technology have been three critical factors to create this change (Moss, 2005). Students must be exposed to a variety of texts so that they develop as proficient and advancing readers.

On February 19, 2015, the Georgia State Board of Education voted to rename the English Language Arts and math standards to the Georgia Standards of Excellence. Since then, Social Studies, Science, Physical Education, Fine Arts, and World Languages have fully adopted the Georgia Standards of Excellence. The Georgia Standards of Excellence are inclusive of the Common Core standards. It provides a consistent framework to prepare students for college and the workplace. The Georgia Standards of Excellence require skill-based instruction for reading, speaking, and writing in all subject areas. There is a critical need to focus on literacy in all subject areas because every student must understand the relationship between one's reading ability and their performance in all content areas. Students can learn to read and comprehend if they are given the proper instruction; reading is an acquired skill.

Teachers are expected to plan authentic lessons in all content areas that address vocabulary, comprehension, and writing. Although tasks have the primary function of helping students understand how content and reading can be useful in their lives, authentic tasks have the added benefit of enhancing students' motivation and building academic vocabularies (Parsons & Ward, 2011). Teachers are expected to plan for instruction in the areas of vocabulary instruction, comprehension instruction, and writing instruction in all content areas. Additionally, teachers are expected to increase parental involvement so that they can have a positive impact on their

student's reading abilities. Therefore, teachers' perceptions of content area literacy are vital in the implementation of strategies to ensure students are successful.

It is crucial for school leaders to know teachers' perceptions about the expectations for literacy in all content areas. Administrators and teacher leaders can benefit from knowing the perspectives of teachers in regard to their approach to content area instruction. Effective professional development and professional learning opportunities can have a positive impact on teachers' perceptions of content area literacy instruction.

Problem on Local Level

In 2018, at an elementary school in southeast Georgia with a population of over 31,000 residents, thirty-five percent of third-grade students were reading below grade level on the Georgia Milestones Assessment. Forty-six percent of fourth-grade students were reading below grade level on the Georgia Milestones Assessment. Thirty-one percent of fifth-grade students were reading below grade level on the Georgia Milestones Assessment. The school consisted of approximately 715 students in grades Pre-Kindergarten through Fifth Grade (P-5). Over seventy-four percent of the student population was socioeconomically disadvantaged. A student who is socioeconomically disadvantaged is considered to be at a disadvantage based on their wealth, social resources, education, geographic location, and/or income. The student population was fifty-seven percent African America, thirty-two percent White, five percent Hispanic, and seven percent other.

This study has the potential to improve content area literacy instruction in this school and may improve student achievement on the Georgia Milestones Assessment. In order to plan effective content and establish goals for each focus area of each PLC, teachers' perceptions of the importance of content area literacy instruction must be examined and considered. Teachers

are constantly told to integrate writing, reading, and comprehension in all subjects. However, teachers lack the appropriate professional development experiences that are needed to ensure this is taking place in the classroom.

This study investigated teacher perceptions of content area literacy and sought to provide support through four PLC meetings to support their ability to effectively provide content literacy instruction to students.

Research Questions

In order to gain knowledge about the teachers' perceptions of content area literacy instruction and provide effective professional development through the creation of a professional learning community, the following two research questions will guide this study:

1. What are a 5th grade team of teachers' perceptions of content area literacy instruction and barriers in implementing content area literacy?
2. What are the experiences of creating professional learning communities for elementary teachers that researches and supports the implementation of research-based strategies in vocabulary instruction, reading and comprehension instruction, writing instruction, and increasing parental involvement impact teacher perceptions of content area literacy instruction and potentially impact student achievement?

Purpose and Significance of Study

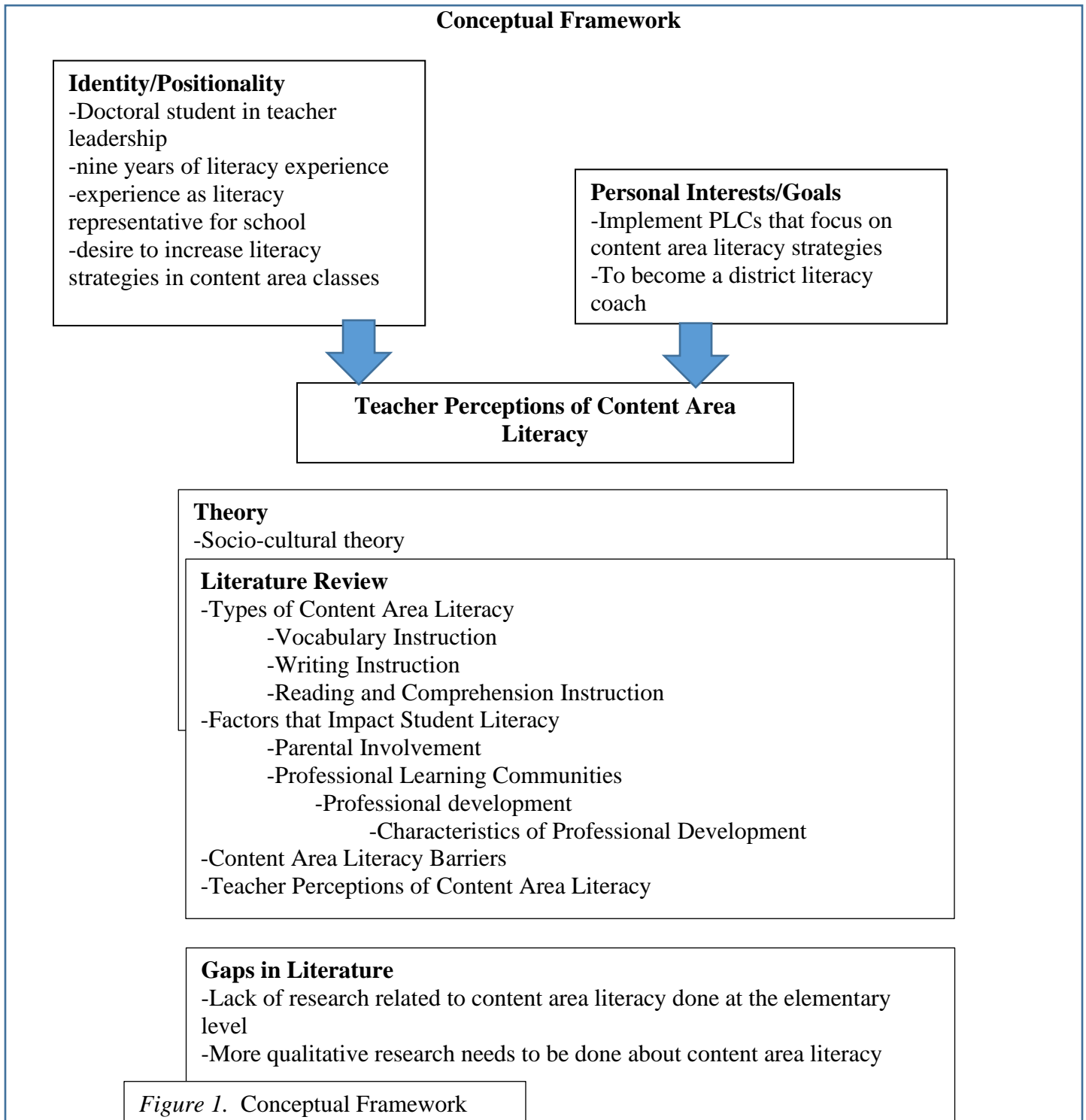
Professional development is needed for teachers to implement effective content area literacy instruction and strategies in their classrooms. Some teachers often reject embedding literacy instruction in their lessons for a variety of reasons. The Georgia Department of Education realizes the need for teacher learning on literacy instruction. They have implemented strategies through the L4GA grant and through the assessment system.

The problem is that many content area teachers lack the necessary knowledge and skills in literacy to be successful in the classroom. Professional learning opportunities that relate to content area literacy is not offered to all teachers. Mostly English Language Arts teachers participate in literacy professional learning communities. However, other content area teachers need to be considered when developing literacy professional learning communities.

This study sought to address improving the content area literacy instruction abilities of teachers through job-embedded and ongoing professional development delivered through the creation of a professional learning community comprised of fifth-grade teachers from all content areas, language arts, math, science, and social studies. The goal of this study was to determine the experiences of fifth-grade content area teacher development through the participation of PLCs.

Figure 1 represents the influence on the design of the study. This study examined teacher perceptions of content area literacy by conducting a pre-interview, leading four professional learning community sessions, and conducting a post-interview. The four professional learning sessions focused on vocabulary instruction, writing instruction, and reading and comprehension instruction. Literacy of students in K-5 settings may be influenced by two factors related to these strategies: parental involvement and professional development. Professional development of teaching involves reviewing teachers' perceptions of content literacy and their experiences with professional development. A recommended method of professional development is professional learning communities. Professional learning communities may affect teachers' instruction of content literacy including the four strategies and their perceptions of content literacy instruction. This study investigated teachers' perception of content literacy as well as

the use of professional learning communities as a part of a professional development instruction practice.



Review of Relevant Terms

Listed below are the terms and definitions that are specific to this study. The definitions provided add clarity and understanding to the information presented in this research paper.

Scaffolding-is when learners begin to internalize the new learning of the lesson, and assistance is gradually withdrawn (Beck & Condy, 2017).

Focus Group Interview- is a qualitative technique for data collection. A focus group is a group comprised of individuals with certain characteristics who focus discussions on a given issue or topic (Anderson, 1990). According to Denscombe (2007) focus group consists of a small group of people, who are brought together by the research to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings and ideas about a topic. A focus group interview provides a setting for the relatively homogeneous group to reflect on the questions asked by the interviewer.

Professional Learning Communities-A group of educators committed to working collaboratively in an ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators.

Professional Development-Planned and purposeful learning that occurs while teachers and administrators engage in their daily work. Participants collaborate with colleagues on professional learning goals, learn by doing, reflect on their experiences and share new insights with one another.

Transformative Learning-Because the learning process involves questioning one's assumptions, beliefs, and values as well as considering alternative perspectives, the learner is significantly changed emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, and politically. Reflective learning

becomes transformative when the previously held assumptions are found to be inauthentic or invalid.

Content Area Literacy- The ability to use reading and writing for the acquisition of new content in a given discipline.

Elementary School- A school for pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and the first five grades.

Organization of Study

This study is presented in five chapters, a reference section, and an appendix. Chapter One is the introduction and includes the statement of the problem, the research questions, the purpose and significance of the study, the local context, the conceptual framework, the review of relevant terms, and the organization of the study. Chapter Two consists of a review of the literature relevant to content-area literacy. Chapter Three consists of the design and methodology. The research questions, the research design, the setting, the overall and sample populations, the instruments, and data collection and analysis procedures are included in this chapter. Chapter Four describes the findings in the qualitative research used in this study to obtain the fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of content area literacy. This chapter includes the data descriptions and data analysis. Chapter 5 includes the discussion and conclusions of the study. It also includes the implications for future research.

Summary

Content area literacy is a major concern in schools across the nation. Teachers must be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to ensure that students are receiving quality literacy instruction in all subjects. It is important to know the teachers' perceptions of content area literacy so that administrators and teacher leaders can get a better understanding in order to provide the needed support. Research proves that professional learning communities are an

effective method to provide the needed support and learning opportunities for teachers. This study provided insight on content area literacy to help the fifth-grade content area teachers be successful.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Literacy development, Literacy instruction and improvement are not vested in one person or an office. It must be a team approach. Administrators must collaborate with teacher leaders in order to fulfill this mission and vision of the school. Many schools are searching for ways to sustain school and literacy improvement. Teachers are the closest professionals to the classroom. Therefore, it is crucial for administrators to support teacher leaders and teacher development when it comes to literacy instruction.

This literature review provided important background knowledge that supported the answering of the research questions.

1. What are a 5th grade team of teachers' perceptions of content area literacy instruction and barriers in implementing content area literacy?
2. What are the experiences of creating professional learning communities for elementary teachers that researches and supports the implementation of research-based strategies in vocabulary instruction, reading and comprehension instruction, writing instruction, and increasing parental involvement impact teacher perceptions of content area literacy instruction and potentially impact student achievement?

In order to get a better understanding of the teachers' perceptions of content area literacy, it was necessary to have a clear understanding of the types of content area literacy instructions. This chapter is organized by the types of content area literacy instruction (vocabulary instruction, writing instruction, and reading and comprehension instruction). Three factors (parental involvement, professionals learning communities, professional development) that impact content

literacy is also included in this chapter. Also in this chapter, the important characteristics of professional development opportunities are explained. Having a clear understanding of these areas will better enable others to understand the importance of teachers' perceptions of content area literacy instruction. Research of two barriers that some teachers encounter is also explained in this chapter. The gaps in the literature are discussed. Finally, the theoretical framework is included in this chapter.

Types of Content Area Literacy

Content area literacy focuses on the ability to use reading and writing to learn content in a subject area. There are different types of content area literacy. This study focused on three types of content area literacy: vocabulary instruction, reading and comprehension instruction, and writing instruction.

Vocabulary Instruction

Vocabulary is the set of words in a language that a person knows and uses; and within the context of reading, these are words that an individual recognizes and comprehends (Barber & Berkeley, 2014). Underdeveloped vocabulary causes students to become unable to support effective reading comprehension and writing (Lesaux & Marietta, 2012). This will have a negative impact on students' overall academic performance. It is highly important that students receive adequate instruction that promotes vocabulary acquisition. The National Reading Panel (2000) recommends that teachers focus on important words (specific academic vocabulary), useful words (high-frequency words), and difficult words (multiple-meaning, idiomatic expressions).

Vocabulary knowledge is emphasized throughout the highly influential Common Core State Standards, with the word vocabulary occurring more than 150 times in the document

(Autenrieth, 2014). When readers know a lot of words, they can read more complex texts. When writers know a lot of words, they can compose more sophisticated documents (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Vocabulary is not limited to the English language arts standards. Content area standards require students to learn new words. In order for students to successfully meet these high standards, they must have significant practice with words. Teachers must realize that vocabulary is not an isolated skill. According to Fisher and Frey (2014), in too many cases, vocabulary instruction is isolated from other aspects of the instructional day, particularly in content area learning. It is far too common to assign students a list of words that will be used in a social studies or science unit and then ask them to look up words and write definitions so that they can then compose solitary sentences. This limited exposure to words and phrased in decontextualized situations has not proven to be effective, nor is it of sufficient intensity.

It is crucial that teachers be very selective with the activities and instructional strategies they use to teach vocabulary. Teachers should use guiding principles when teaching vocabulary. Morrison and Wilcox (2013) recommends that teachers use the Four Es (Experience, Environment, Exposure, and Engagement) of Effective Vocabulary Instruction. Additional guiding principles include students understanding words better when they are related to life experiences, students learning vocabulary words in a meaningful way and ensuring that the context is critical when learning new words. Morrison and Wilcox (2013) believed that children have difficulty comprehending words in isolation. They believed that children should be aware that the sentences, paragraphs, and text structure where the word is found can help them understand what the word means in the place where they read it.

Teachers must be prepared to deliver vocabulary instruction. Fisher & Frey (2014), recommend that teachers attend to four significant components of word learning: wide reading,

selecting words to teach, modeling word solving, and providing students opportunities through collaborative conversations to actually use their growing vocabularies.

One of the main ways that students build their vocabularies is through wide reading. Unfortunately, teachers pay less attention to wide reading and focus their attention on instructional routines (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Expert teachers continue to provide students with opportunities to read independently and provide them with assistance in areas such as monitoring student choices, teaching independent reading behaviors, and maintaining a focus on student growth (Sanden, 2012). Students must be provided with opportunities to read lots of texts so that they can build their background knowledge and vocabulary.

Students need instruction with specific words that will help them better understand complex texts. Teachers must select words and phrases to teach in order to ensure that students are learning words that they are less likely to learn alone (Fisher & Frey, 2014). In order for students to develop a depth of knowledge about words and phrases, teachers must be careful when selecting the words and phrases they will teach in terms of priorities. State standards suggest that students learn general academic and domain-specific words and phrases. General academic words are those that mean different things in different content areas of contexts and they are sometimes neglected (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Domain-specific words must be taught to students because the meaning is consistent.

Students must be taught how to figure out the meanings of unknown words. According to Fisher & Frey (2014) modeling word solving is the best way to teach students this skill. In order to model this skill, teachers should select a text that includes complex vocabulary terms. The text should be read aloud so that the teacher can pause to demonstrate how word solving

works. Modeling word solving should occur across content areas. Word solving occurs through the use of context clues, word parts or morphology, and resources (Fisher & Frey, 2014).

According to Wasik & Iannone-Campbell (2012), students must have time to use the words they are learning in discussions with their teacher and their peers. Students are expected to engage in meaningful discussions that are focused on grade-level texts and topics but they must know many words to do so (Fisher & Frey 2014). Fisher & Frey (2014) recommended several examples to engage students with words that they are learning. The examples include interactive read-alouds, shared readings, collaborative text-based discussions, vocabulary games, and opinion stations.

Vocabulary is crucial in content learning. Teaching vocabulary as an isolated skill undermines the ways students use language as a tool for their learning about the world, therefore, vocabulary instruction should leverage interactions to ensure that students are continually growing in their ability to describe, explain, and query (Fisher & Frey 2014).

Writing Instruction

Though some educators acknowledge the importance of vocabulary instruction in all subjects, it is also important to recognize that writing instruction is crucial also. Significant concerns exist, however, about student writing in all grades, as the results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) consistently show that students are below grade-level proficiency. In a national study of primary grade writing instruction, findings showed considerable variability in teachers' instructional practices (Krause & Zumbrunn, 2012). From finding appropriate strategies that meet students' diverse needs to effectively assessing student writing the complex nature of writing instruction can present a number of challenges for many teachers (Nagin, 2003).

