EARLY READING INTERVENTION: A COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY OF SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION

by

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Abstract

Early reading development plays a vital role in the success of students along their learning journey. Primary teachers facilitate reading development through early reading intervention programs that meet the various needs of young readers. The purpose of this study was to interview what this group of teachers does well in early reading intervention and develop a plan to build upon these successes for future program development. Research data was collected through an appreciative inquiry focus group discussion. The concluding thematic analysis revealed that the participating teachers implemented early reading intervention through continuous professional development, collaborative planning opportunities, and the utilization of critical reflection in order to be responsive early reading educational practitioners.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract.........................................................................................................................i

Acknowledgements..................................................................................................ii

Table of Contents....................................................................................................iii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.................................................................................. 1

   Early Reading Intervention......................................................................................1

   Study Background..................................................................................................3

   Rationale for Study of Problem.............................................................................5

   Research Questions...............................................................................................5

   Statement of Purpose............................................................................................6

   Methodology.........................................................................................................7

   Definition of Terms...............................................................................................8

   Overview of Thesis...............................................................................................8

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.........................................................................9

   Emergent Reading Development Theories............................................................9

   Kindergarten Reading Intervention....................................................................11

   Implications of Early Reading Intervention........................................................12
Importance of Educational Staff in Early Reading Success .............................................................. 19

Further Examination in Early Reading Intervention ........................................................................ 21

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS ............................................................................................................. 24

Study Overview ................................................................................................................................. 24

Methodological Understanding ....................................................................................................... 24

Participants ..................................................................................................................................... 25

Data Collection ............................................................................................................................... 26

Data Analysis and Interpretation .................................................................................................... 27

Establishing Understanding ............................................................................................................ 28

Limitations ...................................................................................................................................... 28

Significance ..................................................................................................................................... 29

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS/FINDINGS ............................................................................................ 31

Overview of Findings ....................................................................................................................... 31

What do we do well in early reading intervention programming? .............................................. 31

When are we providing the best early reading intervention? ...................................................... 32

What characteristics are present in effective early reading intervention? .............................. 33

What are the most inspiring experiences in early reading intervention? ................................. 33

What do we consider the most promising components of our future? ..................................... 34
Chapter One

Introduction

Early Reading Intervention

Reading skill development in the early primary grades has become a focal point for educational study. A growing number of studies identify the importance of emergent reading skills for future learning success (Braun & Clark, 2006; Al Otaiba & Torgesen, 2007; Phillips, Norris, & Mason, 1996; Oslund et al., 2012). There are strong correlations between emergent reading skills such as print knowledge, alphabet knowledge, rapid letter naming, decoding non-words, phonological awareness and later comprehension skills (Early Literacy Panel, 2005). The ability to examine early primary reading development allows educators to identify areas of difficulty and analyze the potential for future special education services (Vellutino, Scanlon, Zhang & Schatschneider, 2008). Educators have the responsibility to support students in developing emergent reading skills to support future learning success.

Early reading intervention provides a way to support emergent reader needs for primary students of all abilities. In the early primary grades, teachers often assess reading development through administration of simple kindergarten tests and anecdotal teacher rating of student ability (Flynn & Rahbar, 1998). The understanding is that early detection of emergent reading skill deficit can help support students to learn how to read and potentially deter later reading problems. Through an examination of preventative studies, Santi, York, Foorman & Francis (2009), determine that 70-90% of at-risk children in kindergarten through grade 2 can learn to read in the average range. Study analyses such as this indicate that the majority of children can learn to read successfully given timely and specific reading intervention opportunities (Foorman & Al Otaiba, in press; Torgesen, 2002).
Early reading intervention is supported through the use of specific diagnostic strategies. These strategies are interventions that target specific literacy skills with a focus on scaffolded reading instruction. A reading intervention strategy commonly utilized is found in Guided Reading intervention. Guided reading is a teaching strategy that involves cognition, talking and working with text in small homogeneous (similar reading ability) groups of students (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). All students participate in reading group activities that support individuals in specific decoding and comprehension strategies at developmentally appropriate levels.

Additionally, early reading intervention includes phonemic awareness programs. As Shanahan (1984) explains, sound-symbol knowledge is related to early reading success. Therefore, students who need direct instruction in analyzing and segmenting words are provided an essential intervention to support reading progress (Vellutino, 1979). Class-based and systematic phonics instruction opportunities starting in kindergarten allow students to apply their knowledge of the alphabetic code to read and spell words (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl & Willows, 2001). Educators utilize specific diagnostic and reading support strategies to identify students requiring support to meet reading achievement criteria.

Diagnostic reading interventions provide a basis for future educational support or special education services delivery. Education professionals who work with students at individual stages of reading skill development have a unique avenue to conduct problem analysis and allow progress monitoring of individual learning progression (Ball & Christ, 2012). The interaction between education staff and learner provides a way to build an educated hypothesis with data that allows educators to understand factors that contribute to academic success and challenges. Through these interactions, educators are able to monitor reading development and provide suggestions for what needs to be learned to reduce the possibility for
reading development struggles (Greenwood & Kim, 2012). Documented and continuously analyzed student progression in emergent reading development allows for consistent support and future consideration for an increase of learner support if required. Diagnostic reading interventions provide a basis to rationalize the intensity of support and services provided to developing learners. Given the impact of early reading on students’ success, it is important that school-wide attention is given to developing a coordinated program of diagnosis and intervention.

*Study Background*

This study took place in a K-7 school within a remote village community on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The student population consists of approximately 190 children. Students are supported by 12 teaching staff/administrators and 6 support staff. As both a member of this team and author of this study, I can state that we are a team of educational practitioners that understand and utilize differentiated support, diverse learning strategies, and assessment to guide learning. Grade team meetings, professional development meetings, and various informal communications provide extensive opportunities to develop our plan and commitment towards early reading success. We have made various commitments to support early reading development through a school-wide Guided Reading program 3 days per week. These small group instructional blocks support emergent and developing readers from decoding to comprehension. Additionally, our Learning Assistance staff provides push-in and pull-out intervention for phonics development, dolch word practice, and reading through internet based applications such as Core5 and RazKids. The skill of all school staff and the repertoire of reading strategies and programming provided to early readers in this learning environment allows for extensive early reading intervention in our school.
Educational decisions in early reading at this school are grounded in data collection and analysis. Primary staff and administrators are dedicated to progress monitoring throughout the school year. At the beginning of each school year, kindergarten teaching staff provide a kindergarten entry reading assessment that provides a baseline of student understanding and to help guide reading instruction through letter/sound recognition. Progress monitoring of early reading development also takes place with the help of learning support staff. Learning Assistance teachers dedicate time each term to conduct reading assessment through PM Benchmark assessments in the fall, spring and at the end of the school year. PM Benchmarks provide a snapshot of student reading fluency and comprehension skills. School administrators are also dedicated to early learning success as classroom teachers provide rubric numeral ranking (1=not yet meeting expectations/ 4=exceeding expectations) for each student three times per year. Patterns of student progress and areas for further development are identified and supported through collaborative meetings and individual classroom support. Our staff has made a commitment to use progress monitoring as a way to validate early reading intervention planning in our primary grades.

For our staff, interest in early learning intervention has stemmed from professional collaboration and school achievement goals. As part of a collaborative professional community, a large amount of time has been placed on determining ways to meet the needs of primary students so that they are ready for each of the learning progressions in their school careers. As a member of this team, I am highly motivated to find ways to share the extensive knowledge and expertise that this diverse group of education professionals bring to support early reading development. Our school goals also identify our team commitment towards early reading development. We have devoted time and staff resources in order to provide extensive early learning intervention opportunities. Over the last number of years, early reading intervention
has been a cornerstone for school growth and academic progress for students. The interest now stems from how to continue to improve early learning development and contribute to the achievement of students in the school community. Collaboration and school accountability for student success provide the foundation for personal and professional interest.

**Rationale for Study of Problem**

At this time, our school has taken part in early reading intervention programming for 5 years. Staff members agreed that reviewing our current practices will help us continue to provide early reading intervention. This study identified the specific skills, interests, dreams and successes for our staff in reading development. From this inquiry, we identified areas for improvement to support primary students as they learn to read. Though each staff member has taken new ideas into his or her practice, we feel we would benefit from school wide knowledge of resources and coordination of programming and strategies, grade to grade, and between teachers of the same grade level. Evaluating and analyzing our current time commitment, reading assessment practices, and evaluation of the efficacy of early reading intervention validated current commitments and provided a pathway towards future early reading intervention in our school.

**Research Question**

This research project focused on the question of “**How can our school staff appreciate and build on early reading programming?**” My intention, in exploring early reading intervention programming through an appreciative inquiry approach, was to understand our strengths as a school staff and identify how we can build upon our achievements to develop and improve early reading intervention practices.
Statement of Purpose

The research conducted in this study focused on the belief system that knowledge within a community can help make improvements to the teaching and learning environment. McNiff & Whitehead (2009) explain that professional development dictates the direction our instruction takes and the impact that these methods of instruction have on fellow teaching colleagues. Collaborative meetings involve sharing teaching strategies, learning activities, and various interventions that we use with our diverse student population. The process of exploring the skill sets, dreams and success within our education community provided a way to develop as a collaborative community. Professional growth in teaching and development of knowledge was formed through rich discussion and planning through this professional development inquiry. This research process takes a constructionist perspective because we believe that early reading development is connected to the reading interventions provided to our students in their primary years. This knowledge will be through a post-positivist perspective as both the researcher and participants are equally invested in the outcomes of this research and future teaching and learning experiences. An inquiry into the skills, dreams and successes of early reading learning in our school environment created knowledge and processes for our school to use as a foundation for future planning.

Additionally, the knowledge created from this research could be of interest to other schools endeavouring in professional practice inquiry. The experiences and conclusions from this research about best practices in early reading intervention can be transferred and confirmed by other schools that are also interested in early reading intervention to innovate the future of primary reading intervention in specific educational settings. The foundation of this
research can be compared and analyzed with the experiences of other schools in a similar professional development experience.

**Methodology**

This research project is based on an appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry (Ai), as first coined by Cooperrider & Srivasa (1987), is built on the premise that change is most successful when an organization builds on its strength. This form of inquiry allows people to search for the best in people and their organization, and the impact of the decisions and actions they have on the world around them (Ludema, Whitney, Mohr & Griffin, 2003). Although Ai was initially formed as a business development process, it is an appropriate inquiry process in the exploration of current educational best practices in early reading services and the discussion about future reading skill development support.

Interested school staff were approached to volunteer in a focus group discussion about early reading intervention. The use of qualitative research methods involving focus group discussions focused on bringing meaning to a situation rather than the search for absolute truths designed in quantitative research (Rabiee, 2004). Therefore, the focus group interview process involved the use of a group interview where participants were selected based on the focus of the selected topic and whether they had something to contribute to the topic of discussion.

Following the focus group discussion, a thematic analysis was conducted to analyze data. Thematic analysis is known as a method of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns that can be extracted from data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analysis identified common themes among staff responses with regards to the success and future of providing early reading
intervention to primary students. Outcomes of this research provide a guide the future of early reading intervention in this school environment.

Definition of Terms

**Appreciative Inquiry (Ai):** a model for analysis, decision making, and the creation of strategic change with an organization starting with what works well within a system.

**Emergent reading:** term often used to explain a child’s knowledge of reading skills before they have learned how to read words.

**Early reading intervention:** through universal screening of primary students, students at risk of reading failure receive increasingly intense instruction that is designed to meet individual learning needs and increase growth in reading.

**Reading Disability:** a reading disorder that involves a significant impairment of reading accuracy, speed, or comprehension based on environmental or neurological variables.

**Thematic Analysis:** a process of analyzing data from qualitative research. Involves coding of scribed responses to create established and meaningful themes for a produced report.

**Overview of Thesis**

The literature review examines the scope of early reading intervention from a broad view of special education to educator contributions. The methodology and procedures outline the exploration of early reading intervention in a specific school setting. The results from the research conducted are presented and analyzed through a thematic analysis. Finally, the conclusions and recommendations for future research conclude this study.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

This review explores the scholarly literature in the field of early reading intervention. Through a focus at the kindergarten level, implications for students participating in early reading intervention programming, the impact of collaborative educational staff on early reading success and additional areas of study in early reading will be examined. The intention of this literature review is to ensure this study is based on current research.

**Emergent Reading Development Theories**

Emergent reading was first introduced by New Zealand researcher Marie Clay in 1972. In her first book of research “Reading the Patterning of Complex Behaviour,” Clay explains emergent literacy theory as the concept that children have substantial amount of learning before entering school. She believes that reading is impacted by developmental experience before a child is introduced to formal reading instruction (McNaughton, 2014). Marie Clay’s emergent literacy theory acknowledges that children have the potential of entering their primary learning years at diverse stages of literacy development.

Marie Clay’s widely adopted early reading intervention is known as Reading Recovery. Reading Recovery is an elementary reading intervention program that begins as a struggling reader enters second grade. Clay believes that effective intervention involves starting where the child is at and focusing on the concept of ‘roaming around the known’ by using a tutor who provides individual intensive reading intervention (Clay, 1991). This level of scaffolding acknowledges that interventions focuses on those with low progress and acting on the development profiles for every child individually (McNaughton, 2014). Although Clay’s early reading intervention is used with children entering second grade, the basis of her early reading
theory relies on the understanding that children entering their primary years have learned reading behaviours. As a result, emergent reading readiness is diverse and varied among early learners who require intervention suited to their level of need.

The developing learner builds upon their knowledge through the gradual introduction of new tasks through the interaction with text and a more knowledgeable reader. Through the constructivist theory of Jerome Bruner (1966), the task of learning is based on an instructor translating information into a format that is appropriate for a learner’s current state of ability. This method of knowledge building is based on simplifying information, generating new ideas and increasing the ability to use information to gain a deeper understanding.