Writing is a crucial skill for all students to develop. Therefore, writing instruction must be a fundamental component of every classroom. Researchers commonly reject the idea that writing is a solitary endeavor and therefore they accept the inherently social nature of writing (Keer and Smedt, 2013). Effective writing skills are considered to be indispensable to participate and communicate in contemporary society. Therefore, education is found accountable for preparing children to be socially active by giving them high-quality writing instruction and by doing so, supporting them to develop essential writing skills (Keer & Smedt, 2013).

From a qualitative study, Krause and Zumbrunn (2012) developed five major themes of effective writing instruction. Effective writing instructors realize the impact of their own writing beliefs, experiences, and practices. Effective writing instruction encourages student motivation and engagement. Effective writing instruction begins with clear and deliberate planning but is also flexible. Effective writing instruction and practice happen every day. Effective writing instruction is a scaffolded collaboration between teachers and students.

Writing instruction should be guided so that every student's individual needs are met. Teachers should combine modeled instruction, direct instruction, guided instruction and independent practice to students so that they can increase their writing skills. To keep track of each student's writing progress, Cohen and Cowen (2011) suggested that teachers use a writing conference record to track the number of conferences he or she has with each student, the date each conference was held, suggestions and praise given, and the goals that the student is currently working on.

Most research suggests that students benefit from writing in all content areas. According to McIver & Urquhart (2005) writing in all content areas enhances critical thinking, allows

students to take greater responsibility for their own learning, promotes reflective thinking and questions, and helps students make connections between events, people, and ideas.

It is important for teachers to schedule writing time as often as possible. Content area classes can be used to help students gather information for their writing (Peterson, 2008). English Language Arts teachers provide focused writing instruction during their literacy block. However, teachers cannot limit writing opportunities to the literacy block if students are expected to succeed (Fisher & Frey, 2013). Writing to learn in math, science, social studies, and the arts, is important for elementary school teachers to take into consideration (Duggan & Knipper, 2006). Elementary teachers should check for understanding through student writing across the content areas. Fisher and Frey (2013) recommended three instructional routines that teachers can use to facilitate student writing across the content areas.

The first instructional routine is power writing: building fluency in composition. Power writing is a method for building writing fluency through brief, timed writing events (Fearn, & Farnan, 2001). Content area teachers can integrate this method into their instruction to build writing fluency. This will allow students to have daily practice with their writing, improve their writing fluency, and think about the content while they are writing. Power writing will allow teachers to assess students' content knowledge and provide them with information about student error patterns (Fisher & Frey, 2013).

The second instructional routine is shared writing: making the composing process visible. Shared writing is used to describe collaborative writing experiences between teachers and students. Shared writing experiences allow students to engage in writing development, organization, and style which are all components of writing (Fisher & Frey, 2013). Shared writing experiences allow students to think about the content and build on their skills.

The third instructional routine is writing from sources to inform and explain. Writing from sources is an important aspect of content area learning. Students use their writing skills to produce pieces of writing that are informative or explanatory; especially in science and social studies (Fisher & Frey, 2013).

In order for students to be successful, they need opportunities to engage in writing tasks in all content areas. It is unfair to expect students to be able to be successful if they are not given opportunities to engage in extended writing tasks. Effective teachers know that building stamina, discussion, and knowledge are integral for developing strong and successful writers (Fisher & Frey, 2013)

Reading and Comprehension Instruction

According to Pullen & Cash (2011), the purpose of reading is to construct meaning from print. The process of constructing meaning from print requires simultaneous proficiency in multiple skills. These skills include the basic skills needed to gain access to print (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency) vocabulary knowledge, and reading comprehension strategies (Barber & Berkeley, 2014). Reading comprehension is an active process that requires focus from the reader before, during, and after reading (Barber & Berkeley, 2014). According to Klingner, Vaughn, & Boardman (2007), reading comprehension is complex and involves many interactions between the reading and the text. It is important that educators understand how good readers approach text because it will provide them with beneficial information to better understand why some students struggle with reading comprehension

The differences in student reading performance become more noticeable as students progress through the grades because the texts that they are expected to read and understand become more complete and demanding (Barber & Berkeley, 2014). It is more evident in content

area classes because a large amount of reading is assigned from textbooks (Wiley, Griffin, & Thiede, 2005). Students are often introduced to many new concepts and terms in textbooks. Research has proven that textbooks are often written well above the students' grade level and are inconsistently organized from chapter to chapter (Armbruster & Nagy, 1992). The authors have made some progress in improving textbooks. Newer textbooks contain introductions to chapters, headings, and subheadings to introduce the content; however, some new textbooks are still written above grade levels (Berkeley, King-Sears, Hott, & Bradley-Black, 2014). Educators must understand the many sides of comprehension instruction to ensure that all of their students are meeting the standards.

Activating prior knowledge is an instructional strategy that teachers can utilize to improve comprehension instruction. Prior knowledge refers to the knowledge, skills, or ability that the students bring to the learning process (Jonassen & Grabowski, 1993). Prior knowledge is used to help readers understand what they are reading and it is important to reading comprehension. Research supports that students who lack a relevant knowledge base do not comprehend text as well as students who do (Goldman & Rakestraw, 2000). Activating prior knowledge helps students make connections to the text they are reading. Students are better able to understand and remember more when they are able to make connections to the text. Teachers can help students with this skill by helping activate their prior knowledge during pre-reading activities.

Questioning is another strategy that teachers can utilize to help improve reading and comprehension instruction. Asking and answering questions throughout the reading process can assist readers to actively engage with a text, self-regulate reading strategies, and understand more of what they read (Berkeley, King-Sears, Vilbas, & Conklin, 2014). Strategies that promote

active text-related questioning are highly effective for improving student comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). Asking and answering students' questions about the text helps engage students in the text.

Understanding the text structure is another strategy that can be used for reading and comprehension instruction. Text structure is the way information in a text is presented (Barber & Berkeley, 2014). Text structure instruction makes the invisible visible so readers can use the content and the structure of the text itself as a tool to enhance understanding, to manipulate their thinking, and revise their existing knowledge, beliefs, and feelings (Keene, 2008). Text structure better helps students construct meaning while reading.

Modeling and guided practice can help students learn new skills strategies. Teachers should model appropriate reading strategies to their students. They should also lead their students through guided practice activities. Metacognitive instruction about how and why we use strategies and guided practices may be more beneficial to the child's progress (Beck & Condy, 2017). Think-aloud is a common modeling technique that is used to model cognitive processing for students. Think-aloud makes the thinking process visible (Farr & Conner, 2004). Guided practice gives students the opportunity to take responsibility for completing reading tasks. Students should be given an opportunity later to practice reading skills independently. Teachers should provide students with constructive feedback. Feedback helps students make connections between effort and performance (Barber & Berkeley, 2014).

Comprehension requires the reader to metacognitively combine the meanings of individual words into a coherent sentence, and then assimilate multiple sentences to create an understanding of the text (McNamara, 2011). Teachers must implement multiple strategies to ensure that students are given many opportunities to improve their reading comprehension skills.

Duke and Block (2012) emphasize predictive, questioning, visualizing, drawing inferences and summarizing as effective metacognitive strategies.

Metacognitive strategies should be incorporated into teachers' reading and comprehension instruction. Metacognitive strategies focus on how students select, monitor and use strategies to help them understand the text. According to Barber and Berkeley (2014), there are several areas that are important to address through explicit instruction in order to promote metacognition. They include: teaching students how to use reading comprehension strategies, teaching students how to use comprehension, teaching students when to use comprehension strategies, teaching students to self-regulate their use of comprehension strategies. Students should also be taught how to monitor their reading and comprehension.

Instructional practices when working with comprehension support explicit teaching as opposed to implicit teaching of reading (Prado & Plourde, 2011). Teachers who attempt to transfer reading strategies are actually testing rather than teaching these strategies (Prado & Plourde, 2011). When teachers use explicit teaching methods instead of implicit teaching methods, they provide reasons and purposes for the texts that they utilize. Explicit reading strategies help improve students reading comprehension skills. Teachers who explicitly teach effective literacy behaviors and who model critical reading and writing skills help learners who come from homes where this is not provided (Beck & Condy, 2017).

Factors that Impact Student Literacy

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement has been shown to be an important variable that positively influences a child's education. More and more schools are observing the importance and are encouraging families to become more involved (Khajehpour, 2011). Parents must not allow the

teacher to be solely responsible for educating their child but they should work with the teacher and incorporate what is being taught in the classroom with daily activities at home. This action would reinforce what the teacher teaches and will let the child know that the parents and the teacher are working together as a team. One of the best known and most obvious ways for parents and schools to work together is through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). An active PTA benefits children and their schools by providing connections, resources, and opportunities for school improvement (Hallford, 2012). Parent-teacher associations have positive effects on parental involvement. Schools should have associations and communities set up to encourage parental involvement. However, it can be a challenge for schools, especially those in urban areas with poor families and at-risk students, to encourage their parents to join the PTA. While challenging, it is possible for schools with limited parental involvement to increase parental participation and establish a stronger school community (Hallford, 2012). Schools should meet and discuss ways to improve parental participation and decrease negative factors that communities may have on schools.

Parental involvement includes not only direct involvement in schools, such as volunteering in classrooms and attending school parent-teacher conferences, but also indirect or hidden behaviors, such as discussing school and family issues and conveying educational expectations (Hayes, 2012). Many parents do not understand exactly what parental involvement is. If school leaders inform the parents on what parental involvement is and explain that parental involvement is not only being active in the classroom but also includes being active in their child's education, parental involvement will increase dramatically. Parents are their children's first educator, and they remain their life-long teachers (Duncan & Rapp, 2011). As babies grow older they do things that they observe their parents do and as they grow older, parents teach them

how to do many things. Findings have demonstrated that a parent's involvement in the education of their children has been found to be of benefit to parents, children, and schools (Khajehpour, 2011). Parents' involvement in their children's education develops a working relation and line of communication for the parents and the child. A bond is created and the parents and children learn to have confidence in each other and in themselves. The children are convinced that education is important and they strive to do their best. The schools benefit because what is being taught at school is being reiterated at home and the educators' job is made easier.

The Common Core State Standards increased attention on writing, speaking and listening, and language in the English Language Arts curriculum. Some teachers and parents had been concerned that these important aspects of literacy were being overshadowed by the emphasis on reading instruction in recent years. With the rigorous standards and increased expectations of students and teachers, it is crucial for teachers and parents to build relationships that are supportive of the students learning needs. Students must not only be given the opportunity to learn at school, but they must also be given the opportunity to learn at home. Many parents are unsure how the new standards affect their children's education. Teachers must not assume that parents know. They must inform and educate parents about the things that are affecting their children's education. When teachers share beneficial information with parents, it helps support children's learning. Once students learn to apply strategies at school, teachers may want to assign students to go home and demonstrate the strategy to a parent or family member. By doing so, students will get extra practice. Parents should not be expected to introduce new skills to students. It is the teachers' responsibility to teach students specific skills and strategies before students go home and attempt to practice them.

Parental involvement is different from culture to culture and society to society. Parental involvement has different types which impact the differential influence on the academic performance of their children. Parental involvement may also include activities like helping children in reading, encouraging them to do their homework independently, monitoring their activities inside the house and outside the four walls of their house, and providing coaching services for improving their learning in different subjects (Chhapra, 2013). It is crucial that educators get the best understanding of parental involvement in order to break the cycle of no parental involvement. We must gain a better understanding of the different things that affect parental involvement. Parental involvement is different from culture to culture and society to society. We must find ways to accommodate parents and encourage them to get involved in their child's education.

Effective Professional Learning Communities

In addition to studies on effective literacy instruction, existing literature on professional learning communities was researched. Professional learning communities or PLCs refer to a group of educators committed to working collaboratively in an ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators. The premise, the purpose, the promise of the professional learning community is the learning of the professionals of the staff – in schools, those certified, responsible, and accountable for delivering an effective instructional program for all students (Easton, 2011). The collective and interdependent work of educators at multiple levels, who are driving forward the innovative work, creates and sustains successful professional learning communities (Harris & Jones, 2011). Effective professional learning

communities are essential to effective professional development and evolve by focusing on the best interests of the students. Professional learning communities that operate in this manner are catalysts for growth and positive change.

Professional learning communities are implemented in many schools because of the increased emphasis on accountability. School districts around the country are implementing PLCs in order to help support teachers by identifying instructional strategies to meet the learning needs of students. School leaders know that it takes more than just attending workshops to effectively implement PLCs. It is crucial for administrators and teacher leaders to create an atmosphere that supports collegiality. This contributes to the success of the professional learning community. The isolation model of teaching must be traded for a more collaborative model. Professional learning communities move teachers away from working alone to increase student achievement. Teachers are moving from the tradition of isolation to a culture of collaboration (DuFour, 2008). According to DuFour (2008), educators create an environment that fosters shared understanding, a sense of identity, high levels of involvement, mutual cooperation, collective responsibility, emotional support, and a strong sense of belonging when they work together to achieve goals that they cannot accomplish alone. According to Thessin and Starr (2011) when implementing PLCs system-wide, districts play the following four key roles: ownership and support, professional development, clear improvement process, and differentiated support. Districts must involve teachers and administrators in developing and leading the PLC process and must teach administrators and teachers how to work together effectively in PLCs. Districts must show stakeholders how PLCs fit into the district's improvement process, so each PLC's work fits into an overall plan. Districts must lend support to schools according to their unique needs in order to help them move to the next step in their PLC growth. It would seem

sensible that educators would derive some rather clear understandings of the three words of the PLC label: *professionals* are those certified or licensed to do an established system of work; *community* is a group of individuals who share common goals; and these professionals meet in their community to focus on learning (Easton, 2011).

The learning that takes place in a PLC is intended to impact students' learning. Teachers participate in PLCs to learn ways to become more effective in their classrooms. Professional learning communities provide the needed support that will ensure that teachers grow professionally and form networks that will benefit them and their students (Weiser, 2012). Students and teachers reap positive benefits when professional learning communities are successful. Professional learning communities provide teachers the opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues and focus on the progress of students. Easton (2011) described 12 qualities of powerful professional learning, which are distinguishable from professional development. Powerful professional learning arises from and returns benefits to the real world of teaching and learning, requires the collection, analysis and presentation of real data, and begins with what will really help people learn. Powerful professional learning also results in application in the classroom, is content-rich, and the learning experiences may not formally end. Additionally, powerful professional learning honors the professionalism, expertise, experiences, and skills of staff. It establishes a culture of quality and is also collaborative or has collaborative aspects to it. It results in "buy-in" because it utilizes the talent within. Powerful professional learning designs the activities that make professional learning communities (PLCs) more than just a structure.

Effective Professional Development

Although professional learning communities are critical, effective professional development during professional learning communities is just as important. Educators must be a

part of a professional learning community that addresses their professional developmental needs. Students and teachers are being held to higher standards established by specialists and societies. Professional development provides teachers with opportunities to enhance their skills through additional training in order to meet expectations (Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015). Effective professional development should have a positive impact on teachers' knowledge and practice. As a result, it will have a positive impact on students' learning. Professional development opportunities for teachers should be more student-focused. This change has brought professional learning communities to the forefront of professional development and gives teachers the opportunities to successfully transition their teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2009). Professional development is one of the major ways to improve the quality of education. Professional development is planned and purposeful learning that occurs while teachers and administrators engage in their daily work. Participants collaborate with colleagues on professional learning goals, learn by doing, reflect on their experiences and share new insights with one another. According to Darling-Hammond (2009), teachers who work together during professional learning activities cultivate change in the school that spreads outside of their classroom.

Many education reforms rely on teacher learning – and the improved instruction that ideally follows – to increase student learning, so understanding what makes professional development effective is critical to understanding the success or failure of school reform (Desimone, 2011).

The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 described high-quality professional development as activities that improve and increase teachers' knowledge of the academic subjects that teachers teach, that are sustained and intensive, and that are aligned with and directly related to state academic content standards, student academic achievement standards, and assessments

(Desimone, 2011). Teachers must be given multiple opportunities to apply their learning to their practice. This does not take place overnight. Instead, it takes place over an extended period of time. Professional development should be intensive and sustained. Intensive and sustained professional development sessions have a greater impact on teachers' practices.

The need for professional development is evident. The constant changes in educational reforms require teachers to acquire new skills and strategies. Professional development allows teachers to improve their teaching practices and acquire instructional strategies. Teachers need must be taken into account in order to achieve positive educational reform (Templeton & Tremont, 2014). Professional development allows teachers to acquire a deeper understanding of the subject areas taught (Lawless & Pelligrino, 2007).

Professional development has changed throughout the years. In the past, professional development opportunities included an expert speaker presenting information on a particular topic as teachers listened and absorbed the information (Desimone, 2009). Teachers returned to their classrooms and implemented the information alone. This type of professional development workshops was ineffective. This method failed in schools and was not proven to be impactful (Nishimura, 2014).

It is important that administrators and teacher leaders know the characteristics of successful professional development workshops. Effective professional development has been proven to increase teachers' knowledge and change their teaching practices (Stewart, 2014). Darling-Hammond (2017) identified seven characteristics of an effective professional development. An effective professional development is content-focused, incorporates active learning utilizing adult learning theory, supports collaboration (typically) in job-embedded contexts, uses models and modeling of effective practice, provides coaching and expert support,

offers opportunities for feedback and reflection, and includes sustained duration (Darling-Hammond (2017).

A leader must have a solid understanding of the characteristics of an effective professional development. Content focus, active learning, collaboration, use of models and modeling, coaching and expert support, feedback and reflection, sustained duration, teacher development, and teacher change must be highly considered when providing educators with a professional development opportunity.