This concept of learning development is further supported through Lev Vygotsky’s social development theory. Vygotsky’s theory proposed that cognitive development proceeds through three main factors: culture, language, and social interaction (Louis, 2009). The most widely known contribution to Vygotsky’s Social Development Theory is his explanation of a child’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This concept explains learning and teaching as it acknowledges that there is a difference between a child’s level of development and the level of performance that can be achieved in collaboration with an adult (Smagorinsky, 2011; Mahn 1999). The value of ZPD lies in the idea that scaffolding of learning propels students towards new competencies that are within their learning potential (Smagorinsky, 2011).

Clay, Bruner, and Vygotsky contribute to the understanding of how learners become developing readers. If we accept learning as a process of building upon pre-existing knowledge through a more knowledgeable individual, then reading becomes an interactive experience between individuals as children build word decoding and reading comprehension skills.
Emergent reading development becomes a skill that it is developed at a young age. Therefore, skill development in emergent reading skills formally begins when a child enters kindergarten.

*Kindergarten Reading Intervention*

Emergent reading skills are one of the core areas of focus in the kindergarten curriculum. Students in the early stages of reading development in kindergarten are working towards understanding the diverse basis of all cueing systems; phonological, semantic, syntactic and pragmatic. Primary learners require direct instruction to develop the efficiency and automaticity of these principles in order to be developed and fluent readers (Lennon & Slesinski, 1999). However, children entering kindergarten have diverse amounts of preparation for learning to read (Lennon & Slesinski, 1999). This is exemplified through various means such as low cognitive ability, minimal opportunities to learn how to read at home, sensory impairments or specific neurological impairments (Schatschneider et al., 2008). The progression leading towards struggling emergent readers becomes a cascading issue from basic reading skills. As Denton (2012) outlined, early difficulties in beginning reading skills usually mean a limited amount of time interacting with text. Because of this reduced reading time, students may experience difficulty with decoding. This may look like a reading deficit noted as low fluency, poor vocabulary, and limited knowledge which impedes reading comprehension development. With approximately 20% of children having reading difficulties that negatively impact the mastering of skills to be proficient readers (Toste et al., 2014; Willms, 2011), the development and support of kindergarten literacy skills is one of the most pressing issues in primary education.
Implications of Early Reading Intervention

Early reading intervention in kindergarten creates an environment to support emergent learners and differentiate instruction to meet the growing needs of beginning readers. Reading intervention in kindergarten provides a way to learn reading skills that will benefit them as they transition to grade 1. These effects become long lasting and can help identify grey area students and identify who may require tiered learning or special education services. The goal of kindergarten literacy intervention becomes building a construct that will support emergent readers so they are less likely to enter grade 1 as a challenged beginning reader.

There are various reading interventions available for emergent readers. While there are interventions that focus on specific skill development, the majority of reading interventions take are based upon a balanced literacy approach. Balanced literacy programs emphasize phonological awareness and language development with comprehension embedded in the literature based approaches (Foorman & Togesen, 2001; Juel & Minden-Cupp, 2000). Of the variety of reading programs available, phonemic awareness and guided reading programs are among the most widely documented and utilized. Phonics, learning to make letter-sound correspondence, allows children to attempt reading and spelling words unknown to them (Adams, 1990). Within phonics programs children are provided a systematic and sequential program that connects graphemes and phonemes of the language and applies these rules to decode words by sounding out letters and blending them together (Ehri, Nunes, Stahl & Willows, 2001). The process of phonemic awareness interventions provides a sequential and scaffolded approach to emergent reading skill development. This intensive and specialized approach to reading development in phonic instruction has the greatest impact on reading achievement for kindergarteners (National Reading Panel, 2000).
Additionally, Guided Reading has become a widely used reading intervention within the primary classroom. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) developed the guided reading model that is built on providing classroom opportunities to allow students to practice reading strategies with teacher’s support in order to become independent readers. This process of Guided Reading was thought to be a return to small group reading instruction where whole group instruction did not provide reading activity at an instructional level (Fort & Opitz, 2008). Emergent readers are provided an intervention program where they are grouped with similar reading skilled readers. Learners are provided a reading environment that provides a scaffolded learning experience where students gain skill from an adult leader and are given increasing independence in their reading development.

The responsiveness of both phonemic awareness interventions and Guided Reading approaches are accepted in educational research experiments. In a study developed by Kamps et al. (2008), 116 students took part in a 3 tier model of school wide intervention in reading and behaviour. In this experimental-control group comparison, students were administered the DIBEL assessment tool for achievement before research began. The DIBEL assessment is a battery of 7 measures of early reading skills in phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, accuracy and fluency, connect text, reading comprehension and vocabulary. These one minute fluency measures are often used with individuals in Kindergarten to Grade 6. After the intervention implementation, Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests-Revised (WRMT-R) subtests were conducted with participants. The WRMT-R assesses reading ability through a battery of reading tests; letter identification, word identification, word attack, word comprehension and passage comprehension. These assessments are used as an identification of general reading ability. The findings from Kamps et al. (2008) conclude that all students in the direct instruction group were within the one standard deviation score on all WRMT-R subtests, and 100% of the
programmed reading group participants were within benchmark by the end of grade two. The ability to provide direct instruction for emergent readers provides an avenue to meet the individual needs of young learners in their primary years.

While phonemic awareness and Guided Reading interventions have been found to be statistically valid approaches to develop readers, there is requirement for diverse interventions utilized with emergent readers. In a meta-analysis of reading intervention research, the National Research Panel (2000) report documented a finding of the effectiveness of multiple interventions provided for students learning to read. In their study, the National Research Panel found that students that were provided phonics instruction alone had an effect size of $d=0.27$ in 2nd grade to 6th grade. Further, students that were provided fluency based instruction produced an effect size of $d=0.47$ and comprehension strategies formed an effect size of $d=0.80$. These findings identify that phonics instruction alone or reading fluency intervention alone will not provide the most effective reading intervention. There must be a combination of different forms of reading instruction and intervention to achieve the highest level of reading development. The benefit of providing a balanced literacy approach to reading skill development provides an avenue for early readers to build a firm understanding of reading skill and comprehension.

The benefits of targeted reading intervention in kindergarten are realized throughout students educational journey. As White (1985) explores, the earlier a child is involved in an intervention program, the more effective the program will be at meeting the needs of emergent readers. An increasing amount of academic literature highlights the importance of intervention beginning in kindergarten as a way to decrease the number of reading difficulties identified in subsequent grades (Al Otaiba & Torgesen 2007; Cavanaugh et al., 2004). The level of fluency in emergent reader skills have implications on learning to read and the predictive success in later education experiences (Simmons, D., Coyne, M., Hagan-Burke, S., Kwok, O., Simmons, L., &
Johnson, C. et al. (2011). In an examination of kindergarten reading interventions enhancing phonemic and decoding skills, Scammaca, N., Vaughn, S., Roberts, G., Wanzek, J., & Torgensen, J. (2007) identify that the lowest 25% of readers in a kindergarten class are most at risk of reading difficulties. Findings such as these indicate the importance of identifying reading difficulties and intervening at an early stage in a child’s literacy development.

Children that enter kindergarten are entering at various levels of development and ability. The school curriculum often assumes that children have knowledge of early literacy skills that they may not have acquired. Phillips, Norris & Mason (1996) explored the literacy skill of students who were taught only regular school curriculum and those who received additional reading intervention. Among the 12 kindergarten students in this study, the early literacy level of only tier 1 achieved a mean score of 85.7 and standard deviation of 29.5, whereas, the early literacy level tier2 had a mean score of 164.3 and standard deviation of 64.6. Students who only participated in general classroom literacy instruction performed a full standard deviation lower than their intensive, small group intervention counterparts. Starting reading intervention in the kindergarten year of school provides an opportunity for literacy development as they emerge as developing readers.

Initiating reading intervention in kindergarten has a long lasting effect on academic achievement. There is growing evidence that early reading intervention has a predictive validity. Predictive validity is known as the achievement noted in one measure connecting with future achievement in another measure. As more educators are implementing early reading intervention in kindergarten, they are able to make far clearer inferences about a learner’s future performance (Oslund, 2012; Spira, Bracken & Fishel, 2005). The ability to provide explicit and intensive reading instruction in the early grades decreases the number of children
presenting with reading problems. For example, Partanen & Siegel (2014) conducted a reading and cognitive test with 650 kindergarten children in the North Vancouver School District. Participants were provided small group intensive reading intervention throughout their kindergarten year. They were then assessed again in their grade 7 year using the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT3). These researchers identified 22% of children identified as at-risk in kindergarten with a decrease to 6% at-risk readers in grade seven. This evaluation of early intervention suggests that starting in kindergarten is successful at decreasing the amount of reading difficulties.

A further study in the predictive validity of early reading intervention comes from the work of Vellutino (2006) and Vellutino et al. (2008). In the Vellutino (2006) study of kindergarten intervention and reading achievement, he identified that 58% of children were meeting expectations in reading curriculum at the end of their first, second and third years. Vellutino built upon these findings in his research conducted in Vellutino et al. (2008) where he studied the impact of intensive kindergarten intervention alone or intensive reading intervention in both kindergarten and first grade. The researchers conducted a screening battery of letter identification and followed those who scored at or below the 30th percentile through to the end of their third grade. Of the 117 participants, 84% (98/117) were meeting grade level expectations by the end of grade one through tier 2 kindergarten intervention alone or with kindergarten and grade one intervention. Only 16% (19/117) of the children who were noted as at-risk at the beginning of kindergarten demonstrated difficulty in reading at the end of second and third grade (Vellutino et al., 2008, p.471). In this research, early reading intervention that started in kindergarten and that was conducted using small group intensive sessions outside of the class provided a system to support at-risk readers throughout their primary learning years.
The construct of early literacy intervention provides an avenue to meet the needs of ‘grey area’ students. Students who fall within the ‘grey area’ of student services are those who require additional support, but who do not meet the eligibility criteria for special education services. In a 2010 survey of teachers through the British Columbia Teacher’s Federation, meeting the needs of ‘grey area’ students was listed as the top source of teacher stress (Naylor & White, 2010). Often times the need to wait to prove a failure of skill building creates an environment of wait-to-fail and a struggle to meet the diverse needs of students. This period of waiting for services can last from several weeks to several years. Otiba et al. (2014) presented an experimental design that explored the impact of swift intensive intervention in comparison to waiting 8 weeks before moving into intensive intervention. The findings exemplified the need for the students showing weaker skills to receive the most intensive intervention, as reading performance at the end of kindergarten was stronger than those students in the typical wait for service procedure. Students who have reading difficulties that are not severe enough to meet special education services benefit from the intervention programming and monitoring. When intervention can be provided in a timely manner, the trajectory of learning for primary students can be altered and the number of students requiring special education services in later years can be reduced (Askew et al., 2003). Early learning intervention provides a framework of support that creates a catchment for students at risk for future special education services.

Additionally, early reading intervention provides a preventative model to reduce the number of inappropriate referrals to special education (Greenfield, 2010). This programming is designed to decrease the prevalence of children experiencing reading difficulties in the hope that fewer students will later be identified as reading disabled (Simmons et al, 2011). This process helps to screen early learners to help identify risk. For example, Vellutino et al. (2008) found that when compared to the tests administered at the beginning of grade one the
kindergarten screening battery tests accurately identified 70% of children who continued to be at risk learners. Identification of kindergarteners at risk allows time to increase skill and distinguish those needing remedial services beyond grade one. Increased awareness and the utilization of intensive intervention supports early literacy learners. For example, according to the British Columbia Ministry of Education guidelines, in order to be formally designated, as having a learning disability, assessment data must demonstrate that, despite systematic attempts to meet the needs of the student through provision of instructional adaptations and approaches, s/he continues to exhibit consistent difficulties learning (BC Ministry of Education, 2010).

There are negative implications for children entering grade 1 as challenged readers. Children who enter grade 1 as challenged readers often fail to acquire reading proficiency and are unlikely to perform at an average range by the end of elementary school (Partanen & Siegel, 2014). Lennon & Slesinski (1999) examine the impact of entering first grade without phonemic awareness, the ability to manipulate phonemes in words, and understanding of the alphabetic principle, or the understanding that phonemes can be mapped onto graphemes. The findings suggest that those students lacking these emergent reader skills as they enter grade 1 are likely to be behind their classmates and identified as needing special education services in the future. A staggering 88% of children identified as poor readers at the end of grade 1 will remain poor readers at the end of grade 4 (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). In an exploration of at-risk readers in second and third grade, O’Connor (2005) explored the impact of intervention between kindergarten and grade 3 by examining a cohort of 100 students over a 4 year period. O’Connor administered the Woodcock Johnson Reading Mastery Test (WJIII) and examined the level of intervention provided and the severity of reading disabilities over time. Those students who failed to meet expectations in early reading interventions often did not see a reduction of
reading disabilities. The implications for children entering grade 1 as struggling readers highlights the need for educators to use intervention programming to support at-risk readers in kindergarten.

*Importance of Educational Staff in Early Reading Success*

Educational staff are the driving force for successful early intervention implementation. The attitudes and beliefs held by staff shape the environment and foundation of early intervention practice. The ability to use collaboration as a mechanism to problem solve and implement intervention allows for the development of skill and knowledge among learners. Educational staff who are able to define their own confidence in program development and implementation shape the success rate of early reading intervention.