Content Focus

Content focus addresses the content that is taught during professional development. This allows teachers to connect theories to their practices. The inclusion of and attention to specific strategies to teach content when working with specific student populations is a key principle of effective professional development (Bates & Morgan, 2018).

Professional learning should focus on the content that teachers teach. Content-focused professional development should be job-embedded so that professional development is specific to the teachers' classrooms with their students (Darling-Hammond, 2017). This type of professional development allows teachers the opportunity to assess their students' work, test out new curriculum with their students, or study a particular element of pedagogy or student learning in the content area (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Professional development should be aligned with the school and district initiatives. This ensures that teachers are provided coherence as opposed to attending professional development workshops that are different from the school and district initiative.

Active Learning

Professional development sessions require teachers to be actively involved in their learning. The learning should be meaningful so that teachers are engaged more with the content. Teachers should be engaged in interactive experiences rather than traditional lectures. Bates and Morgan (2018) recommends that these experiences include examining student artifacts, using materials that teachers implement in their classrooms, engaging in lessons that teachers could use with their students, and participating in or leading model lessons. This would allow teachers the opportunity to question and reflect on their practices.

Facilitators of professional development experiences must consider how teachers learn. Trotter (2006) identified three themes that are relevant for designing teacher professional development. The themes are: adults come to learning with experiences that should be utilized as resources for new learning, adults should choose their learning opportunities based on interest and their own classroom needs, and reflection and inquiry should be central to learning and development. These themes are a general framing that helps explain why professional development that incorporates active learning experiences is successful in supporting student learning and growth. Active learning in professional learning experiences engage teachers in the practices they are learning and are connected directly to teachers' classrooms and students (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Active learning supports collaboration, coaching, feedback, and reflection and the use of models and modeling (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Active learning experiences allow teachers to transform their teaching.

Collaboration

Collaboration supports professional development sessions. Vygotsky's research supports the idea that there is power in social learning. Relationships built on trust will support teachers during professional development sessions. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012)

conversely, a lack of time can lead to a sense of contrived collegiality. Teachers must be given adequate time to dig deeply into issues discussed during professional development sessions.

Collaboration is an important aspect of professional development. Collaboration can span from one-to-one or small-group interactions to schoolwide collaboration to exchanges with other professionals beyond the school (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Research supports that collaboration as a model of professional development impacts instructional practice and improves student achievement outcomes. When collaboration is included in professional development experiences, teachers collaborate in the development of instruction, assessments, and seek ways to determine essential learning outcomes. Collaboration in professional development workshops establishes a culture of learning for the adults that elevates the importance of reflection upon professional practice. The National Staff Development Council (2005) considers teacher collaboration the foundational element of any successful professional development effort and asserts that staff development that improves learning for all students organizes adults into learning communities (Gajda & Koliba, 2008).

Use of Models and Modeling

Bates and Morgan (2018) argued that teachers benefit from seeing instructional practices in action. They also believe that teachers can benefit from working directly with curricular materials. Modeling is beneficial to teachers. Modeling allows teachers to envision what an effective practice of the skill will look like in the classroom.

According to Darling-Hammond (2017), professional development that utilizes models of effective practice is successful at promoting teacher learning and supporting student achievement. The use of models and modeling allows teachers to have a vision of practice for their own learning and growth. Modeling can include: video or written case of teaching,

demonstration lessons, unit or lesson plans, observations of peers, and curriculum materials (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Kleickmann (2016) found that teachers who utilized educational curriculum materials alone had lower student achievement than the teachers who had access to materials and expert support combined with collaborative active learning opportunities.

Students are at a disadvantage when their teachers attempt to utilize curriculum materials without effective professional development supporting them.

Coaching and Expert Support

Coaches and experts serve a crucial role in professional development sessions. Coaches, leaders, and experts can create meaningful learning opportunities for teachers by providing them with learning strategies, opportunities to collaborate, and discussion and experiences related to their content. Experts don't mean that they know everything. Coaches who view their role as tentative and adopt a co-learner stance assist teachers in seeing multiple possibilities when making decisions (Bean & DeFord, 2012). These individuals can also provide teachers with meaningful coaching sessions and feedback. Contextualizing and personalizing coaching and support guarantees that actual problems of practice are addressed (Bates and Morgan, 2018).

A common way experts provide support is through one-on-one coaching. Coaches and experts also share their knowledge as facilitators of workshops or as mentors. Teachers who receive coaching are more likely to enact desired teaching practices and apply them more appropriately than the teachers who receive more traditional professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2017). This supports the idea that coaches and experts have a crucial role in professional development.

Feedback and Reflection

Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) agreed that professional development opportunities should include time for teachers to think about, receive input on, and make a change to their practice. Constructive feedback is beneficial to all. Reflecting is part of receiving feedback. Being a reflective practitioner means a number of things, but connecting feedback and reflection in a symbiotic way can deepen learning (Bates & Morgan, 2018). A reflective practitioner demonstrates professional knowledge, efficient assessment use and communicates effectively. Reflection is necessary for teachers to reflect on their teaching methods and strategies in order to improve the way they deliver instruction to the student. All elements of a reflective practitioner impact students' learning. Educators must reflect on experiences and face new encounters with better skills and techniques. In order to be an active reflective practitioner, an educator must be willing to learn new things. They should research new methods and stay familiar with modern technology and teaching methods. Good educators not only consider themselves as a teacher but as a life learner. Persistent reflective practitioners are willing to take challenges. Difficult issues do not intimidate them but instead, they are willing and committed to thinking through difficult issues. Teaching can be very challenging at times but the rewards, in the end, are worth it. All teachers should have a goal to see their students meet or succeed standards. Reaching this goal is not easy so teachers should be willing to work and think through a challenge to help students reach their goals.

Additionally, reflective practitioners must be rational and proactive. Reflective practitioners do not act on assumptions. Instead, they request data and evidence and analyze it to formulate judgments. They are able to reflect on issues in the classroom and become proactive. Professional knowledge is an important component of being a reflective practitioner. A person must demonstrate an understanding of the curriculum, subject content, pedagogical knowledge,

and the needs of students by providing relevant learning experiences in order to be considered a reflective practitioner. Reflective practitioners are masters in their subjects. They never stop learning about their subjects and remain curious. When a teacher is curious about things related to his/her subject, he/she will continue to research and learn more about the subject. This will have a positive impact on students' learning and achievement.

Another critical component of a reflective practitioner is communication. It is listed that reflective practitioners must communicate effectively with students, parents or guardians, district and school personnel, and other stakeholders in ways that enhance student learning.

Communication with colleagues and parents is very important. Effective communication can also increase parental involvement.

Constructive feedback and reflections are beneficial components in effective professional development. Professional development models associated with gains in student learning frequently provide build-in time for teachers to think about, receive input on and make changes to their practice by providing intentional time for feedback and/or reflection (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Feedback and reflection provide opportunities for teachers to share positive and constructive reactions to teacher practices. Professional development that includes opportunities for teachers to reflect and provide feedback creates richer environments for teachers.

Sustained Duration

Effective professional development requires time. Meaningful professional learning that creates change in practices cannot be accomplished in short, one-off workshops. Professional development that is sustained has a greater chance of transforming teaching practice and student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2017). The duration of professional development appears to be associated with a stronger impact on teachers and student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2009).

Sustained efforts usually include applications to practice and are supported by coaches. When teachers return to professional development settings, they have the opportunities to refine and apply their understanding of content in their classrooms.

A sustained focus over time is a hallmark of effective professional development and should be considered in terms of weeks, months and years (Bates & Morgan, 2018).

Professional development should be on-going so that teachers are allowed to engage in continuous learning.

Teacher Development

Research suggested that sustained and intense teacher development programs increase student achievement. In order for teacher leaders to help build teachers' skills, they must have a broad understanding of the field of teacher development. The information taught and learned in schools depends on the curriculum and the teachers who implement the curriculum. Teachers bring different knowledge, skills, and theories to the classroom that influence their teaching. Several factors (policies, resources, reforms, etc.) influence teachers' practices and teacher development is one of them.

Teacher development is on-going, includes training, practice and feedback, and provides adequate time and follow-up support. The development of teachers should increase teachers' knowledge of a subject in light of recent advances. It should also update teachers' skills, attitudes, and approaches to new teaching strategies

Teacher development is impacted by historical, social and cultural contexts. The language in which a school's curriculum is communicated is defined and shaped by historical and cultural processes (Cable, 2005). There is not a "correct" way of teaching and learning. Approaches to pedagogy are defined based on social and cultural factors. There are several

factors that affect the degree to which learners feel they can identify with what is being taught. Some of the factors include the content of the curriculum, language, and pedagogic approaches.

Teacher Change

The progressive period was a social movement that turned into a political movement. During this time, many people believed that problems (such as poverty, racism, violence, etc.) could be addressed by providing people with a good education, safe environments, and jobs. During the “progressive period” many progressive reformers believed that “good ideas would travel of their own volition” into schools and classrooms. However, Sputnik was the cause of a large-scale reform in the United States in the 1960s. Pressure and incentives to become innovative caused many schools to adopt reforms that they did not have the resources to put into practice. The innovations were adopted on the surface level, with some of the language and structures becoming altered, but not the practice of teaching (Fullan, 2016). The various forms of civil rights movements also were major forces for reform. Education was considered a major vehicle in reducing social inequality. In 1983, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) called for a system change. This book claimed that the education system was characterized by a rising tide of mediocrity. It also condemned schools for not adequately teaching students. This caused several educational reforms. In 2002, President Bush signed a legislation titled “No Child Left Behind.” This legislation puts emphasis on all children, testing, and consequences. However, it did not provide information on how to accomplish these goals. Decades of school reform and legislation have many school districts implementing professional learning communities as an effective way to meet the needs of teachers and students.

Change may take place because it is imposed on us or because we voluntarily participate in it. Also, change is often initiated when we find dissatisfaction, inconsistency, or intolerability in a situation (Fullan, 2016). The classroom press is basically a situation that influence teachers. These situations affect teachers because they isolate them from other adults, exhaust their energy and limit their opportunities for sustained reflection.

Some educators do not understand the nature of educational change. They often do not perceive educational change as multidimensional. In order to implement educational change, one must change his/her practice. According to Harland & Kinder (1997), there are at least three components at stake in implementing any new program or change. The three components are: the possible use of new or revised materials, new teaching approaches, and the alteration of beliefs.

A policy driver brings about positive change in a system. A wrong driver is a policy that does not impact a system in a positive way. Fullan (2016) suggested four criteria to determine the effectiveness of a driver. He suggested fostering intrinsic motivation of teachers and students, supporting continuous improvement of instruction and learning, encouraging collective endeavors or teamwork, and affecting all teachers and students 100 %. Right drivers consist of collaborative work, pedagogy, systemness and capacity building for results.

Wrong drivers consist of external accountability, individual teacher and leadership quality, technology, and fragmented strategies. When a system seeks successful change, it is crucial for the stakeholders to ensure that positive guidelines are embedded in the process of change. Fullan (2016) recommended six guidelines for this process. He recommended defining closing the gap as the overarching goal, recognizing that all successful strategies are socially based and action oriented-change by doing rather than change by elaborate planning, assuming

that lack of capacity is the initial problem and then work on it continuously, staying the course through continuity of good direction by leveraging leadership, building internal accountability linked to external accountability and establishing condition for the evolution of positive pressure.

Content Area Literacy Barriers

The factors that affect student literacy achievement must continue to be addressed. However, it is crucial that the barriers that hinder teachers from successfully implementing content area literacy strategies are also addressed. There are several barriers affecting teachers' ability to implement content area literacy in the classroom. Two of the barriers are teachers' beliefs and lack of effective professional learning communities.

Teachers' beliefs are a barrier that affects the implementation of content area literacy strategies. The decisions that content area teachers make about what to teach and how to teach it often depends on their beliefs; despite the amount of knowledge that they may have, their beliefs more than likely dictate their actions in their classrooms (Hall, 2005). Some teachers believe that it is the responsibility of English Language Arts teachers to incorporate literacy strategies. Content area teachers believe that literacy instruction falls mainly on English Language Arts teachers (Boon, 2008).

Some teachers reference the lack of effective professional learning communities as a barrier in implementing content area literacy strategies in the classroom. A study, that included over 10,000 teachers, took place in a large school district in the United States. It indicated that districts spend over \$18,000 per teacher annually on professional development. However, teachers didn't feel that the professional development positively influenced their teaching or their students' learning (The New Teacher Project, 2015). Effective professional learning communities provide teachers with the necessary tools they need to work together (Muirhead,

2009). Effective professional learning communities have the potential to positively impact teachers and student achievement (Many, 2008). However, teachers must be given adequate time to collaborate and participate in professional learning communities. The lack of time given to teachers during professional learning communities damages the possible positive influence of the professional learning community (Brasfield, 2012). Barriers must be addressed in order to better support teachers' implementation of content area literacy strategies.

Teacher Perceptions on Content Area Literacy

Research suggests that some teachers perceive responsibility for teaching literacy within their content, but that some teachers do not feel like they are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the literacy needs of their students (Delany, 2005). Research also revealed that content area teachers have more confidence in their specific subject, but do not have confidence in their knowledge or abilities to integrate literacy instruction into their content areas or address students' literacy needs (Greenleaf, 2001).

Based on research, some content area teachers believe that the English Language Arts teachers should teach literacy because they do not teach other content areas such as math, science, and social studies (Hall 2005). Some teachers feel so strong about literacy being the responsibility of the English Language Arts teacher they chose to teach other subjects such as math, science, and social studies (Hall, 2005).

Gaps in Literature

With the push toward implementing literacy in all content areas, it is imperative to address the gap between the research and practice. There needs to be more done in the methodology and participants part of the research to help close the gap in the successful implementation of content area literacy in schools. This study helps fill the gap because this

study focuses on using qualitative methods to interview teachers to get a better understanding of their perceptions of content area literacy. The interviews allowed the researcher to get an understanding of the content area literacy needs of the teachers and plan professional learning community sessions to address the needs. The study also focuses on fifth-grade teachers. Most literature focused on secondary education teachers. However, more elementary teachers need to be included in studies because many elementary schools are departmentalized. Departmentalized means that teachers are focusing on one specific subject.

Theoretical Framework

Socio-Cultural Theory

One of the goals of this study was to help improve teachers' knowledge of content literacy so that it can have a positive impact on students. It is crucial that teachers understand how students learn. Social interactions, which take place in the child's immediate and external environment, play a significant role in the child's development and allow children the opportunity to acquire knowledge and develop processes. To benefit optimally from such interactions and problem-solving experiences, a learner should be actively involved in the process (Beck & Condy, 2017). Santrock (2011) explains that the importance of social influences on children's cognitive development is reflected in Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The Zone of Proximal Development is the gap between what students can do independently and what they can do with guidance.

Scaffolding is when learners begin to internalize the new learning of the lesson, and assistance is gradually withdrawn (Beck & Condy, 2017). Scaffolding should be used in order to help students gain independency. The purpose of scaffolding is to help students acquire

knowledge and skills they would not have learned on their own. As the students demonstrate mastery of the content, the learning aids are faded and removed (Beck & Condy, 2017).

According to Desimone (2011), professional development follows four steps. Step one: teachers experience professional development. Step two: the professional development increases teachers' knowledge and skills, changes their attitudes and beliefs, or both. Step three: teachers use their new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs to improve the content of their instruction, their approach to pedagogy, or both. Step four: the instructional changes that the teachers introduce to the classroom boost their students' learning. This framework is powerful because it lays a strong foundation to determine if a professional development is effective. This framework allows us to determine if a professional development allows teachers to learn, change their practices and if it increases student achievement.

Transformative Learning Theory

Change is inevitable in the educational world. Teachers must be committed to being life-learners because the education field requires them to continuously learn, grow and adapt to new techniques, strategies, content standards, and curriculums. Adult learning theories provide a framework for understanding how adults learn. These theories provide researchers with information on how to better provide professional learning to meet the needs of teachers at all phases of their careers. Knowledge of adult learning strategies can better help teacher leaders be more effective in their practice when meeting the needs of their teacher learners.

Because the learning process involves questioning one's assumptions, beliefs, and values as well as considering alternative perspectives, the learner is significantly changed emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, and politically. Reflective learning becomes transformative when the previously held assumptions are found to be inauthentic or invalid. The theory of transformative

learning was first proposed by Mezirow based on research involving women returning to education. It uses a constructionist philosophy, suggesting that learners make meaning from their experiences of the social context (Cox, 2015).

Instead of focusing on adult learners' characteristics, transformative learning focuses on the cognitive process of meaning-making. This type of learning is considered an adult learning theory because transformative learning is dependent on adult life experiences and a more mature level of cognitive functioning than found in childhood (Merriam, 2014). When adults learn, it is more than just gaining new knowledge and information. Adults must understand and make sense of the learning experience so that they can make a change in their beliefs, attitudes and/or perspectives. Transformational learning theory requires adults to be willing to change their perspectives.

From an examination of current beliefs, the learner moves to explore new ways of dealing with the dilemma which may lead to a change in a belief, attitude, or an entire perspective. The new perspective is more inclusive and accommodating of a wider range of experiences than the previously-held perspective (Merriam, 2014).

Additionally, I consider myself as a transformational leader. Transformational leaders work to inspire their followers to be creative. They're more concerned with the needs of their followers. They tend to focus on positive change and consider everyone's needs as a whole. Transformational leaders help their followers by creating new ways of solving problems.

The Relationship to Teacher Leadership

The Aspen Institute (2014) described the need for teacher leaders as effective teacher leadership marries form with function in order to create transformative change in schools. Function means that the teacher leadership initiatives are not created for their own sake but are

designed to advance other pressing priorities. Form means that the teacher leader roles are clearly defined, with sufficient time, support, and resources to be effective.

It is crucial that conditions are supportive so that teacher leaders can increase the potential for success. Administrators must create conditions for successful teacher leadership in their schools that focus on a healthy culture and supportive structure. Killion (2016) identified the following factors that contribute to a healthy culture in schools: relational trust, collective responsibility, commitment to continuous development, recognition and celebrations, and autonomy. He also identified the following factors as key supportive structures: a comprehensive plan for teacher leadership, role changes, preparation, support and supervision, district policies and procedures, and opportunities to lead.

Summary

Many educational reforms rely on teachers learning and improving their instruction. Administrators must collaborate with teachers and provide them with opportunities to improve the school. Content area literacy is directly impacted by students' vocabulary, writing, reading and comprehension abilities. Teachers must provide literacy instruction in all subjects to ensure that students are improving their students' vocabulary, writing, reading and comprehension abilities. Appropriate activities and instructional strategies must be used in order to properly address the students' needs.

Effective professional learning communities can provide the teachers at the school with continuous, job-embedded learning opportunities to positively impact content area literacy. Teachers must be provided with appropriate professional development to enhance their skills and increase their knowledge. Professional development helps cultivate change that will increase student learning. In order to successfully participate in professional learning communities and

professional development sessions, teachers must embrace change. Teachers must be willing to change their practice and implement the new skills and strategies that they acquire in professional learning sessions.

Current literature discussed topics and implications correlated with content area literacy and professional learning communities. It is widely agreed that literacy should be incorporated in all subject areas and that professional development is beneficial to teachers. Research proves that students reach higher achievement levels when literacy skills are implemented in all subjects. However, a problem that schools face is the successful implementation of content area literacy skills in all classrooms due to content area teachers' lack of professional knowledge of literacy skills.

Further research is needed on how professional learning communities directly affect teachers' abilities to incorporate content area literacy strategies in the classroom. Additional studies are needed to reinforce the effectiveness of all teachers participating in meaningful professional learning communities that focus on content area literacy. Too often math, science and social studies teachers do not participate in professional learning communities that focus on literacy. Although research supports that literacy is the responsibility of all content area teachers, it is often associated with English Language Arts teachers. This indicates the need for additional research on teachers' knowledge of content area literacy and how it directly impacts all content areas.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The focus of this study was to help change teachers' planning, instruction, and assessment practices by providing them with ongoing job-embedded professional development through professional learning communities focused on content area literacy researched-based practices and their impact on student achievement.

In order to gain knowledge about the teachers' perceptions of content area literacy instruction and provide effective professional development through the creation of a professional learning community, the following two research questions guided this study.

1. What are a 5th grade team of teachers' perceptions of content area literacy instruction and barriers in implementing content area literacy? Research question one was measured qualitatively through a focus group pre-interview and post-interview with the 5th grade team of teachers regarding their perceptions of content area literacy instruction.
2. What are the experiences of creating professional learning communities for elementary teachers that researches and supports the implementation of research-based strategies in vocabulary instruction, reading and comprehension instruction, writing instruction, and increasing parental involvement impact teacher perceptions of content area literacy instruction and potentially impact student achievement? Research question two was measured qualitatively through the systematic collection of agenda/research focus/strategy focus/goals/minutes for each PLC session.

Research Design

Research designs are either classified as qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. Qualitative and quantitative research approaches are based on divergent theories and assumptions that one should be more advantageous than the other and vice-versa; depending on the nature of research and data collection methods (Daniel, 2016). Rajaskear (2013) described research methodology as the procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining, and predicting phenomena. The focus of this study was to help change teachers' planning, instruction, and assessment practices by providing them with ongoing job-embedded professional development through professional learning communities.

The nature of this study was a qualitative study. Qualitative methods are used to answer questions about experience, meaning and perspective from the view of the participants. Qualitative research techniques include small-group discussions for investigating beliefs, attitudes and concepts of behavior, semi-structured interviews, to seek views on a focused topic or, with key informants, for background information or an institutional perspective, in-depth interviews to understand a condition, experience, or event from a personal perspective (Hammarberg, 2016).

The use of a qualitative research method through focus group interviews and the collection of data from professional learning community sessions allowed me to develop a better understanding of the participants' perceptions of content area literacy. Researchers need participants who are willing to speak and share their experiences (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative data collection began with the pre-interview that consisted of structured and unstructured questions. This allowed me to get an understanding of the participants' perceptions before they participated in the professional learning community sessions. Qualitative data collection

continued with the collection of the agendas and notes from the professional learning community sessions. The post-interviews allowed me to collect qualitative data to get a better understanding of the participants' perceptions at the end of the study.

Berg and Howard (2012) characterize qualitative research as meanings, a concept, a definition, metaphors symbols and a description of things. This definition shows that qualitative research contains all necessary instruments that can evoke recall which aids problem-solving (Daniel, 2016). Qualitative data instruments such as observation, open-ended questions, in-depth interviews, and field notes are used to collect data from participants in their natural settings (Daniel 2016). This approach provides the researcher with data about real-life people and situations.

Setting

The setting of the study was an elementary school in a city with a population of over 31,000 residents in the southeastern region of Georgia. The school consisted of approximately 715 students in grades P-5. Over 74% of the student population was socioeconomically disadvantaged. A student who is socioeconomically disadvantaged is considered to be at a disadvantage based on their wealth, social resources, education, geographic location, and/or income. The student population was 57.3% African America, 31.7% White, 4.5% Hispanic, and 6.5% other.

Overall and Sample Populations

Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants. Purposeful sampling was used based on my professional acquaintance with them and the participants' availability, their willingness to participate and communicate throughout the research. Purposeful sampling is often used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for

the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of inquiry (Patton, 2015). Availability, willingness to participate, the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner is important in purposeful sampling (Bernard, 2002).

The research participants included four fifth grade teachers. All of the teachers are employed at the same school. Participant 1 is a white female with over thirty years of teaching experience. Most of her teaching has been in 4th grade. Participant 2 is a white female with seven years of teaching experience. She has taught in three different schools. Participant 3 is a white female with eight years of teaching experience. She has taught in two different schools. She has only taught 5th grade. Participant 4 is a male with five years of teaching experience. He has taught in two different schools.

Table 1. Research Participants

	Gender	Years of Teaching Experience	Grades Taught	No. of schools taught	Subject Areas
Participant 1	Female	30 +	4 th , 5 th	2	ELA/S.S.
Participant 2	Female	7	Pre-K, 2 nd , 5 th	3	ELA/S.S.
Participant 3	Female	8	5 th	2	Math/Science
Participant 4	Male	5	5 th	2	Math/Science

Data Collection

The researcher scheduled a pre-interview before the Professional Learning Community session. The purpose of the pre-interview was to answer research one question and gain a better understanding of teachers' perceptions of content literacy instruction and state any barriers to this instruction. The four professional learning community sessions occurred after the pre-

interview (see Table 2). The four PLC sessions answered research question two. And helped the researcher gather information about the teachers' experiences with the PLCs. A post-interview was conducted with the participants after the four PLC sessions. Interview responses were collected and transcribed. Additionally, agendas, notes, and lesson plans were used to collect data.

Pre and Post Interviews

The qualitative data collection method included pre and post interviews. The purpose of the focus group interview is to understand the participants' perspectives of things that affect content literacy in their classroom. The focus group interviews took place inside of my classroom for one hour and fifteen minutes. I conducted the interviews after school to allow the teachers quality time to answer the questions. The teachers answered structured and unstructured questions (See Questionnaire included in the appendix) so that they felt comfortable and openly shared their perspectives with each other. Teachers answered questions that evoked their attitudes and perspectives toward content literacy. All of the comments were transcribed by me during the interviews.

Professional Learning Community Agenda/Minutes

Based on the results of the pre-survey responses, I designed, led, implemented and evaluated four PLC sessions. The topics of the sessions included effective vocabulary instruction, effective comprehension instruction, effective writing instruction, and increasing parental involvement. For each professional learning session, I created agendas to guide the session. We started each session with an article related to the topic of discussion. The articles included: *Teaching Vocabulary Across the Curriculum* (Bintz, 2011), *Comprehension instruction in content classes* (Neufeld, 2011), *Teaching Reading and Writing in the Content Area* (Heller,

2019), and *Why it is important to involve parents in their children's literacy development* (Clark, 2007). Throughout the sessions, I shared research that I obtained from the Literature Review.

After each session, I instructed participants to plan ways that they could implement some of the strategies discussed in the PLC. I helped the participants plan activities to incorporate the strategies in their lessons. This often took place during grade-level meetings when we collaborated to plan lessons. I recorded detailed notes of each session to ensure that a positive change was created through the professional learning community. Additionally, the fifth-grade team's archivist took notes.

Table 2. PLC Sessions

	Date	Length	Participants	Content Discussed
Vocabulary Instruction	Feb. 2019	one hour	all four participants	-shared <i>Teaching Vocabulary Across the Curriculum</i> (Bintz, 2011) article -introduction to vocabulary instruction and its importance -discussed four pragmatic principles for enhancing vocabulary instruction -shared their practices for incorporating vocabulary instruction -shared strategies to incorporate vocabulary instruction in the classroom
Reading and Comprehension Instruction	March 2019	one hour and fifteen minutes	all four participants	-shared <i>Comprehension instruction in content classes</i> (Neufeld, 2011) article -participants shared their thoughts on reading and comprehension instruction -discussed activating prior knowledge, monitoring comprehension, and answering and asking questions

				-modeled strategies to monitor comprehension and how to ask students questions
Writing Instruction	April 2019	one hour and fifteen minutes	all four participants	-shared <i>Teaching Reading and Writing in the Content Area</i> (Heller, 2019) article -participants shared how they incorporate writing in their instruction -discussed the importance of all teachers incorporating writing strategies in the classroom -modeled instructional routines to incorporate writing in the classroom
Parental Involvement	April 2019	fifty minutes	all four participants	-shared <i>Why it is important to involve parents in their children's literacy development</i> (Clark, 2007) article -positive impact of the parent liaison -participants shared how they encourage parental involvement in their classrooms -discussed the schools' parent and family engagement plan

PLC Experiences

All of the participants participated in all of the PLC sessions. The PLC sessions took place in my classroom and my school's PLC room. The PLC sessions were structured by topics because research supports that professional development should be content-focused (Darling-Hammond, 2018). The first PLC session covered vocabulary instruction, the second PLC session was reading and comprehension instruction, the third PLC session was writing

instruction, and the last PLC session was parental involvement. Table 3 below shows the dates, times, and the topic we discussed during each PLC session.

Table 3. PLC Topics

Date	February 2019	March 2019	April 2019	April 2019
PLC Topic	Vocabulary Instruction	Reading and Comprehension Instruction	Writing Instruction	Parental Involvement

Vocabulary Instruction

The first professional development session focused on vocabulary instruction in content areas. The article, *Teaching Vocabulary Across the Curriculum* (Bintz, 2011) was used as a part of the introduction to vocabulary instruction PLC. This article was used because it emphasized the importance of vocabulary being a part of the instructional learning in all content areas. It also shared effective instructional strategies for incorporating vocabulary instruction in the classroom. Additionally, it explained the relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension. Since this was the first professional development session, I provided a thorough introduction of content area literacy and the school's expectations of content area teachers.

I explained that content area literacy is crucial for students to build conceptual knowledge, solve problems, understand the context and complete general academic tasks. Students must be able to read and understand material in all content areas. In order for students to be successful, content area literacy must be implemented daily in all subjects. During this PLC session, Participant 4 stated, "I haven't received adequate training and depended more on ELA teachers to provide literacy instruction to students (PLC Session 1, 2019)." Participant 1 explained, "That all content area teachers should incorporate literacy in their classrooms because students must be able to construct meaning in all content areas (PLC Session 1, 2019)."

I provided participants with an introduction to vocabulary instruction. I chose to begin with an introduction so that the session would be content-focused. This allowed us to focus on specific strategies pertaining to vocabulary. The inclusion of and attention to specific strategies to teach content is a key principle of effective professional development (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Professional learning communities should focus on student learning in the content area and vocabulary has a crucial impact on students' learning in all content areas. Content area teachers should know the following information in order to provide effective vocabulary instruction to their students. Content area teachers must know the components of effective vocabulary instruction, how to select essential words, how to define and contextualize terms, how to help students actively process vocabulary, how to provide multiple exposures to vocabulary, and how to build vocabulary and conceptualize knowledge (IRIS Center, 2019). Additionally, I provided the participants with the four pragmatic principles for enhancing vocabulary instruction. 1) Establish efficient yet rich routines for introducing target words 2) Provide review experiences that promote deep processing of target words 3) Respond directly to student confusion by using anchor experiences 4) Foster universal participation and accountability.

After the introduction to vocabulary instruction during the professional learning session, participants were allowed to share their practices with vocabulary instruction. Participant 1 stated, "I review target words at the beginning of shared reading and guided reading. I also view text before the lesson and choose vocabulary words that I know most students will have difficulties with. The reading books provide vocabulary words to focus on but I choose additional words based on my students' needs. Also, I know that some students are able to define vocabulary words but are not always able to correctly use them in sentences. I address

this issue by providing students with examples of how to use the words and asking them to use the word in a sentence (PLC Session 1, 2019).” This is crucial for all teachers to do because some students do not know the meaning of words that are not bold printed but are crucial to the specific lesson.

Participant 2 explained, “The students in my class are exposed to vocabulary words throughout the week and given multiple opportunities to learn the vocabulary words. I incorporate the vocabulary words during read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading and writing instruction. I also include them during the students’ independent activity (PLC Session 1, 2019).” Participant 3 stated, “I mainly provide vocabulary instruction during whole group instruction (PLC Session 1, 2019).” Participant 4 agreed with Participant 3. It is evident that vocabulary is approached differently. They provide vocabulary instruction more in a whole group setting. Participants 1 and 2 are ELA teachers. They are able to provide more opportunities for students to be exposed to specific vocabulary words based on the school’s balanced-literacy approach in ELA.

I was amazed at the difference in how the participants chose their vocabulary words. Math/Science teachers used the bold printed words as their vocabulary words. ELA teachers chose words that they thought their students needed exposure to along with bold printed words. They also chose words that were important to the planned lesson. ELA teachers also ensure that the students were exposed to the vocabulary words during independent activities, group activities, and teacher-led activities. Math/Science teachers reviewed the words during whole group instruction and didn’t put must focus on exposing the students to the vocabulary words outside of whole group instruction.

Reading and Comprehension Instruction

The second professional development session focused on reading and comprehension instruction. The article, *Comprehension Instruction in Content Classes* (Neufeld, 2011) was used at the beginning of the PLC session to provide the participants with a broad introduction to comprehension instruction in content classes. The purpose was to emphasize that reading instruction has a place in all content areas.

Next, I allowed all of the participants to share their thoughts on reading and comprehension instruction. Participant 1 stated, “I am confident with providing reading and comprehension instruction to students. I’ve been using the Balanced Literacy to teach reading (PLC Session 2, 2019).” Participant 2 stated, “I’ve been using the Balanced Literacy approach for a few years and I am comfortable with providing students instruction to address their reading and comprehension needs. I think more knowledge of the Balanced Literacy approach will be helpful (PLC Session 2, 2019).” Participants 3 and 4 had a different opinion. Participant 3 shared, “I am somewhat comfortable with reading and comprehension instruction. I feel that it is an area that I can show a lot of growth (PLC Session 2, 2019).” Participant 4 stated, “I am very uncomfortable with reading and comprehension instruction (PLC Session 2, 2019).”

I provided participants with an introduction to reading and comprehension instruction. Content area teachers must know the components of effective comprehension instruction, how to activate prior knowledge, how to monitor comprehension, how to answer students’ questions, and how to generate questions.

Activating students’ prior knowledge allows the students to make connections between the new information that they are expected to learn and the information that they previously acquired. This helps students learn the information easier. Content area teachers can actively engage students in discussions by relating the new information to prior knowledge. Students are

able to be more engaged when they are able to make connections to the content that they are expected to learn. All of the participants agreed that they often activate students' prior knowledge by relating new content to experiences from the real world.

Monitoring students' comprehension is important to ensure that students are understanding the new information. All content area teachers must know several strategies to monitor students' comprehension. I asked the participants if they had planned how they would monitor comprehension before a lesson. Only one teacher acknowledged that she plans ways that she will monitor students' comprehension before a lesson. The other participants shared that they check for comprehension by having students answer questions. Although this is one way to check for comprehension, I wanted the participants to explore additional ways to check for comprehension.

I shared and modeled a few ways that content area teachers can monitor students' comprehension. Teachers benefit from seeing instructional practices and working directly with curricular materials. For one example, I used a short reading passage from our reading textbook. The passage was a nonfiction passage about Rosa Parks. Before we read the passage, I asked the participants to make a prediction about the story and I encouraged them to visualize while reading the passage. The first visual was a picture of Rosa Parks sitting on a bus. Her face did not show much expression. All of the participants predicted that the story was about Rosa Parks' life.

As we read, I stopped throughout the passage and asked them to summarize the content that they read. For example, I stopped after we read Rosa Parks' incident on the bus where she refused to give up her seat. I asked Participant 1, to summarize the events that led to this moment. Participant 1 was able to successfully summarize the material. Although she did great

at summarizing, I noticed that she didn't mention Rosa Parks' personal reasoning for refusing to give up her seat. I asked the following question: "Why did she refuse to give up her seat?"

Participant 1 was able to answer the question and include it in her summary.

We continued to read the short passage. I asked another participant to summarize the events that took place after Rosa Parks' refusal to move out of her seat. The participant was able to successfully summarize the information. She summarized how this event sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott and also predicted the effects that it would have on the bus system.

The summarizing allowed me to evaluate how much of the information they were comprehending. When a participant didn't mention information that I thought was crucial to the summary, I asked a question about the information that was missing.