Educator attitude towards and commitment to intervention drives the implementation process of early intervention. As Lefevre & Richardson (2002) discuss, the perceptions of teachers are often not explored or documented in meaningful ways. Personality, personal development, age, career stage, generational identity and attachment all impact educational change. Each staff member brings unique qualities to the school team. Educator qualities are further impacted by the attitudes they hold about the effectiveness of intervention programs. Through an analysis of teacher experiences with learning intervention, Wilcox, Murakami-Ramalho & Urick (2011) acknowledged that when teachers experience less technical obstacles such as funding, paperwork and scheduling, they could focus their concern on implementation and the specific individual student intervention needs explored through assessment, collaboration, and instruction. Although there are diverse qualities of educators implementing early intervention, the common core of effective implementation comes from the ability to focus on implementation needs over technical issues.
Educators implementing interventions rely on collaboration as a way to create and maintain intervention programming. At the core of intervention programming is the understanding that teams of educators work together to develop flexible instructional plans which are capable of addressing the academic needs of students within the classroom (Little, 2012). Within this model is the understanding that school-based teams have continued dialogue and continue to problem solve in order to create flexible instructional plans to meet the academic needs of students within the classroom (Little, 2012). Intervention planning involves collaboration of those who are in the setting of the child’s school and who know the child, resources available and issues, so they are better equipped to analyze the intervention levels in order to support child development (Barnett, Daly, Jones & Letnz, 2004). Within these collaborative teams, there are specific roles and tasks completed by each team member. Not only does this decrease the amount of overlap or unnecessary assistance, but it also creates a system of management and accountability (Werts & Fewell, 2014). Given that intervention implementation relies on collaboration at the core of its effectiveness, any issues are not solely solved through quantitative research alone (White, 1985/1986). Issues with early intervention are often rooted in values and politics. The emphasis of listening to the voices of educators and sharing collaboration between faculty and administration creates an environment that is positive for student progress (Stuart et al., 2011). O’Connor (2005) explored the factors that impact the reduction of poor readers. Among the top identifiers of decreasing the number of poor readers was the combination of professional development and feedback among teams about student progress. Through collaboration comes a system to plan, develop, implement and reflect about early intervention programming and identify ways that school teams can meet the diverse individual needs of students.
Educator skill and confidence in early intervention impacts the rate of success. Wilcox, Murakami-Rumalho & Urick (2011) identified 89% of teachers surveyed believed they received inadequate pre-service training in teaching students with special needs. Furthermore, Simmons & Kame’enui (1998) believe that general education teachers often lack the specified knowledge required to help large numbers of struggling learners in the general class environment. The learning intervention programs help teachers develop confidence in instructional practices as they feel more adept at individualizing instruction and finding effective ways to motivate students (Hazelkorn et al., 2011). In a survey conducted about the perceptions of special education teachers and intervention, 72.76% of respondent statements focused on students being provided a higher level of instruction because of its implementation (Werts & Fewell, 2014). When educators use the learning interventions in the classroom setting, they are using a method of gathering information and charting, summarizing, and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data. This model of supporting learners provides educators with a breadth of information about students that provides a way to make informed educational decisions for struggling learners (Hoover, 2011). Skill development in intervention implementation and confidence in this intervention model to meet the needs of individual learners perpetuates the effectiveness of learning intervention as a means to provide academic support to emergent learners.

Further Examination in Early Reading Intervention

Although there is evidence of research supporting our understanding of intervention supporting diverse learners, there continues to be gaps of knowledge in areas of implementation, sustainability and the role of all school staff in program implementation. Werts & Fewell (2014) identify the need for the special education field to focus on the
perceptions of all stakeholders to identify the effectiveness of programs implemented and the attitudes of those involved as a way to affect student growth. It can then be concluded that there is a scarcity of qualitative research, and there is an evident need for educators to have open-ended discussions regarding specific intervention programming (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014). Giving the opportunity for educators to share open dialogue about the usage of RtI to support diverse learners has the potential to provide insight into the further development of early reading intervention.

Additionally, current research identifies a need to identify specific factors that are necessary to develop and sustain the intervention in the school setting. Examining the specific factors that develop and sustain intervention assist school staff to consider the use of this approach and maintain student success within this support model (Werts, Lambert & Carpenter, 2009; Hughes and Dexter, 2011). The ability to explore factors that have assisted school teams to develop and maintain effective early intervention provides insight into future support and ways to implement receptive intervention programs.

Furthermore, research identifies the need to explore various perspectives of stakeholders involved in early learning intervention. Although teachers are often the individuals providing service delivery, implementation is supported through a diverse network of individuals. Greenfield (2010) explored the need for future studies to examine and analyze the perspectives of all stakeholders. A student is supported in learning intervention by all professionals that work in the school setting and plan, implement, and assess intervention success. It is important to incorporate into future research studies, the views and opinions of all individuals involved in supporting children experiencing reading difficulties.
The field of early reading development has been described through the connection from theory to research and further action in the education setting. An exploration of reading development and the implications of early reading intervention in the primary grades leads to the understanding that educators are the driving force behind the level of success in this service. An understanding the positive role that an active and collaborative school staff plays in the success of early reading intervention highlights the need for further study about ways schools can build upon strengths and meet the diverse needs of learners in the primary grades. This theoretical and research framework of early reading intervention provides the foundation for further educational research. The examination of early reading intervention through a team of education professionals engaged in this process helped to identify steps towards successes and further support in an adaptive and long-term early reading intervention program.
Chapter 3

Methods

Study Overview

This research explored the development of early reading intervention practices within an elementary school team. Research conducted explored what we do well as a school community to provide early reading intervention, the future for early reading intervention programming, a structure to further develop and engage early reading learners and the next steps to develop early reading intervention in our school community. The goal for this research was to understand and improve practices being used to support struggling readers in the primary grades.

Methodological Understanding

The method conducted for the purpose of this research was Appreciative inquiry (Ai). Appreciative inquiry is known as “the search for knowledge and theory of collective action that is meant to evolve the vision and determination of a group, organization or society” (Cooperrider & Starvos, 2008, p. 3). The method of Ai originated from the Department of Organizational Behaviour at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.A in 1987. The originators, David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva (1987), believed that traditional action research within business focused too much on problem solving and ultimately defining who was to blame. Their model of Ai was a different management process that used the positive shared experiences in an organization or group in order to bring about change. This model acknowledged that improvement came from searching from the best in people and their organization and the impact they have on the world around them (Ludema, 2003). A positive perspective to guide change within an organization is the foundation of Appreciative inquiry.
Appreciative inquiry is based on a 4 stage process; discovery, dream, design and destiny. As outlined by Priest, Kaufman, Brunton & Seibel (2013), each of the four stages have distinct goals that build upon each other. Ai begins with the discovery stage where the task is to brainstorm the positive exceptions, successes, and most vital moments in an organization. These are often identified through open sharing, meaning-making dialogue. The dream stage uses the interview stories from the discovery step to extract the key themes that underline the times when the organization was at its best. The design stage begins as participants co-construct the future by designing the organizational framework. Lastly, the stage of destiny proceeds as participants help the organization reach its destiny through action and innovation. Appreciative inquiry will be conducted for this research, as it honours the past dedication of participants and searches for new ways to transition towards a new future (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008). Ai allows all participants in this research to be a part of the positive transformation of program development that builds on and extends professional development purposes. This qualitative research was context specific, as participants reflected on the success of early reading intervention in our learning community and created a framework for future early reading intervention programming.

Participants

A total of 9 participants took part in this research study. The participants were comprised of administrators, classroom teachers, and special education teachers. The criteria for participation were staff who work directly with early reading intervention programming who have experience and knowledge to contribute to the topic of exploration. Participants were provided an introduction letter and project information session shared at a monthly staff meeting. Those who were interested in participating were given an electronic transmission of the research introduction and consent forms. While gathering research participants, careful
consideration of voluntary participation consent, respect of confidentiality and anonymity in data collection and interpretation, and all contributions were respected as valid and important to the study.