If a student is unable to summarize or retell the information, this is an indicator that they are not fully comprehending the content. I also asked the participants to make connections from the text to the real world. I asked Participant 4 to share an example of a boycott in today's society. Participant 4 explained, "Groups of people start nationwide boycotts on restaurants and businesses when they feel like an individual or group of people are being discriminated against (PLC Session 2, 2019)." When students are able to make connections to the real world, this allows the teacher to get a better understanding of how the student is comprehending the information. I shared that getting students to connect with the information will get them more engaged.

Additionally, I shared how teachers can use short writes to get a better understanding of students' comprehension skills. If students are able to write about content, it is a strong indicator that they fully comprehended the writing. I shared with participants how to use writing as a tool to check for comprehension. I read a few paragraphs at the end of *Rosa Parks* and wrote a quick

summary to model this strategy. After I wrote my summary, I shared my response with the participants.

Content area teachers can ask questions to focus students' attention on important points in a text, have students summarize important information from the text, make connections and integrate new ideas with the text, and allow students to share their interpretations and responses to the text. Content area teachers can also allow students the opportunity to respond to new information through writing, debates, and digital platforms.

Participant 4 shared, "I often allow my students to create PowerPoint presentations to share science information to show their learning (PLC Session 2, 2019)." Participants 1 and 2 allows their students to write about new content. Participant 1 stated, "I allow my students to write about new content. Sometimes, I ask them to connect the content to their lives (PLC Session 2, 2019)." Participant 2 added, "I allow my students to write about the content we discuss in class too (PLC Session 2, 2019)."

During this professional development session, we read a Weekly Studies about the Civil Rights Movement. Each participant successfully modeled one way to check for comprehension. Participant 3 shared, "I am going to try to incorporate debates more in my lessons to check for comprehension. Students must be able to thoroughly understand the content in order to take a stand and debate so this will give me a better understanding of the students' knowledge about the topic (PLC Session 2, 2019)."

During this professional development session, I also shared strategies on how to ask students questions and how to answer students' questions. I shared Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge Levels (Webb, n.d.) with the participants. Table 9 shows the DoK Level questioning stems that I shared with the participants. The DoK (Depth of Knowledge) Levels is a tool that is

used to help teachers create rich environments that support students learning at a higher level.

Questions are sorted in four levels based on the complexity of thinking that it requires students to answer. Level 1 requires students to recall and reproduce information. Level 2 requires students to apply skills and concepts to complete tasks that require more than one step. Level 3 requires students to use strategic thinking. Students must be able to explain and/or justify their thinking and provide evidence for reasoning and conclusions drawn. The thinking is more abstract at this level. Level 4 is the most complex. Students must be able to transfer knowledge from one domain to another to solve a problem.

Figure 2. Depth of Knowledge Levels

<p><u>DOK 1</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Can you recall_____? -When did ____ happen? -Who was _____? -How can you recognize_____? -What is _____? -How can you find the meaning of _____? -Can you recall_____? -Can you select_____? -How would you write_____? -What might you include on a list about_____? -Who discovered_____? -What is the formula for_____? -Can you identify_____? -How would you describe_____? 	<p><u>DOK 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Can you explain how ____ affected _____? -How would you apply what you learned to develop _____? -How would you compare _____? -Contrast_____? -How would you classify_____? -How are_____alike? Different? -How would you classify the type of_____? -What can you say about_____? -How would you summarize_____? -How would you summarize_____? -What steps are needed to edit_____? -When would you use an outline to _____? -How would you estimate_____? -How could you organize_____? -What would you use to classify_____? -What do you notice about_____?
<p><u>DOK 3</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -How is _____ related to _____? -What conclusions can you draw _____? -How would you adapt_____to create a different_____? -How would you test_____? -Can you predict the outcome if_____? -What is the best answer? Why? -What conclusion can be drawn from these three texts? 	<p><u>DOK 4</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Write a thesis, drawing conclusions from multiple sources. -Design and conduct an experiment. Gather information to develop alternative explanations for the results of an experiment. -Write a research paper on a topic. -Apply information from one text to another text to develop a persuasive argument.

<p>-What is your interpretation of this text? Support your rationale.</p> <p>-How would you describe the sequence of ___? -What facts would you select to support ___?</p> <p>-Can you elaborate on the reason ___?</p> <p>-What would happen if ___?</p> <p>-Can you formulate a theory for ___?</p> <p>-How would you test ___?</p> <p>-Can you elaborate on the reason ___?</p>	<p>-What information can you gather to support your idea about ___?</p> <p>-DOK 4 would most likely be the writing of a research paper or applying information from one text to another text to develop a persuasive argument.</p> <p>-DOK 4 requires time for extended thinking.</p>
<p><i>Note: Reprinted from From Depth of Knowledge – Descriptors, Examples and Question Stems for Increasing Depth of Knowledge in the Classroom Developed (Webb, n.d.) and Flip Chart developed by Copyright 2012 by Collins</i></p>	

It is important for content area teachers to teach students how to generate questions in order to help them improve their reading comprehension. I modeled how students can use their textbooks to ask questions from their reading. I used the social studies textbook for this example. I showed them how to review headings, subheadings, and bold words when previewing the text. I also explained that it is important for students to generate questions about the heading, subheadings, and bold words while previewing the text. With these questions, they should also apply the knowledge that they know about the topic. For this example, I used the Great Depression chapter from a social studies textbook. I shared one heading that had three subheadings. The heading was The Great Depression. The subheadings were: Stock Market, Black Tuesday, and the Dust Bowl. First, I shared information that I knew about the heading and the subheadings. Next, I examined the bold words and previewed information under each subheading. Next, I used the information that I briefly read to write three questions. My questions were: What caused the Stock Market Crash? Why did so many Americans suffer from the Stock Market Crash? Why was it called the Dust Bowl?

Writing Instruction

I began the third professional development session by sharing the article, *Teaching Reading and Writing in the Content Area* (Heller, 2019). This article allowed me to share information about the role of content teachers as it related to reading and writing. This article explained that all teachers should learn how to provide effective vocabulary, reading, and writing instruction in their content area. It explained that reading comprehension strategies should help students make sense of content-area texts. Additionally, it elaborated on the importance of teachers having the knowledge to teach students to read and write in ways that are distinct to their content areas.

I continued the professional development session by asking the participants how often they incorporate writing into their lessons. Participant 1 shared, “I incorporate writing in my lessons daily. Students are given the opportunity to write during independent activities and sometimes during whole group instruction (PLC Session 3, 2019).” Participant 2 stated, “I give students the opportunity to write each day during independent activity (PLC Session 3, 2019).” Participant 3 stated, “Students do not write each day in my classroom but I do allow them to write at least three times a week. I allow them to write more in science than in math. Sometimes, they are required to explain their answers in math (PLC Session 3, 2019).” Participant 3 stated, “I allow my students to write more during science than math instructional time (PLC Session 3, 2019).”

Writing instruction is the responsibility of all content area teachers. It is important for all content area teachers to be able to design writing instruction in a way that will motivate students to become great writers. Research supports that there is a significant increase in motivation when students are expected to respond thoughtfully to literature. Student engagement in making text connections based on personal experiences and the level of intellectual challenge presented

in literacy activities are also identified as factors for increasing motivation (Sigmon, 2019). Content area teachers should also be able to teach students to write in ways that are specific to their particular content area.

Writing can be used as a tool for learning and to show the information that they have learned in a content area. It's important that content area teachers teach students how to write. Students must be able to write for a variety of purposes in all content areas. Therefore, students must be given opportunities to write in all content areas. During this professional learning session, I shared three instructional routines that content area teachers can use to incorporate writing in their classrooms (Fisher and Frey, 2019). 1) Power writing: building fluency in composition 2) Shared writing: making the composing process visible 3) Writing from sources to inform and explain.

I used information from Fisher and Fryer (2019) to help explain the importance of writing instruction. Power writing is a method to build writing fluency by allowing students the opportunity to participate in a brief, timed writing activities. This will help students generate their ideas and put them on paper. We participated in one activity that Fisher and Fryer recommended to incorporate writing in content areas. I wrote the word "environment" on the board. I asked the participants to use the word in their writing. I set a timer and had the participants reread their writings, circle the errors and record the number of words. I explained that this activity can be done daily to increase writing fluency. This will also allow students to think about the content more when they are writing. The participants shared ways that they could incorporate this activity into their classrooms. Participant 4 stated, "I could use this activity as a daily bell ringer (PLC Session 3, 2019)."

Shared writing is used to describe collaborative writing experiences between teachers and students (Fisher and Fryer, 2019). The purpose of shared writing is to focus on the meaning of the message. The purpose of interactive writing is to focus on the meaning of message and conventions of print. I shared an example of how to use shared writing during math instruction with the participants.

The participants and I shared the reasons why it is important for students to be able to write to inform and explain their learning in all subjects. Participant 3 stated, “Students must be able to write to explain their answers on the state assessment (PLC Session 3, 2019).” I shared that in order for students to be successful and prepared to do this on state assessments they must be taught and given multiple opportunities in all content areas to practice. I shared some annotation strategies that will help content area teachers teach students how to write to inform and explain. It is important for students to be able to read the text carefully and support their responses with evidence from the text. Some of the annotation strategies I shared with the participants are: underlining key points, using stars to emphasize key points, use numbers to indicate a sequence, circle keywords or phrases, and writing in the margin. Before this professional development, I got an informational text from the science teachers about ecosystems. During the professional development, the participants practiced annotation strategies. Participant 1 stated, “This strategy should be used school-wide and should start in the lower grades. I like this idea because students will be experts at marking the text by the time they are in fifth grade (PLC Session 3, 2019).”

Parental Involvement

This was the fourth and last professional development session. I shared the article, *Why it is important to involve parents in their children’s literacy development* (Clark, 2007) with the

participants to give them a better understanding of the benefits of parents being involved in their children's literacy activities. This article provided a deeper understanding of how parental involvement positively impacts children's literacy performance levels and leads to higher academic achievement.

This is the first year that the school has a full-time parent liaison. The participants all agreed that her role is making an impact on parental support in the school. Participant 1 stated, "There are more parents being involved this year. There are also more opportunities for parents to be involved (PLC Session 4, 2019)." Participant 4 shared, "The parental liaison has been creative with getting parents more involved (PLC Session 4, 2019)." I shared our school's parent and family engagement plan. All of the participants agreed that our school is following the actions in the plan to involve parents in their students' education.

I asked each participant to share how they increase parental involvement in their classroom. Participant 1 shared, "I try to include homework assignments that involve parents' participation. I instructed students to interview a parent about 9/11. This required parents to be involved in their child's assignment (PLC Session 4, 2019)." Participant 4 stated, "I assigned a budget activity that required parents' participation (PLC Session 4, 2019)." Participant 3 stated, "I invite parents to the classroom to volunteer during instructional time (PLC Session 4, 2019)." The participants are satisfied with the increase in parental involvement this school year. It is evident that the parent liaison is beneficial to the school.

Data Analysis Procedures

For this study, SPSS Modeler Text Analytics was used to analyze the qualitative data. SPSS Modeler Text Analytics is used to process a large variety of unstructured text data and organize the key concepts. Hand coding qualitative data can be laborious and a time-consuming

process (Creswell, 2014). SPSS Modeler Text Analytic grouped the concepts into categories. This software was beneficial in helping me organize, sort and search for valuable information within my data.

I created an SPSS file with 10 questions from the interviews. The sample size reflected the participants' responses to each question. I built a Modeler stream to do the text analysis for each question. Then I built categories and generated a text analytic model to do simple tabulations of the results. This approach required me to do a separate text analysis for each question and helped me better organize and analyze my data. I identified themes that emerged from the data.

Teachers participated in a pre-interview and post-interview to answer questions that are directly related to content area literacy. The interview questions allowed me to gain information on teachers' perspectives about content area literacy. Their responses provided me with critical information to plan and implement PLCs to support them in integrating literacy strategies into their classes. This increased the implementation of literacy skills in the classrooms which will have a positive impact on students' literacy achievement in all subjects.

The interview questions in Appendix A allowed me to gain critical insight into the participants' perspectives. The same interview questions were used in the pre-interview and post-interview. The same questions were used so that I could get a better understanding of the impact that the PLC sessions had on the participants. The first interview question required the participants to define content area literacy. The data collected allowed me to compare the participants' definitions of content area literacy. The second interview question allowed the participants to describe the school-wide emphasis on content area literacy and provide their perspective on the administrators' and school leaders' support on the integration of literacy

instruction across the content areas. The third interview question allowed the participants to provide their perspective on how their students' day capitalizes on students' literacy and language as a way to learn new information. They also shared their perspectives about attending professional development sessions to learn new reading instructional strategies for their respective content areas. The fourth interview question required the participants to explain how intervention initiatives cause students to read more and read better. Participants also explained how teachers developed individual literacy plans to meet the literacy needs of students. Interview question five allowed the participants to explain how professional development support all students in reading and writing. Participants also shared their perspectives on the literacy leadership team assessment and planning of literacy professional development. For question six, the participants elaborated on how literacy is embedded in their instruction. Interview question seven allowed the participants to describe the barriers that inhibit them from implementing literacy in their classrooms. They also shared some ways they are supported in implementing literacy strategies in their classrooms. For interview question eight, the participants explained how the school could better support them in implementing content area literacy strategies. The participants also shared their perspectives about the expectation to integrate literacy strategies within their content instruction. Interview question ten required the participants to share how prepared they are to teach the expected content area literacy strategies to their students.

Trustworthiness

To ensure that the research was trustworthy, credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable was established.

Credibility is the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2019). The strategy that was used was persistent observation. Persistent

observation is when the researcher identifies characteristics that are most relevant to the problem and focus on detail. Persistent observation was critical throughout the interviews and professional learning community sessions. The participants were highly encouraged to be honest and open about their perceptions of content area literacy. This allowed me to identify characteristics that were most relevant to the study as I was collecting notes about the information shared. Transferability is the degree in which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents (Korstjens & Moser, 2019). I ensured that the research is transferable by describing the context so that the experiences are more meaningful. The participants' quotes are included throughout the research paper. Dependability is the stability of findings over time. This includes the participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretation, and recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data as received from participants of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2019). Throughout the study, transparency is evident. The research steps are described in detail from the beginning to the end of the study. Confirmability is the degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers. This is related to the establishment that data and interpretations of the findings are clearly derived from the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2019). The data from the research is kept throughout the study.

Role as Researcher

My role as the researcher was to conduct the study, collect data, analyze data, and provide beneficial information to the participants that positively impacted their instructional strategies. It was also my responsibility to share my findings with the school leader and effectively communicate my recommendations to address the concerns of the study.

Additionally, I was responsible for gaining the support of the school leaders to address the content area literacy concerns of the teachers in the school.

My position is not superior to that of the participants that are included in this study. The participants and I worked at the same school but it did not play a factor in the data that was collected. As the former grade chairperson, I often collected data for our grade level for different purposes. Although I was their colleague, it did not have a negative impact on the fact that I was teaching them about literacy. I have taught literacy strategies for nine years and was the literacy contact person for my former school. My colleagues are aware that I've attended many district and regional literacy workshops and have knowledge of content area literacy. My colleagues understood my role as a researcher. They also supported and trusted me to lead professional learning sessions about content area literacy. I have a bias for the use of content area teachers incorporating literacy strategies in their lessons. However, I did not try to persuade my participants based on my beliefs.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations for this research are data storage and the privacy of the participants. Data collected from each participant was stored in a secure location in hard copy and on a flash drive. In order to maintain confidentiality, specific names and schools are not mentioned. Participants are referred to as Participant 1, Participant 2, etc. Collected data did not include names.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I presented the analysis of data collected to answer the following research questions.

1. What are a 5th grade team of teachers' perceptions of content area literacy instruction and barriers in implementing content area literacy?

2. What are the experiences of creating professional learning communities for elementary teachers that researches and supports the implementation of research-based strategies in vocabulary instruction, reading and comprehension instruction, writing instruction, and increasing parental involvement impact teacher perceptions of content area literacy instruction and potentially impact student achievement?

The purpose of this study was to help change teachers' planning, instruction, and assessment practices by providing them with ongoing job-embedded professional development through professional learning communities focused on content area literacy research-based practices and their impact on student achievement. Professional development was needed for teachers to implement effective content area literacy instruction and strategies in their classrooms.

A list of interview questions was used to gain teachers' perceptions of content-area literacy. First, teachers were asked to define content area literacy. Next, they were asked to explain the school-wide emphasis on content area literacy. They were also asked if administrators and school leaders support the integration of literacy instruction across the content areas. Teachers were asked if all subjects, throughout the day, capitalize on students' literacy

and language as a way to learn new information. Teachers were asked if they attend professional development sessions to learn reading instructional strategies for their respective content areas. Teachers had to explain how the intervention initiatives cause students to read more and to read better. They also had to expound on how teachers develop individual literacy plans to meet the literacy instructional needs of students. Teachers were asked to explain how professional development supports all students in reading and writing and also if a literacy leadership team assesses and plans literacy professional development. Teachers explained how literacy is embedded in their instruction. They also explained the barriers that inhibit them from implementing literacy strategies in their classrooms. If there were no barriers, teachers explained what support the implementation of literacy strategies in their classrooms provided. Teachers explained how the school could better support them in implementing content area literacy strategies in their classrooms. Teachers shared their thoughts about the expectation to integrate literacy strategies within their content instruction. Lastly, teachers discussed how prepared they felt to teach the expected content area literacy strategies to their students.

This chapter includes the data of the study. First, the analysis of the pre-interview data is discussed. Next, the data from the four professional learning community topics are explained. Lastly, the post-interview data are discussed and the research questions are answered and explained. The themes for the study are also discussed in this chapter.

Analysis of Data

Findings from Pre-Interview

In this section, I presented the major findings of the pre-interview data. Table 4 lists the themes from the pre-interview data. SPSS Modeler Text Analytics was used to analyze the data by processing the text data and organizing the key concepts. The key concepts were grouped

into categories and used to create the themes. The following significant themes emerged from analyzing the pre-interview data: (1) Content area teachers do not have a solid understanding of the meaning of content area literacy and how to successfully implement literacy in their instruction. (2) Content area teachers feel that the lack of effective professional development negatively impacts them in successfully implementing instructional strategies in their respective content areas. (3) Literacy strategies are not consistently embedded in participants' instruction. (4) Barriers that inhibit participants from implementing literacy strategies in their classroom are related to the lack of professional development and lack of time.

Table 4. Pre-Interview Data Themes

Themes from the Pre-Interview Data	
Theme 1	Content area teachers do not have a solid understanding of the meaning of content area literacy and how to successfully implement literacy in their instruction.
Theme 2	Content area teachers feel that the lack of effective professional development negatively impacts them in successfully implementing instructional strategies in their respective content areas.
Theme 3	Literacy strategies are not consistently embedded in participants' instruction.
Theme 4	Barriers that inhibit participants from implementing literacy strategies in their classroom are related to the lack of professional development and lack of time.

Theme 1: Content area teachers do not have a solid understanding of the meaning of content area literacy and how to successfully implement literacy in their instruction.

Table 5 shows the responses to Questions 1, 4, and 9. All of the participants agree that literacy strategies should be integrated into their content areas. I asked the participants, "What are your thoughts about the expectation to integrate literacy strategies within your content instruction." Participant 1 stated, "I'm fine with it (Pre-Interview, 2019). I think it is necessary to integrate literacy strategies in all subjects." Participant 2 agreed with Participant 1 and stated, "All content should integrate literacy (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 3 stated, "I believe that students need to be exposed to many literacy strategies in all content areas (Pre-Interview,

2019).” Participant 4 shared, “Literacy is important and should be incorporated in all subjects (Pre-Interview, 2019).” However, the participants did not define content area literacy the same. Participants 1, 2, and 4 explained that content area literacy is the ability to use reading and writing skills when learning new content. Only participant 2 explained that content area literacy included teaching other subjects with the use of literacy. Participant 4 only included the use of reading and literacy in all subjects in the definition of content area literacy. He did not include the use of writing. To define content literacy, Participant 1 stated, “Using reading and writing in the learning and developing of new content (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 2 stated, “Content area literacy is the ability to read and write using different strategies (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 2 added, “Teaching other contents with the use of literacy is related to content area literacy (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 3 stated, “Content area literacy is the ability to use reading and writing skills to learn the subject area content (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 4 shared, “Content area literacy is the use of reading and literacy in all subjects (Pre-Interview, 2019).”

Question 4 allowed me to gain insight into how participants implement intervention initiatives in their instruction to impact students’ literacy abilities. I asked the participants, “How do the intervention initiatives cause students to read more and to read better?” Participant 1 stated, “Intervention initiatives such as one-on-one or small group instruction, help students to read more effectively when the teacher is modeling and explaining comprehension strategies and when students are reading texts that are of interest to them. Helping students connect prior knowledge is also important (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 2 stated, “Small groups help meet individual needs (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 3 stated, “Currently, I don’t feel there are effective initiatives that encourage our students to read more (Pre-Interview, 2019).”

Participant 4 stated, “I do not feel that there are any initiatives that cause students to read more and better (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participants also shared ways they develop individual literacy plans to meet the literacy instructional needs of students. Participant 2 explained that small groups and SMART goals help students’ literacy abilities. A SMART goal is a goal that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. It is used in setting objectives. Participant 1 was the only teacher who was able to thoroughly describe some initiatives that impact the students’ literacy abilities. The participant explained that one-to-one interventions, small group instruction, modeling, and building on prior knowledge help with students’ literacy abilities. This participant also mentioned that intervention teachers develop plans for certain students. Students only work with intervention teachers for reading instruction.

I asked the participants, “Do teachers develop individual literacy plans to meet the literacy instructional needs of students?” Participant 1 stated, “Our intervention teachers do develop plans for instructing these students. Classroom teachers also help with small group instruction (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 2 stated, “Teachers create SMART goals for the students (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 3 stated, “Differentiated plans are created to address as many of the learners’ needs as possible (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 4, “There are interventions that allow teachers to work with students (Pre-Interview, 2019).”

Table 5. Participants’ Responses to Pre- Interview Questions 1, 4, and 9

	Teacher 1 Responses	Teacher 2 Responses	Teacher 3 Responses	Teacher 4 Responses
Question 1 How do you define content area literacy?	Using reading and writing in the learning and developing of new content.	Content area literacy is the ability to read and write using different strategies—also including teaching other	Content area literacy is the ability to use reading and writing skills to learn the subject area content. EX: KWL chart	Content area literacy is the use of reading and literacy in all subjects.

		subjects with the use of literacy.	for science content; citing evidence in a social studies text for research.	
<p>Question 4 How do the intervention initiatives cause students to read more and to read better? Do teachers develop individual literacy plans to meet the literacy instructional needs of students?</p>	<p>Intervention-initiatives, such as one-on-one or small group instruction, help students to read more effectively when the teacher is modeling and explaining comprehension strategies and when students are reading texts that are of interest to them. Helping students connect prior knowledge is also important. Our intervention teachers do develop plans for instruction these students. Classroom teachers also help with small group instruction.</p>	<p>Small groups help meet individual needs. Teachers create SMART goals.</p>	<p>Currently I don't feel there are effective initiatives that encourage our students to read more. Differentiated plans are created to address as many of the learners' needs as possible.</p>	<p>I do not feel that there are any initiative that cause students to read more and better. There are interventions that allow teachers to work with students.</p>
<p>Question 9 What are your thoughts about the expectation to integrate literacy strategies</p>	<p>Fine with it---I think it is necessary.</p>	<p>All content should integrate literacy.</p>	<p>I believe that students need to be exposed to many literacy strategies in all content areas.</p>	<p>Literacy is important and should be incorporated in all subjects.</p>

within your content instruction?				
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Theme 2: Content area teachers feel that the lack of effective professional development negatively impacts them in successfully implementing instructional strategies in their respective content areas.

Table 6 shows the responses to questions 3, 5, and 8. Question 3 asked participants if all subjects capitalize on students' literacy and language as a way to learn new information. Question 3 also asked participants to share if they attended professional development sessions to learn reading instructional strategies for their respective content areas. All participants gave different responses that prove that they lack effective professional development to successfully incorporate literacy instructional strategies in their respective content areas. I asked the participants, "Do all subjects throughout a student's day capitalize on students' literacy and language as a way to learn new information?" Participant 1 stated, "Reading, as well as math and other content area, do capitalize on literacy through writing and differentiated texts and lessons (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 2 shared, "Upper-grade levels may incorporate some reading in all subject areas, but not literacy strategies (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 3 stated, "Not all subject areas. Social Studies probably would be most likely to include literacy and language (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 4 stated, "Social Studies teachers capitalize on students' literacy more than other subject areas (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 1 explained that reading, math, and other content areas capitalize on literacy through writing and differentiated texts. Participant 2 explained that upper-grade levels may incorporate reading in all subject areas but not literacy. She explained that literacy includes reading strategies to learn through reading. Participant 3 explained that all subject areas do not capitalize on literacy and

she doesn't see a heavy emphasis on it. Participant 4 shared that social studies teachers capitalize on students' literacy more than other subject areas. I asked the participants, "Do teachers attend professional development sessions to learn reading instructional strategies for their respective content areas?" Participant 1 stated, "We have received some professional development (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 2 stated, "Professional development is not beneficial (Pre-Interview, 2019)." I asked the participant to explain her response. Participant 2 explained, "The professional development related to literacy hasn't been beneficial (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 3 stated, "Professional development is provided to ELA teachers (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 4 stated, "I do not attend professional development sessions to learn instructional strategies. I attended a guided reading session that wasn't beneficial because I didn't have any beginning knowledge (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participants 2 and 4 mentioned that the professional development sessions they attended were not beneficial. Participant 4 also mentioned that he lacked beginner level knowledge on guided reading so the professional development was not beneficial. Participant 1 explained that she has received some professional development. Participant 3 explained that literacy and language professional development is provided for ELA teachers.

Question 5 asked participants to explain how professional development supports all students in reading and writing. I asked the participants, "How does the professional development support all students in reading and writing?" Participant 1 explained, "By learning best techniques and practices that will result in improvements in student learning. (Pre-Interview, 2019)" Participant 2 stated, "Best practices trainings and developing more as a teacher help teachers develop best practices for teaching (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 3 stated, "I never attended a professional development for supporting students in reading and writing. We were

given a book last school year on guided reading (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 4 stated, “I haven’t attended a professional development to gain knowledge on how to support all students in reading and writing (Pre-Interview, 2019).”

I asked the participants, “Does the literacy leadership team assess and plan literacy professional development.” Participant 1 stated, “I do not know of a literacy leadership team (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 2 stated, “We do not have a literacy leadership team (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 3 stated, “I’m not aware of a literacy leadership team at our school (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 4 stated, “We do not have a literacy leadership team (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participants 1, 2, 3, and 4 responded that a literacy leadership team doesn’t exist at their school. Therefore, no one assesses and plans literacy professional development on a regular basis. This supports this theme.

Question 8 asked participants to explain how the school could better support them in implementing content area literacy strategies in their classrooms. Participants 1, 3, and 4 responded that professional learning communities and/or professional development opportunities would better support them. Participant 2 responded that curriculum coaches who have a deep understanding of embedded literacy across content areas would be beneficial.

Table 6. Participants’ Responses to Pre-Interview Questions 3, 5, and 8

	Teacher 1 Responses	Teacher 2 Responses	Teacher 3 Responses	Teacher 4 Responses
Question 3 Do all subjects throughout a student’s day capitalize on students’ literacy and language as a way to learn	Reading, as well as math and other content areas, do capitalize on literacy through writing and differentiated texts and lessons. We	Upper grade levels may incorporate reading in all subject areas, but not literacy, which includes reading strategies to learn through	Not all subject areas. Social studies probably would be the most likely to include literacy and language. I don’t see a heavy emphasis on this.	Social studies teachers capitalize on students’ literacy more than other subject areas. I do not attend professional development sessions to learn

<p>new information? Do teachers attend professional development sessions to learn reading instructional strategies for their respective content areas?</p>	<p>have received some professional development.</p>	<p>reading. Professional development is not beneficial.</p>	<p>Professional development is provided for ELA teachers.</p>	<p>instructional strategies. I attended a guided reading session that wasn't beneficial because I didn't have any beginning knowledge.</p>
<p>Question 5 How does the professional development support all students in reading and writing? Does the literacy leadership team assess and plan literacy professional development?</p>	<p>By learning best techniques and practices that will result in improvements in student learning. I do not know of a literacy leadership team.</p>	<p>Best practices trainings and developing more as a teacher helps teachers develop best practices for teaching. We do not have a literacy leadership team.</p>	<p>Never attended a professional development for supporting students. We were given a book last school year on guided reading. I'm not aware of a literacy leadership team at our school.</p>	<p>I haven't attended a professional development to gain knowledge on how to support all students in reading and writing. We do not have a literacy leadership team.</p>
<p>Question 8 How could the school better support you in implementing content area literacy strategies in your classroom?</p>	<p>professional learning communities</p>	<p>curriculum coaches who have a deep understanding of embedded literacy across content areas and provide useful, helpful ways to implement</p>	<p>provide professional development; provide examples for successful</p>	<p>more professional development opportunities</p>

Theme 3: *Literacy strategies are not consistently embedded in participants' instruction.*

Table 7 shows the responses to questions 6 and 10. Question 6 allowed me to get a better understanding of how literacy is embedded in the participants' instruction. I asked the participants, "Is literacy embedded in your instruction?" Participant 1 stated, "We do write about our reading in various ways—summarizing, citing evidence, etc (Pre-Interview, 2019)."

Participant 2 stated, "Literacy is the foundation of instruction in my classroom. All new skills are supported by literacy (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 3 stated, "I do try to embed literacy where I can in math. For example: vocabulary, word problems. I also try to include it in science with informational text; cause/effect, vocabulary making claims and linking evidence (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 4 explained, "I try to embed literacy in my classroom. I teach math and science. I need more opportunities to learn about ways to do so (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participants 3 and 4 used the term "try" when they explained how they embed literacy in their classrooms. Participant 3 explained that she tries to embed literacy whenever she can during math instruction. She also explained that she uses literacy during science through vocabulary and linking evidence. Participant 4 shared that he needs more opportunities to learn ways to implement literacy in math and science instruction. Participants 1 and 2 explained that literacy is the foundation of their instruction and writing and reading are used in various ways in their classrooms.

Question 10 allowed the participants to explain how prepared they feel they are to teach the expected content area literacy strategies to their students. Based on their responses, it is evident that literacy isn't embedded in their instruction. I asked the participants, "How prepared do you feel you are to teach the expected content area literacy strategies to your students?" Participant 1 stated, "Prepared but hindered by lack of time (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 2

stated, “I feel confident but don’t always know how to reach each individual literacy need (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 3 stated that she is not prepared. Participant 4 stated, “Not as prepared as I would like to be (Pre-Interview, 2019).” None of the participants responded that literacy is embedded in their daily instruction. Participants 3 and 4 explained that they are not prepared to teach the expected content area literacy strategies to their students. Participant 1 feels prepared but is hindered by time. Participant 2 is confident in teaching the expected content area literacy strategies but doesn’t always know how to reach each individual literacy need.

Table 7. Participants’ Responses to Pre-Interview Questions 6 and 10

	Teacher 1 Responses	Teacher 2 Responses	Teacher 3 Responses	Teacher 4 Responses
Question 6 Is literacy embedded in your instruction? Elaborate.	We do write about our reading in various ways—summarizing, citing evidence, etc.	Literacy is the foundation of instruction in my classroom. All new skills are supported by literacy.	I do try to embed literacy where I can in math. (ex: vocabulary, word problems) I also try to include it in science with informational text; cause/effect, vocabulary making claims and linking evidence.	I try to embed literacy in my classroom. I teach math and science. I need more opportunities to learn about ways to do so.
Question 10 How prepared do you feel you are to teach the expected content area	Prepared but hindered by lack of time	I feel confident but don’t always know how to reach each individual literacy need.	Not prepared	Not as prepared as I would like to be.

literacy strategies to your students?				
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Theme 4: *Barriers that inhibit participants from implementing literacy strategies in their classroom are related to the lack of professional development and lack of time.*

Table 8 shows the responses to questions 2 and 7. The responses to question 2 proved that there is a school-wide emphasis on content area literacy. I asked the participants, “What is the school-wide emphasis on content-area literacy?” Participant 1 stated, “Direct, explicit instruction in comprehension, modeling of reading and thinking strategies through read-alouds and shared reading, discussions of texts in small groups, differentiated texts and writing about reading show that emphasis is placed on literacy (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 2 stated, “The focus on increasing literacy and cross-curriculum is encouraged. For example, I use small group information reading to teach social studies content (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 3 stated, “I feel like it is encouraged but not necessarily emphasized (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 4 stated, “There is an emphasis on content-area literacy (Pre-Interview, 2019).” The responses also revealed that administrators and school leaders support the integration of literacy instruction across the content area. I asked the participants, “Do the administrators and school leaders support the integration of literacy instruction across the content areas?” Participant 1 stated, “Integration of literacy instruction is supported by our administration (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 3 stated, “Administrators suggest integration of areas such as ELA and SS and/or science. The integration requires activities that use literacy skills to learn content area skills (Pre-Interview, 2019).” Participant 4 stated, “Administrators encourage all teachers to implement small group activities that encourage literacy activities (Pre-Interview, 2019).” It is

evident that the integration of literacy instruction is encouraged by the administration.

Participant 3 feels that it isn't emphasized enough. However, only Participant 1 was able to thoroughly explain the school-wide emphasis on content area literacy.

Question 7 allowed the participants to describe the barriers that inhibit them from implementing literacy strategies in their classrooms. They also had the opportunity to explain what supports the implementation of literacy strategies in their classrooms. None of the participants shared anything that supports the implementation of literacy strategies in their classrooms. However, all of the participants shared barriers that inhibit them from implementing literacy strategies in their classrooms. I asked the participants, "What barriers inhibit you from implementing literacy strategies in your classroom. If there are no barriers, what supports the implementation of literacy strategies in your classroom?" Participant 1 stated, "So many different reading and comprehension levels in the classroom—many different learning styles—the lack of experience of our students. The lack of time also hinders opportunities for students to discover information on their own (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 2 stated, "Not enough time, too many students, a wide range of skills (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 3 stated, "The lack of professional development and time for planning (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 4 stated, "Time, high expectations without adequate professional development (Pre-Interview, 2019)." Participant 1 explained that the various learning abilities and styles, and lack of time are barriers. Participant 2 explained that time, class size, and range of student ability levels are barriers. Participants 3 and 4 explained that the lack of professional development and lack of time for planning are barriers.