Data Collection

The data collection method was completed through a focus group. Participants took part in a semi-structured process where topics and issues were specified in advance. In the role of researcher, I developed the specific set of questions and decided upon the sequence they were asked during the session. This focus group met for one session for a total of 1.5 hours in a meeting room within our school, after school hours. A focus group was a suitable data collection method for this research as it supported the group dynamic that our school employs when providing early reading intervention. As Watts & Ebbutt (1987) explain, group interviews are useful when a group of individuals have worked together for a period of time or have a common purpose and there is an importance that everyone concerned is aware of what others in the group are experiencing. It is these lived experiences and perceptions about those experiences that provided a contextual understanding of experiences within the environment (Niesz et al., 2008).

As lived experiences were the focus of this research, the study was flexible as it allowed all participants to share their understanding of early intervention in this school setting and the affected of these programs. (Rumrill, Cook & Willey, 2011). All participants who were part of this focus group shared their lived experiences and collectively explored the past, present, and future of early reading intervention in the school environment. The lived experiences and planning that stemmed from this research experience were collected through an audio recording of the focus group discussion. Data that was collected was then organized through the production of a discussion transcript.
**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Data analysis was on-going throughout this research experience. During the focus group discussion, information was organized into themes of Ai: discovery, dream, design and destiny. Upon completion of the focus group, an audio recording was reviewed and organized according to themes. Data was then described and interpreted through a narrative discussion to extrapolate findings.

Thematic analysis was the process of data interpretation. Thematic analysis begins by identifying common areas of discussion and responses presented in the areas of experience, dream and plan for future development. These common areas are identified through the generation of initial codes. As Boyatzis (1998) explains, codes identify features of data that appear interesting and refer to the most basic element of the raw data that can be assessed in meaningful ways. Thematic analysis can be based on either a realist method or constructionist method. As Braun & Clarke (2006) determine, thematic analysis is either realist, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants included in the study, or it can be constructionist which examines how the realities and experiences of participants are effects of the range of activity operating within a society. Because this study will explore participant experiences connected to a range of early reading intervention strategies and programming, it is based on the constructionist perspective.

The identification of themes extracted from this research was a collective experience. Initially, the researcher determined the themes as they fit within the stages of Appreciative inquiry. However, Rumrill, Cook & Willey (2011) explore the use of member checks when conducting research with a team. Member checks provided a way of creating credibility by including all participants in the research experience to review the accuracy of emerging themes and categories. In this research, member checks were conducted after the initial summarization
of findings. Participants were provided a copy of the transcript electronically once the discussion transcript was completed. This research was based on the collective experience of educational staff involved. Given this foundation, participants requesting revisions from the transcript were honoured. Participants were also provided 0.5 hours to individually give feedback about this research experience and the resulting themes. Researcher and participants had an active role in the identification and summarization of themes from this research experience.

Establishing Understanding

The establishment of understanding was developed through qualitative research. As Patton (2002) describes, while the credibility in quantitative research depends on instrument construction, in qualitative research, the researcher is essentially the instrument. Given this understanding of research validity, the reliability of qualitative research is based on the trustworthiness of the information gathered and interpretations gained. Over time, many researchers have developed their own concepts of validity and reliability as they adopted different terms such as quality, rigor and trustworthiness (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mishler, 2000; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001). The validity and reliability of these findings are supported through triangulation. Triangulation allows for a way to control bias as it allows for more viewpoints to provide credibility to research findings. All members of the research experience were part of validating the analysis and interpretation of findings. The establishment of understanding through this research method allowed for a team approach to examine, confirm, and summarize what has been determined through this research experience.

Limitations

The limitations for this research stemmed from the qualitative method of research in Appreciative inquiry. In the model of Ai, the focus on the positive workings of a system may invalidate the negative organizational experiences of participants (Egan & Lancaster, 2005). This
has the opportunity to decontextualize the polarization between positive and negative experiences. What may be positive for some may be negative for others (Oliver, 2005). Additionally, the model of Appreciative inquiry starts with a need for improvement. While Appreciative inquiry focuses on the asset-based approach to change, it requires a system when a deficit model created the problem for Ai to solve (Johnson, 2011). Change comes when a current model does not completely meet the needs of the individuals in the environment. Looking at the application of this study in future research provides a limitation for the generalizability to other settings. However, through viewing this research in connection with other research findings, teachers and schools may be able to determine its value for their context.

**Significance**

The significance of this research is to emphasize the importance of collaborative professional communities in realizing the success of early reading intervention. Appreciative inquiry has the potential to change an organization (Ludema, 2002) and can have a positive impact on relationships as education communities navigate the improvement of an early literacy intervention program (Barrett & Fry, 2005). Through such a research experience, the establishment of the core values of the team working towards the goal revealed the deeply held values and provide meaning to the educational goals (Barrett & Fry, 2005). The experiences and findings from this research have the ability to determine the core beliefs and values of a collaborative group. The findings from this research hold value for other professional communities focusing on similar educational goals as the findings could be transferable and confirmable in other contexts.
Chapter 4
Results/Findings

Overview of Findings

The facilitated focus group discussion provided a detailed dialogue about early reading intervention in our school community. The following section examines the specific appreciative inquiry questions posed to the participant group and provide an understanding of emerging themes within and between questions. A detailed understanding of participant contributions will be discussed.

What do we do well in early reading intervention programming?

Participants began this focus group discussion looking at the best parts of our current early reading intervention. The question asked to participants was, “What do we do well at this time to provide early reading intervention programming?” There were three themes that emerged from participants discussion; accountability (16%), collaborative (12%), and common language (16%). Each theme presents an understanding of perceived successes in our current intervention programming.

With respect to accountability, participants explained the benefits of using ways to monitor student progress. Examples of this practice included student data tracking, using lesson outlines, and referring to learning continuums generated for reading development in specific grade levels. Participants highlighted the importance of keeping data to support professional decisions and having a good understanding of where students need to be by certain checkpoints in their specific primary grade level.

Furthermore, participants believed that the collaborative nature of our staff allows members to discuss student progression issues and implement the optimal learning plan for
student success. The ability to meet in various informal conversations or more formal meetings were deemed ways to examine where students were on their reading progression and exploring the best fit for students to be supported in intervention programs. These collaborative opportunities were considered a way to converse about best practices and adjusting programming as student develop in their reading skill.

A third theme that emerged from this discussion point was the use of a common language amongst staff who worked within early reading intervention programs. Participants explained numerous reading strategies that they explicitly modelled and taught to their intervention groups. The understanding that common language supports students as they progress between different reading intervention groups was noted as a benefit experienced among participants. The embedded nature of common language was seen as a positive outcome of our current early reading intervention programs.

*When are we providing the best early reading intervention?*

Upon discussion about what we do well in early reading intervention, participants were asked to provide specific examples of when we are at our best. The focus group was asked, “When are we providing the best early reading intervention?” The three themes that emerged were student groupings (7%), parent support (13%) and modelling reading behaviour (13%). These themes exemplify the perceived examples of best practice in early reading intervention in this learning environment.

Small group instruction was identified as one of the main ways participants identified as best practice for early reading intervention. Participants identified keeping the number of students in each group at a lower number in order to allow educators the time to provide specific reading support to all students in their group. Additionally, the ability to group students
with older students such as big buddy reading programs was highlighted as an example of grouping students to support their reading development in different ways.

Also, parents as education partners was identified as an example of what we do best in early reading programs. For example, participants provided examples of implementing in-service opportunities to parents on reading strategies and how to support their developing readers at home. This included the implementation of book bag programs across the entire primary team. The ability to provide reading resources and strategies for reading support at home was highlighted as a portion of our early reading program that has facilitated reading progression in the primary grades.

Furthermore, consistent modelling of behaviours good readers use was identified as best practice in our early reading interventions. The consistent use of vocabulary and comprehension strategies was identified as a key part to our early reading success. From classroom teacher to student services personnel such as our Speech-Language Pathologist, there were programs identified that require all educators to use the same vocabulary and model the reading behaviours of successful readers. Participants explained the understanding that the more adults are consistently modelling the use of decoding and comprehension strategies, the more students will have an opportunity to be successful in their early reading intervention programs.

*What characteristics are present in effective early reading intervention?*

It is through the discussion among participants about what was considered best practice in our current model of early reading intervention that led participants to discuss the specific criteria for successful early reading intervention. Through a facilitated discussion around criteria, participants were asked, “What characteristics are present in effective early reading
Participants explained the importance of sharing experiences in early reading intervention and sharing expertise in the subject area. The ability to share resources, get together and reflect on student reading progression, and seek ways to improve student success in early reading were deemed important for effective implementation. This led participants to discuss how experienced staff frequently share knowledge with the new teachers on staff. This ability to share resources, time and knowledge were considered strong indicators for effective early reading intervention.

Secondly, the ability to provide relevant and up-to-date literature for reading programs was seen as a part of our current model of effective early reading interventions. Participants highlighted the need to dedicate a large portion of time finding the right resources that fit the interest levels and readability levels of students in early reading intervention programs. The types of literature identified as most widely accepted as relevant were those from aboriginal authors such as Eagle Crest books or on non-fiction topics about living things and places found around the community. The relevant literature provided to students was identified as motivating to students and provided a way to engage learners at all stages of the reading progression.

What are the most inspiring experiences in early reading intervention?

After discussing elements of successful early reading programs, participants were asked to share inspirational moments in their work with early reading intervention. Participants were asked, “What do you consider the most inspiring experience in early reading intervention?” This discussion provided two broad themes of responses; building relationships with students (14%)
and witnessing reading progress (28%). Inspiration among participants was built on supporting individual early readers along their learning progression and sharing in student successes.

Various participants noted that fostering a relationship with students as they develop on their reading progression was an area of inspiration. Some participants mentioned how students who struggled to read benefited from having a teacher who believed and modelled that making mistakes is an opportunity to learn. Others mentioned the impact of scaffolding learning for students in a way that students felt supported and the elements of reading came together for emerging readers over time. These stories of inspiration came from a wide variety of examples of teachers working hard to promote student success and celebrating alongside students as they progressed in their reading development. For example, participants provided personal accounts of developing readers placed in their early reading intervention groups and the successes they experienced. Experiences of personal growth and celebrating success, both small and large, were iterated as times of student progress providing professional inspiration.

**What do we consider the most promising components of our future in early reading intervention programs in our school?**

Participants of this focus group were asked to consider what the components of our early reading intervention and have the greatest promise for the future. The discussion focused around the question of, “What do we consider the most promising components of our future in early reading intervention programs in our school?” The two themes that arose from this question were teachers as learners (60%) and access to material (20%). These two themes served to create the foundation of appreciative inquiry as participants began to explore what they felt would be the parts of current programming that could flourish in the future.
The majority of responses from participants were around the theme of teacher as learner. For example, participants explained the importance of professional development and in-service opportunities. This also led to the discussion of the wealth of professional knowledge that our own staff hold. The understanding that all participants have expertise that could be shared to develop the future of our understanding in early reading intervention programming was highlighted. There was also the acknowledgement that supporting new teachers to the learning community by providing time for support and mentorship is key for current and future success. Participants shared an understanding that our school community values educators as learners themselves, which in turn, benefits our school and its development of programs for student progress.

A second theme that arose from this discussion was the importance of access to literature. The acceptance among those participants who mentioned access to literature highlighted the greater need to support the use of technology in reading development. The availability of learning tools and online programs has the potential to support early reading intervention programming by deepening the number and quality of materials available to early readers. The integration of technology in to reading instruction was seen as a promising component of future early reading intervention.

What steps do we need to take as a school team to create the most promising early reading intervention programming?

Building upon promising components of future early reading programming, participants discussed specific steps needed to create an optimal early reading intervention program. Participants were asked, “What steps do we need to take as a school team to create the most promising early reading intervention programming?” The majority of responses fell within three
broad themes; professional development and planning (27%), progress monitoring (27%) and family involvement (27%). It is these discussion points that led to constructing specific steps to create our future early reading intervention programs.

Participants gave a high level of detail about the need to plan extensively in order for early reading interventions to continue to be successful in our school. It was discussed that the plan should be well laid out at the beginning of the year. Examples of year planning for early reading intervention placed emphasis on time to conference with students, various opportunities to establish a check-in among staff and intervention groups to ensure accountability, and allowing ourselves the time to critically reflect. These portions of the school year planned and integrated in the planning stage were deemed a part of planning for a promising future in early reading.

Secondly, participants explored the concept of progress monitoring, how that currently looks, and what it could potentially look for future program development. It was discussed that the most vulnerable readers in early primary needed to be identified as early as possible, at the very beginning of the year. As well, it was emphasized that there must be a process to monitor the progress of these students over time and use the data received to make decisions on program placement and availability. Furthermore, participants commented on the need to focus on resource allocation. Examples of reviewing student progress over the school year and determining whether placement in early reading intervention groups is based on various factors, such as attendance and response to the intervention being provided. Specific steps in progress monitoring were identified as key to building future intervention programs in the school.

The final step identified as key to creating the most promising future in early reading intervention was the level of family involvement in individual student reading development.
Participants explored the need for families to support reading development at home. The use of home reading and having adults who can listen to their children read and support readers in skill development was seen as a crucial form of support for student success in early reading intervention. The continuing support of families reading with children outside of the school day was deemed the last step of building a promising future for early reading intervention with our primary students.

*Where do we want our early reading intervention programming to be in the future?*

The last piece of the appreciative inquiry process was to discuss where we wish to view our collective efforts in early reading intervention in future years. Participants in this focus group were asked to ponder and discuss, “where do we want our early reading intervention programming to be in the future?” The themes that arose from this dialogue were that decisions are based on reflective practice (22%) and supported with a diverse selection of reading material (33%). These two key areas summarized the final point of hopes for the future of early reading intervention in this school environment.

Participants began by explaining the importance that future early reading intervention programs are based on reflection. This includes an understanding of how to be an introspective educator, but also, an understanding that educators need to stay on top of current research so that programs are based on evidence and that they work. Additionally, the focus group explored the need to review the models of learning and intervention that are currently being used and reflecting on whether the intended outcomes are being met. An important part of achieving success in early reading intervention is the ability to critically assess and select interventions strategically and set aside those deemed to be ineffective. Educators being reflective practitioners was seen as a key factor ensuring success in future early reading programming.
Additionally, participants felt that they wanted the future of early reading intervention programs in this school to be supported with diverse reading materials. Participants explained the importance of variety within the non-fiction selection of literature and identifying subjects that interest our student body. Students connect to books they find interesting and in turn will spend more time reading. Having literature that is reflective of our local environment and First Nations community is also of great importance. It is through engaging literature that participants feel students will continue to experience success as they participate in early reading intervention programs throughout their primary grades.