Table 8. Participants' Responses to Pre-Interview Questions 2 and 7

	Teacher 1 Responses	Teacher 2 Responses	Teacher 3 Responses	Teacher 4 Responses
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<p>Question 2 What is the school-wide emphasis on content-area literacy? Do the administrators and school leaders support the integration of literacy instruction across the content areas?</p>	<p>Direct, explicit instruction in comprehension, modeling of reading and thinking strategies through read alouds and shared reading, discussions of texts in small groups, differentiated texts and writing about reading show that emphasis is placed on literacy. Integration of literacy instruction is supported by our administration.</p>	<p>The focus is on increasing literacy and cross-curriculum is encouraged. Ex: I use small group information reading to teach social studies content.</p>	<p>I feel like it is encouraged but not necessarily emphasized. Administrators suggest integration of areas such as ELA and SS and/or science. The integration requires activities that use literacy skills to learn content area skills.</p>	<p>There is an emphasis on content-area literacy. Administrators encourage all teachers to implement small group activities that encourages literacy activities.</p>
<p>Question 7 What barriers inhibit you from implementing literacy strategies in your classroom? If there are no barriers, what supports the implementation of literacy strategies in your classroom?</p>	<p>So many different reading and comprehending levels in the classroom—many different learning styles—the lack of experiences of our students. The lack of time also hinders opportunities for students to discover information on their own.</p>	<p>Not enough time, too many students, wide range of skills</p>	<p>lack of professional development; time for planning</p>	<p>time, high expectations without adequate professional development</p>

Findings from Post-Interview

In this section, I presented the major findings of the post-interview data and answered the research questions.

I was able to analyze the data from the pre-interview to plan and implement four professional development sessions based on the data that addressed the research questions. It is evident in the data that the PLC sessions had a positive impact on the teachers. After I completed the four professional development sessions, I conducted the post-interview to get a better understanding of the participants' perceptions after they were exposed to more information about content area literacy. SPSS Modeler Text Analytics was used to analyze the data by processing the text data and organizing the key concepts. The key concepts were grouped into categories and used to create the themes. The following significant themes emerged from analyzing the post-interview data after participants: (1) Content area teachers have a better understanding of content area literacy and its importance. Content area teachers are more prepared to teach literacy strategies. (2) Content area teachers are incorporating literacy and language instruction in their content areas. The data also revealed that the participants feel that the professional development sessions were beneficial to the implementation. (3) Barriers that inhibit participants from implementing literacy and language strategies in their classroom are related to the lack of professional development and lack of time. Each theme is related to a research question.

Table 9. Post-Interview Data Themes

Themes from the Post-Interview Data	
Theme 1	Content area teachers have a better understanding of content area literacy and its importance. Content area teachers are more prepared to teach literacy strategies.
Theme 2	Barriers that inhibit participants from implementing literacy and language strategies in their classroom are related to the lack of professional development and lack of time. Each theme is related to a research question.

	Content area teachers are incorporating literacy and language instruction in their content areas. Professional development sessions are beneficial to the implementation of content area literacy.
Theme 3	Content area teachers are incorporating literacy and language instruction in their content areas. Professional development sessions are beneficial to the implementation of content area literacy.

Research Question 1: What are a 5th grade team of teachers' perceptions of content area literacy instruction and barriers in implementing content area literacy? Research question one was measured qualitatively through a focus group pre-interview and post-interview with the 5th grade team of teachers regarding their perceptions of content area literacy instruction. The following themes emerged from the post-interview that addresses research question 1.

Theme 1: *Content area teachers have a better understanding of content area literacy and its importance. They also feel more prepared to teach content area literacy.*

Table 10 shows the responses to Questions 1, 7, and 8. Question 1 asked participants to define content area literacy. Question 7 asked participants about their thoughts on the expectation to integrate literacy strategies within their content instruction. Question 8 asked the participants how prepared do they feel they are to teach expected content area literacy strategies to their students. The pre-interview data showed that the participants defined content area literacy differently. The post-interview data showed that all of the participants can accurately define content area literacy. I instructed the participants to define content area literacy.

Participant 1 stated, "The ability to use reading and writing skills in content areas to acquire new knowledge (Post Interview, 2019)." Participant 2 stated, "Content area literacy is the ability to read and write using different strategies (Post Interview, 2019)." Participant 3 explained, "Content area literacy is the ability to use reading and writing skills to learn the subject area content (Post Interview, 2019)." Participant 4 stated, "Content area literacy is the use of reading

and literacy in all content areas to acquire new knowledge in all content areas (Post Interview, 2019).”

All of the participants strongly agree that literacy strategies should be integrated into all content areas. I asked the participants, “What are your thoughts on the expectation to integrate literacy strategies within your content instruction?” Participant 1 stated, “Literacy should be integrated into all instruction (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 2 stated, “All content areas should integrate literacy (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 3 stated, “Literacy should be implemented in all subjects (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 4 stated, “Literacy is important and should be embedded in all content areas (Post Interview, 2019).” Additionally, I observed teachers incorporating literacy strategies into their lesson plans that were modeled during the professional learning community sessions.

Question 8 allowed the participants to explain how they feel about teaching the expected content area literacy strategies to their students. I asked the participants, “How prepared do they feel to teach expected content area literacy strategies to your students?” Participant 1 stated, “I feel that I am prepared to teach literacy strategies (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 2 stated, “I am prepared to teach content area literacy strategies to my students (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 3 stated, “I feel prepared to teach content area literacy strategies (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 4 stated, “I feel prepared to teach the student content area literacy strategies. However, I feel that ongoing professional development opportunities will better prepare me (Post Interview, 2019).” Participants 1, 2, and 3 feel prepared to teach content area literacy strategies to their students. Participant 4 explained that he feels prepared to teach content area literacy strategies but feels that ongoing professional development opportunities would better prepare him to integrate content area literacy strategies into his classroom.

Table 10. Participants' Responses to Post-Interview Questions 1, 7, and 8

	Teacher 1 Responses	Teacher 2 Responses	Teacher 3 Responses	Teacher 4 Responses
Question 1 Define content area literacy.	The ability to use reading and writing skills in content areas to acquire new knowledge.	Content area literacy is the ability to read and write using different strategies.	Content area literacy is the ability to use reading and writing skills to learn the subject area content.	Content area literacy is the use of reading and literacy in all content areas to acquire new knowledge in all content areas.
Question 7 What are your thoughts on the expectation to integrate literacy strategies within your content instruction?	Literacy should be integrated in all instruction.	All content areas should integrate literacy.	Literacy should be implemented in all subjects.	Literacy is important and should be embedded in all content areas.
Question 8 How prepared do they feel to teach expected content area literacy strategies to your students?	I feel that I am prepared to teach literacy strategies.	I am prepared to teach content area literacy strategies to my students.	I feel prepared to teach content area literacy strategies.	I feel prepared to teach the student content area literacy strategies. However, I feel that ongoing professional development opportunities will better prepare me.

Theme 2: Barriers that inhibit participants from implementing literacy and language strategies in their classroom are related to the lack of professional development and lack of time.

The research yielded basically the same viewpoint to this question. The participants feel that the lack of professional development and time are major barriers that prevent them from implementing literacy strategies in their classrooms. One participant said, “I’ve tried to use some of the strategies we discussed for writing instruction to get students to write in all subjects. I need more tips on how to implement more writing instructional strategies in the classroom (Post Interview, 2019).” Another participant shared, “I have a large range of ability levels in my classroom. Many of my students struggle with writing. A professional development to help teachers address the writing needs of all students will be helpful (Post Interview, 2019).” A math and science teacher shared, “At my other school, we had an academic coach who addressed literacy in all the subjects. During our PLCs, she shared ways to incorporate literacy strategies. I think it will be helpful to have a group of teachers work together to share literacy strategies with the teachers in the school (Post Interview, 2019).”

Table 11 shows the responses to questions 5 and 6. Question 5 allowed the participants to describe the barriers that inhibit them from implementing literacy strategies in their classrooms. I asked the participants to describe the barriers that inhibit them from implementing literacy strategies in their classrooms. Participant 1 stated, “The difference in students’ ability level and time (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 2 stated, “The range of ability level in the classroom (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 3 stated, “The lack of professional development is a barrier (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 4 stated, “The lack of professional development and time restraints (Post Interview, 2019).”

They also had the opportunity to explain what supports the implementation of literacy strategies in their classrooms. I asked the participants to explain what supports the implementation of literacy strategies in their classroom. Participant 2 responded, “The writing

PLC was supportive (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 3 explained, “The mini PLCs supported me with learning new ways to incorporate literacy in my instruction (Post Interview, 2019).”

Participant 4 shared, “The writing, vocabulary, and comprehension PLCs helped me learn new ways to incorporate literacy strategies in my instruction (Post Interview, 2019).”

Additionally, participants were asked if the parental involvement professional development session impacted their instruction. I asked the participants, “Was the parental involvement professional development session beneficial.” Participant 1 stated, “The parental involvement information was beneficial (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 2 explained, “The parental involvement review was helpful. I notice a difference in the level of involvement from last year (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 3 stated, “The parental information was helpful (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 4 stated, “It was helpful to review our parental plan (Post Interview, 2019).” It was beneficial to review the school’s family engagement plan. From the interview, it is evident that the parent liaison is effective.

For Question 6, I asked the participants to explain how the school could better support them in implementing content area literacy strategies in their classroom. Participant 1 stated, “professional development opportunities, literacy resources, and materials (Post Interview, 2019),” could better support her. Participant 2 stated, “curriculum coaches and ongoing professional development (Post Interview, 2019),” could better support her. Participant 3 stated, “provide professional development, beneficial walkthrough with feedback (Post Interview, 2019),” could better support her. Participant 4 stated, “professional development opportunities and literacy coaches (Post Interview, 2019),” would be supportive. All of the participants explained that professional development opportunities would support them in implementing content area literacy strategies in their classrooms.

Table 11. Participants’ Responses to Post-Interview Questions 5 and 6

	Teacher 1 Responses	Teacher 2 Responses	Teacher 3 Responses	Teacher 4 Responses
<p>Question 5 Describe the barriers that inhibit you from implementing literacy strategies in your classroom. Explain what supports the implementation of literacy strategies in your classroom. Was the parental involvement professional development session beneficial?</p>	<p>Difference in students’ ability level and time</p> <p>The parental involvement information was beneficial.</p>	<p>Range of ability level in the classroom</p> <p>The writing PLC was supportive.</p> <p>The parental involvement review was helpful. I notice a difference in the level of involvement from last year.</p>	<p>Lack of professional development is a barrier.</p> <p>The mini PLCs supported me with learning new ways to implement literacy in my instruction.</p> <p>The parental information was helpful.</p>	<p>Lack of professional development and time</p> <p>The writing, vocabulary, and comprehension PLCs helped me learn new ways to incorporate literacy strategies in my instruction.</p> <p>It was helpful to review our parental plan.</p>
<p>Question 6 Explain how the school could better support you in implementing content area literacy strategies in your classroom.</p>	<p>professional development opportunities, literacy resources and materials</p>	<p>curriculum coaches, ongoing professional development</p>	<p>provide professional development; beneficial walkthrough with feedback</p>	<p>professional development opportunities, literacy coaches</p>

Research Question 2: What are the experiences of creating professional learning communities for elementary teachers that researches and supports the implementation of research-based strategies in vocabulary instruction, reading and comprehension instruction,

writing instruction, and increasing parental involvement impact teacher perceptions of content area literacy instruction and potentially impact student achievement? The following theme emerged from the post-interview that addresses research question 2.

Theme 3: Content area teachers are incorporating literacy and language instruction in their content areas. The data also revealed that the participants feel that the professional development sessions were beneficial to the implementation.

I identified literacy and language strategies in the participants' lesson plans that support their comments about the incorporation of literacy strategies in their classrooms. I also noted that the participants incorporated at least one or two strategies that I shared during the PLCs into their lesson plans. The lesson plans included the following strategies and practices: multiple opportunities for students to engage with vocabulary words, use of activating prior knowledge and connecting content to the real world, short writes to check for comprehension, use of technology to check for comprehension, and DoK Level Questioning strategies.

A participant, who is a math and science teacher, explained that he incorporated the short-writes and multiple opportunities for students to engage with vocabulary after learning about the simple strategies during one of the PLCs. This explanation proved that teachers are willing to use the strategies and information from the PLCs. Another participant shared that the strategies I shared were simple but has had a positive impact on the implementation of more literacy strategies in her classroom. "I used the short-writes strategy. During my math instruction, I usually would give students more math problems that only required them to compute and provide a single answer. I've noticed that the short writes require the students to think more about the process because I ask them to write an explanation to go with their answer (Post Interview, 2019)." The DoK Level Questioning strategies appear to be more beneficial to

ELA teachers. One ELA teacher shared that she uses the questioning strategies to ask students about specific texts.

Table 12 shows the responses to questions 2, 3, and 4. Question 2 asked the participants if all subjects capitalize on students' literacy and language as a way to learn new information. I asked the participants, "Do all subjects capitalize on students' literacy and language as a way to learn new information?" Participant 1 stated, "ELA and Social Studies instruction incorporates literacy and language strategies to help students learn new information (Post Interview, 2019)." Participant 2 stated, "I have continued to include literacy and language instruction in reading and social studies instruction (Post Interview, 2019)." Participant 3 stated, "Literacy is included more during my math and science instruction (Post Interview, 2019)." Participant 4 stated, "I include more literacy strategies in my science and math time (Post Interview, 2019)." The participants also explained the benefits of the professional development sessions in teaching reading instructional strategies for their respective content areas.

I instructed the participants to explain the benefits of the professional development sessions in teaching reading instructional strategies for their respective content areas. Participant 1 stated, "I have allowed students to participate in more writing opportunities during social studies instruction. We have received some professional development (Post Interview, 2019)." Participant 2 stated, "Students are given more informal writing opportunities to improve fluency which is helping them generate thoughts. I also provide students more opportunities to work with vocabulary words. I think it will eventually have a positive impact on their achievement. Professional development has been limited and I feel that I can benefit more from additional PLC opportunities (Post Interview, 2019)." Participant 3 stated, "Professional development is still needed to help me become efficient in providing more literacy opportunities to my students

(Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 4 stated, “Students are provided more opportunities to write during math. Science is full of reading for information so I include more writing opportunities during science as well. I would like to be given more opportunities to attend literacy professional development (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 1 explained that she incorporates literacy and language strategies in her instruction to help students learn new information. She also explained that she incorporates more writing instruction during social studies instruction. Participant 2 continues to include language and literacy strategies in her instruction. She also includes more writing opportunities for students during instructional time to help improve their writing fluency. She provides more opportunities for students to improve their vocabulary. Participants 3 and 4 explained that they incorporate more literacy strategies during their science and math instruction. Participant 4 explained that students are provided with more opportunities to write during math and science. Participants 3 and 4 feel that more professional development would be beneficial to their implementation of content area literacy strategies.

For question 3, I instructed the participants to explain how the professional development sessions provided the past few weeks, support all students in reading and writing. Participant 1 stated, “The professional development sessions allowed me to learn more literacy strategies to include in my classrooms that will increase students’ reading and writing abilities (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 2 stated, “I learned some additional strategies that I can use to help students with their reading and writing in reading and social studies (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 3 stated, “The professional development sessions allowed me to participate in mini activities that support writing and reading in all content areas. I was able to learn ways to incorporate vocabulary activities, writing activities, and reading activities in math and science instruction (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 4 stated, “I learned ways that writing can be used

during math instruction. I particularly like the writing fluency activity that can be incorporated into math and science (Post Interview, 2019).” Participants 1 and 2 explained that the professional development sessions allowed them to learn literacy strategies to help them improve their reading and writing instruction during reading and social studies. Participant 3 explained that the professional development sessions allowed her to participate in mini activities that support reading and writing instruction in all of the content areas. She also explained that she learned strategies that will help her incorporate vocabulary activities, writing activities, and reading activities in math and science instruction. Participant 4 explained that he learned ways to incorporate writing during math instruction. He specially mentioned the writing fluency activity that was conducted during a professional development session.

Question 4 asked the participants if literacy is embedded in their instruction. I asked the participants, “Is literacy embedded in their instruction?” Participant 1 answered, “Literacy is embedded in my instruction. I plan multiple opportunities for students to read and write in all of the content areas (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 2 explained, “Literacy continues to be the foundation of instruction in my classroom. I allow students the opportunity to participate in writing and reading opportunities during ELA and social studies. I also incorporate literacy activities on the computer (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 3 explained, “I have begun to embed more literacy instruction in my math time. I allow students more opportunities to write and collaborate with their peers about math. Literacy is embedded during my science instruction. Students have always read for information during science but I try to include more interactive writing opportunities for them during science (Post Interview, 2019).” Participant 4 stated, “I have begun to incorporate more literacy instruction during math and science. I am continuing to look for different strategies to help me improve in providing students with more

literacy instruction (Post Interview, 2019).” Participants 1 and 2 explained that literacy is embedded in their instruction. Students engage in literacy instruction in all content areas.

Participant 2 also explained that the students participate in literacy activities on the computer.

Participants 3 and 4 have begun to embed more literacy instruction in their classrooms.

Participant 3 explained that she is continuing to improve on including more writing opportunities for students. Participant 4 is also continuing to look for additional strategies to help him improve in providing students with more literacy opportunities.

Table 12. Participants’ Responses to Post-Interview Questions 2, 3, and 4

	Teacher 1 Responses	Teacher 2 Responses	Teacher 3 Responses	Teacher 4 Responses
Question 2 Do all subjects capitalize on students’ literacy and language as a way to learn new information? Explain the benefits of the professional development sessions in teaching reading instructional strategies for their respective content areas.	ELA and Social Studies instruction incorporates literacy and language strategies to help students learn new information. I have allowed students to participate in more writing opportunities during social studies instruction. We have received some professional development.	I have continued to include literacy and language instruction in reading and social studies instruction. Students are given more informal writing opportunities to improve fluency which is helping them generate thoughts. I also provide students more opportunities to work with vocabulary words. I think it will eventually have a positive impact on their achievement. Professional development has	Literacy is included more during my math and science instruction. Professional development is still needed to help me become efficient in providing more literacy opportunities to my students.	I include more literacy strategies in my science and math time. Students are provided more opportunities to write during math. Science is full of reading for information so I include more writing opportunities during science as well. I would like to be give more opportunities to attend literacy professional development.

		been limited and I feel that I can benefit more from additional PLC opportunities.		
Question 3 Explain how the professional development sessions provided the past few weeks, support all students in reading and writing.	The professional development sessions allowed me to learn more literacy strategies to include in my classrooms that will increase students' reading and writing abilities.	I learned some additional strategies that I can use to help students with their reading and writing in reading and social studies.	The professional development sessions allowed me to participate in mini activities that supports writing and reading in all content areas. I was able to learn ways to incorporate vocabulary activities, writing activities, and reading activities in math and science instruction.	I learned ways that writing can be used during math instruction. I particularly like the writing fluency activity that can be incorporated in math and science.
Question 4 Is literacy is embedded in their instruction?	Literacy is embedded in my instruction. I plan multiple opportunities for students to read and write in all of the content areas.	Literacy continues to be the foundation of instruction in my classroom. I allow students the opportunity to participate in writing and reading opportunities during ELA and social studies. I also incorporate literacy activities on the computer.	I have begun to embed more literacy instruction in my math time. I allow students more opportunities to write and collaborate with their peers about math. Literacy is embedded during my science instruction. Students have	I have begun to incorporate more literacy instruction during math and science. I am continuing to look for different strategies to help me improve in providing students with more literacy instruction.

			always read for information during science but I try to include more interactive writing opportunities for them during science.	
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CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This chapter is a discussion of the findings, the limitations of the findings, researcher comments, and implications for future research.

Discussion of Findings

This section presents a discussion of the findings of the research that was conducted to answer the following questions.

(1) What are a 5th grade team of teachers' perceptions of content area literacy instruction and barriers in implementing content area literacy?

(2) What are the experiences of creating professional learning communities for elementary teachers that researches and supports the implementation of research-based strategies in vocabulary instruction, reading and comprehension instruction, writing instruction, and increasing parental involvement impact teacher perceptions of content area literacy instruction and potentially impact student achievement?

Research Question 1

The first research question is: What are a 5th grade team of teachers' perceptions of content area literacy instruction and barriers in implementing content area literacy? It was revealed in the findings that professional learning communities that focus on content area literacy allow teachers to have a better understanding of literacy and its importance. It also prepares them to teach literacy strategies.

The findings in this study support the literature in chapter two. Effective professional learning communities have the potential to positively impact teachers and student achievement

(Many, 2008). According to Darling-Hammond (2009), teachers who work together during professional learning activities cultivate change in the school that spreads outside of their classroom. The findings revealed that professional learning communities that focus on content area literacy impact teachers' perceptions of content area literacy. The findings proved that teachers were more prepared to implement literacy strategies into their instruction after participating in professional learning communities that focused on content area literacy. This study also revealed that professional learning communities have a positive impact on teachers' abilities to implement literacy strategies. This research supports Weiser (2012) research that professional learning communities provide the needed support that will ensure that teachers grow professionally and form networks that will benefit them and their students.

One interview question asked the participants to describe content area literacy. One reason this question was asked was to see if there was a common definition among the grade level. This allowed me to discern if the participants understood the meaning of content area literacy. The responses varied and this proved that the participants did not have a shared definition for content area literacy. A researcher describes schools as nested communities in which collections of people are tied together by common foundational values. These values lead to a commitment to both individual rights and shared responsibilities Sergiovanni (2001). Content literacy represents the skills needed to acquire knowledge of content rather than the actual knowledge of the content itself (McKenna & Robinson, 2009). It is crucial for teachers to share a common definition and value of content area literacy. After the first professional learning community session, the participants acquired a better understanding of content area literacy and were able to define content area literacy. The definition was more specific and more meaningful than the definition that they provided during the pre-interview.

Content area teachers must know the importance of incorporating literacy in their classrooms. When one focuses on one area, it does not provide an accurate picture of the scope of literacy practices that take place in the classroom (Pearson, 2013). It is assumed that students possess literacy skills for each content area and are able to use it appropriately (Buehl, 2011). However, students must be taught literacy skills. It is the responsibility of content area teachers to model and help students develop literacy skills. A professional learning community can help teachers better understand the importance of literacy and also model ways to provide students with opportunities to develop literacy skills.

Another question asked the participants their views about the expectation to integrate literacy strategies within their content instruction. All of the participants explained that literacy strategies should be integrated into all content instruction. All content area teachers must take the responsibility of integrating literacy strategies in their content area. Previous research supports my belief. Teachers need to conceptualize their notion of teaching in their subject areas, to recognize that they are teaching reading and writing specific to a particular subject area (Biannacarosa & Snow, 2006).

The study proved that the lack of professional development and time are barriers that inhibit teachers from implementing literacy and language strategies in their classrooms.

The participants shared that time and lack of professional development opportunities limit them from successfully implementing literacy strategies in the classroom. These findings are related to previous literature. Some classroom teachers believe that reading instruction infringes on their content time (Park & Osborne, 2006). When teachers feel that instructional time is better spent on focusing on content, literacy tends to be set to the side (Ness, 2007). The researcher also noted in the study that content area teachers view the implementation of literacy

and support for reading comprehension as a time-consuming burden that is ineffective in improving student understanding and retention of content (Ness, 2007).

A group of researchers defined professional development as structured professional learning that results in changes to teacher knowledge and practices, and improvement in student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Effective professional development opportunities will allow teachers to participate in job-embedded literacy activities to increase their knowledge in literacy and change their instructional practice to support literacy in their classrooms.

Additionally, the participants also discussed the parental involvement impact on students' literacy. It is obvious that the parent liaison had a positive impact on parental involvement. The participants agreed that the parent liaison planned a variety of activities that involved parents. This required parents to visit the school and/or interact with their children about their schoolwork at home.

Research Question 2

The second research question is: What are the experiences of creating professional learning communities for elementary teachers that researches and supports the implementation of research-based strategies in vocabulary instruction, reading and comprehension instruction, writing instruction, and increasing parental involvement impact teacher perceptions of content area literacy instruction and potentially impact student achievement? It was revealed that the implementation of professional learning communities allows content area teachers to better incorporate literacy and language instruction in their content areas.

The lack of professional development opportunities was mentioned several times as a factor that inhibited participants from integrating literacy strategies in their classrooms. This finding related to previous literature and one of the theoretical theories discussed in the literature

review. Teachers need to engage with their colleagues in a sociocultural context to learn new skills (Berry, 2013). A sociocultural group can provide scaffolding for new content area literacy teaching skills until the individual is capable of demonstrating independence and helping others become independent (Biannacarosa & Snow, 2006). Professional learning communities can help provide scaffolding and support for improving content area literacy in classrooms. Teachers need a repertoire of usable and practical strategies, opportunities to experience the strategies in use, and on-going encouragement in actually putting them into practice (Rose, 2000).

During the study, my participants agreed that all teachers should incorporate literacy in their instruction but admitted that they needed support. They also explained that professional development sessions would be beneficial. Content area teachers are more likely to implement literacy strategies in their classrooms when they attend professional development that is related to literacy (Adams & Pegg, 2012).

During the interviews, the participants agreed that there is a school-wide emphasis on content area literacy and that they have the support of the school leaders. However, the participants explained that they do not attend regular professional development sessions that are related to reading and writing strategies. A consistent professional learning community that focuses on literacy instruction in content areas will only strengthen the teachers' skills and will impact the students' achievement levels. A professional learning community that focuses on content literacy instruction will help the teachers create intervention initiatives that cause students to read more and read efficiently.

A researcher reported that her experience as a high school science teacher, who attended a staff development program in content area reading, learned to use content area strategies with her students that improved both her own teaching and her students' learning (Ridgeway, 2004).

Improved teaching of literacy across all content areas enhance not only language learning but also content area learning.

Limitations of Findings

The main limitation of this study was the small sample size. This study only involved four teachers at the upper elementary level. This study needs to be replicated with a larger group. This limitation definitely limited my ability to include information from the lower elementary level, middle school, and high school. School leaders can address this limitation by allowing grade chairpersons in other grade levels to collaborate with their team to get a better understanding of their team's perceptions of content area literacy.

Another limitation is that students' and administrators' perceptions are not included at all. It is crucial for teachers to have an understanding of their students' perceptions of content area literacy. If the administrators' perceptions were included in the study, it may have better-opened dialogue between the teachers and administrators to get the support that is needed to address the concerns expressed during the research.

Implications for Future Practice in Local Context in the field of Teacher Leadership

This research revealed valuable insights from fifth-grade teachers on how to improve the content area literacy strategies at their school. This study provided information about teachers' perceptions on content area literacy that highlighted ways that professional learning communities could support teachers' implementation of content area literacy strategies in their classrooms. It shed a light on the importance of teachers receiving ongoing professional learning that addresses content area literacy strategies. The study revealed that teachers felt more prepared to implement content area literacy strategies after they attended professional learning communities that focused on content area literacy strategies. The professional learning communities included

effective professional development that focused on content area literacy strategies. Teachers were able to collaborate in the PLCs and increase their knowledge and skills to effectively implement the strategies in their classrooms. Additionally, this study proved that all content area teachers need to be a part of a professional learning community that focuses on literacy.

It is important for teachers to share their perceptions so that the proper changes can be implemented to improve the content area literacy at the school. This research revealed that teachers feel that there is a strong need for a professional learning community that focuses on content area literacy strategies. This study can be used by teacher leaders across the nation to ensure that content area teachers have opportunities to be a part of a PLC to enhance their knowledge and skills. This will allow students to experience more literacy opportunities in all of their content area classes. Teacher Leaders can communicate with the content area teachers in their schools to get a better understanding of their literacy needs. Afterwards, they can create and implement professional learning communities that focus on content area literacy. Teacher leaders can research literacy strategies and participate in district and state level PLCs to share information and strategies with the content area teachers at their schools.

Recommendations for Future Practices based on Research Findings

During the interviews, participants concurred that there was no literacy leadership team at the school. I suggest that the administrators at the school create a Literacy Leadership Team that consists of ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies teachers. This is crucial to implement in schools to ensure that content area teachers' literacy needs are addressed. It will also ensure that teachers are receiving ongoing learning opportunities that addresses literacy.

There are many English Language Art (ELA) teachers with several years of experience at the school. The Literacy Leadership Team can include a teacher from each grade level who is

knowledgeable in literacy strategies. The Literacy Leadership Team should also include school leaders and a district representative with a literacy background. Each member of the team will represent their grade so that the concerns, needs, and successes of all content area teachers are shared and represented.

The Literacy Leadership Team should meet monthly to plan engaging professional development learning opportunities that are directly related to the content area teacher literacy needs.

Examples of possible meetings for Literacy Leadership Teams can be with grade level meetings and may be used to provide content area teachers with effective professional development related to literacy strategies. The professional development sessions can be conducted by visitors with expertise in content area literacy, members of the school's Literacy Leadership Team, and/or literacy leaders in the district. This will be beneficial to the content area teachers because all of the participants shared that effective professional development opportunities are one way that the school can better support them in implementing literacy strategies in their classrooms.

Another recommendation is to send members of the Literacy Leadership Team to literacy conferences that are offered in other districts and/or states and at the national level. It is crucial that the members of the literacy team receive training and professional development to better provide effective professional development opportunities for the teachers at the school. Literacy conferences and workshops will provide the members of the school's Literacy Leadership Team with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively provide learning opportunities with teachers at the school. For schools that are unable to start a Literacy Leadership team, it is recommended that they designate teachers or teacher leaders to regularly participate in literacy

professional development offered by the district, state or national level. These individuals will be responsible for delivering the information to the teachers at the school during their PLC sessions.

One of the barriers that was mentioned is the lack of professional development opportunities. It is recommended that teachers participate in PLCs that RESA (Regional Educational Service Agency) provides. RESA provides research-based professional learning that improves the work of educators, data-driven school improvement support that improves student achievement, services that increase the effectiveness of school systems, and effective collaborations with other agencies that maximize the impact of state initiatives.

Additionally, the participants shared their experiences with professional learning communities in this study. The professional learning communities conducted in this study will contribute to the future practices of teacher leaders in elementary schools. The professional learning communities focused on the needs of the content area teachers. They addressed the different components of content area literacy and included strategies for each one. The PLCs also focused on adult-learning strategies for the implementation of the professional development. Teacher leaders can use the structure of the professional learning communities to plan and implement professional development opportunities for content area literacy teachers. This study included information on strategies that can be used by teacher leaders to help teachers embrace and incorporate literacy strategies in their classrooms.

Administrators in schools must realize the importance of providing their teacher leaders with opportunities to attend professional learning communities. Teacher leaders can use the opportunities to enhance their knowledge of skills of content area literacy and use it to deliver effective professional development at their own schools.

Implications for Future Research

There is a need for future research on the professional development opportunities that ELA teachers attend and the professional development opportunities that math teachers attend. Math, science, ELA, and social studies teachers attended my professional learning community sessions. All teachers benefited by learning literacy strategies that they were able to incorporate in their specific content area. Teachers trained as content specialist do not have extensive training on how to teach the higher-level language and literacy skills or special needs strategies which are needed in today's classrooms (Richardson, 2006). It is evident through the quotes from math teachers and ELA teachers that math teachers are not given many literacy professional development opportunities. The ELA teachers had more defined definitions of literacy than the math teachers. The data from the interview also supports that ELA teachers embed literacy in their instruction more than the math teachers. Future research must be done to get a better understanding of the impact that literacy professional development opportunities will have on math teachers' implementation of content area literacy. The literacy strategies that are implemented in the ELA teachers' classrooms and the literacy strategies that are implemented in math teachers' classrooms should be further researched. Math teachers do not experience the same level of literacy professional development opportunities that ELA teachers experience. This has a major impact on the importance of literacy in math, science, and social studies classrooms and the way literacy strategies are implemented.

There is also a need for further research on the perceptions of content area teachers on literacy strategies in early childhood, middle school, and high school. This study only looked at fifth-grade teachers at one school. More research needs to be done at a higher level to get a better understanding of the perceptions of early childhood, middle and high school teachers.

Researcher Comments

Effective professional learning communities have the potential to positively impact the implementation of content area literacy in schools. Common Core Standards has put much focus on literacy. In order for students to be successful, they must be provided with literacy opportunities in all subjects. It is crucial for teachers to realize that literacy is not only the responsibility of English Language Arts teachers. Teachers must be willing to change their mindset about content area literacy and be willing to incorporate literacy strategies into their classrooms. Ultimately, providing the necessary opportunities for teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills is about improving learning for all students. Effective professional learning communities have the ability to impact teachers' knowledge and skills in content area literacy as well as students.

Administrators and school leaders must be willing to advocate for the necessary resources to provide teacher leaders with opportunities to attend professional learning communities on the district and state level to increase their knowledge and skills in content area literacy. Teacher leaders must be advocates for the teachers at the school. Many schools are unable to send all of their teachers to district and state professional learning sessions. However, a teacher leader can attend and redeliver the information to the teachers at the school.

Conducting this study allowed me to gain a better understanding of the different challenges and successes that teachers have with literacy. I was able to see how my knowledge of content area literacy benefited others.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. How do you define content area literacy?
2. What is the school-wide emphasis on content area literacy? Do the administrators and school leaders support the integration of literacy instruction across the content areas?
3. Do all subjects throughout a student's day capitalize on students' literacy and language as a way to learn new information? Do teachers attend professional development sessions to learn reading instructional strategies for their respective content areas?
4. How do the intervention initiatives cause students to read more and to read better? Do teachers develop individual literacy plans to meet the literacy instructional needs of students?
5. How does the professional development support all students in reading and writing? Does the literacy leadership team assess and plan literacy professional development?
6. Is literacy embedded in your instruction? Elaborate.
7. What barriers inhibit you from implementing literacy strategies in your classroom? If there are no barriers, what supports the implementation of literacy strategies in your classroom?
8. How could the school better support you in implementing content area literacy strategies in your classroom?
9. What are your thoughts about the expectation to integrate literacy strategies within your content instruction?
10. How prepared do you feel you are to teach the expected content area literacy strategies to your students?

Appendix B: Consent Form

SIGNED CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Study: Teacher Perspectives on Content Literacy in Elementary Schools

Researcher's Contact Information: Jontia Grace
jgrace13@students.kennesaw.edu

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research study conducted by Jontia Grace of Kennesaw State University. Before you decide to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Description of Project

The problem of practice this study seeks to address is improving the content area literacy instruction abilities of teachers through job-embedded and ongoing professional development delivered through the creation of a professional learning community comprised of 5th grade teachers from all content areas - language arts, math, science, and social studies. The goal of this study is to positively impact 5th grade students' literacy abilities by supporting teacher development by changing their planning, instruction, and assessment practice by implementing effective research-based strategies in vocabulary instruction, reading and comprehension instruction, writing instruction, and increasing parental involvement to support the home/school literacy connection.

Explanation of Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, I will administer a pre-survey to gain a better understanding of your perceptions of content area literacy. I will also facilitate professional learning sessions related to vocabulary instruction, writing instruction, comprehension instruction, and parental involvement. A post-survey will be administered at the end of the professional learning sessions so that I can compare data. A focus group interview will also take place during the study.

Time Required

The pre-survey and post-survey will take 30-45 minutes to complete. The professional learning sessions will take 45-60 minutes to complete. The focus group interview will also take 45-60 minutes to complete.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no known risks or anticipated discomforts in this study.

Benefits

There are no benefits to you. The researcher may learn more about teachers' perceptions of content area literacy in elementary schools and ways to support the teachers as a result of the study.

Confidentiality

The results of this participation will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will reveal your identity. If I tape-record the interview, I will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed.

Signed Consent

I agree and give my consent to participate in this research project. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

Signature of Participant or Authorized Representative, Date

Signature of Investigator, Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 585 Cobb Avenue, KH3403, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (470) 578-2268.