*Shared Theme*

The theme that spanned across focus group responses was the need for clarification. Of all 141 responses provided in this discussion, 24.8% of responses were about clarification and the proceduralization of early reading intervention taking place within the school. Among the responses provided, participants sought clarification about programs that are currently implemented within the school, the process of rolling out such services to the student groups, and the use of school personnel to implement these early reading intervention programs. The need to clarify the process of early reading intervention within the school highlights the need for further discussion about the purpose, process, and product of our work with primary students learning to read.

*Findings Summary*

This focus group discussion explored our collective efforts in early reading intervention programs through an appreciative inquiry process. Participants shared and discovered the positive elements of our current early reading intervention programs, shared dreams for future program development, discussed the specific design of how to reach this higher level of
implementation, and stated the destiny for which they wished to see our early reading intervention to flourish towards the future. It will be these points of discussion that will form the basis of our future efforts in early reading programs.
Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary of Research

This research was conducted in order to explore the early reading intervention practices taking place in our school environment and the direction for future programming. The first section of this chapter presents a summary of the results from this focus group. The second section provides conclusions that are drawn from the themes taken from the discussion. The final section focuses on recommendations for further understanding and action.

The purpose of this study was to explore the question of, “How can our school staff appreciate and build on early reading programming?” Through an appreciative inquiry lens, participants discussed these four broad points:

1.) What are the best attributes of our current early reading intervention programming?

2.) What could our early reading intervention programming develop towards in the future?

3.) What specific steps do we believe we need to collectively take to improve our early reading intervention program?

4.) What do we envision as the future of early reading intervention to be like in our school community?

Summary of Results

Participants consistently focused on the need of a common understanding of early reading intervention programming in order for it to be successful. They explained the importance of common language used among all educators in early reading intervention programs. For example, educators expressed the need to explicitly name and teach decoding
and reading comprehension strategies and consistently use them in authentic reading opportunities throughout early reading intervention program sessions. The need for shared understanding was also highlighted by the fact that 24.8% of responses in the focus group asked for clarification about, and the procedures for, implementing early reading intervention in our school. In order for educators to have a common understanding of the components of early reading, it is imperative that those implementing early reading interventions have a clear understanding of key learning outcomes and the steps for which success is met through these program opportunities.

A second theme that arose through this research was the understanding that we must envision teachers as learners. Participants shared various past experiences working in early reading intervention programs. Both the actual experiences and the lessons learned were shared as a way to demonstrate their reflective practice as teachers. Additionally, the focus group also explored the need for current and future early reading intervention programming to be based on best practices. Participants shared the need for educators to be aware of current research and programs that are based on proven success. It is this understanding that educators will need to continue to learn about early reading and the interventions, programs, and research that supports its effectiveness in the primary grades.

A final theme that came from this focus group was the need for accessibility when providing early reading intervention programs. Accessibility was explained in two forms; physical space with groups and the changing nature of how literature is accessed. The first area that arose as highly impacting accessibility was the need to maintain small group numbers. Participants shared their struggles with providing the best early reading intervention programs
with large groups of students. The need to limit the number of students placed in these early reading intervention groups was identified as an area that could see immediate action.

Secondly, participants acknowledged the changing nature of literature. Literature is increasingly being accessed in various modes; paper, computer, tablets, audio devices. The need to have access to up-to-date literature in all forms was explained as a way to provide meaningful reading opportunities to students in our programs. Manageable space and group numbers, as well as various avenues to access literature, were identified as ways that early reading intervention could continue to be accessible to children.

Conclusions

There were four general conclusions that were made from this study. Each conclusion connects with each step of the appreciative inquiry model; discover, dream, design and destiny. First, the best attributes of our current early reading intervention programming are that we as a group of education professionals are accountable, collaborative, and have a wealth of experience and expertise in early reading intervention. Second, the participant group identifies themselves as teachers who are also learners. They are aware of current best practices and the need to access this knowledge and new resources to continue to provide the best early reading programs. Third, the design for future early reading programs will require a collaboratively designed plan with avenues for consistent progress monitoring. This plan will be successful through the involvement of families. Finally, this group of educators in early reading, acknowledged the future must be based on reflective practices where the best practices and materials are used to support the success of young readers.
Recommendations

It is imperative to continue to support the notion that teachers are also learners. This is supported by using the various skill sets and levels of expertise held within this specific group of educational professionals. As Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) conclude, teachers have a collective responsibility to improve teacher efficacy and ensure that student learning is always at the center of professional learning. The collective nature of professional learning can be supported through the creation of professional learning networks within the school, with focus on early reading. Teachers within this specific learning environment possess the expertise and relationships that can foster growth among fellow teachers. As Lieberman and McLaughlin (1992) suggest, “Participation in networks gives teachers firsthand experience of the constructivist notion of teaching and learning that is central to conceptions of higher-order thinking and problem solving. When they construct ideas about practice with their colleagues, teachers act as both experts and apprentices, teachers and learners” (p. 674). A professional learning community with a focus on early reading would utilize the expertise on staff and support further professional development.

Furthermore, collaboratively planning for early reading intervention is the greatest insurance for student success. As Kitchen (2009) explored, when teachers are part of a collaborative team, there are significant contributions made to professional development and student progress. Working together with colleagues to create the early reading intervention program schedule will allow all educators to contribute ideas, resources, and seek clarification in the planning stage of early reading intervention program development.

Finally, the use of critical reflection is important for success in early reading intervention program development and implementation. Reflection, as defined by John Dewey, is known as
“active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or practice in light of the reasons that support it and the further consequences to which it leads” (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p.9). If we consider this definition of reflection and apply its use to the team implementing early reading intervention, we come to understand that decisions about implementation and progress monitoring in early reading must be made through reflection on the process and the ultimate outcomes that come from this program in the school setting. Such understanding is supported through the work of Connor et al. (2009) that determined that first grade teachers who adapted and modified their instruction as students’ reading development changed over time saw a greater reading comprehension growth compared with students who did not receive such modification of instruction. Educational practitioners who use reflection as a professional development tool are able to be responsive to the developing readers who are participating in early reading intervention programs.

Based on the data provided through this study, there are three specific recommendations for further study. First, using the same model of appreciative inquiry, include in research, support staff who facilitate early reading programs. Second, conduct a study examining the impact of early reading intervention programming on students transitioning from primary to intermediate reading instruction. A final research idea could be to look at the impact of professional learning communities, such as the one focused on in this study, on early reading intervention outcomes. Each of these recommended areas for further study would add upon the field of early reading intervention programming in the elementary school environment.

Conclusion

Reading development in the early primary grades is an indicator of future academic success. Early reading intervention program implementation is a response to support emergent
readers as they build towards greater reading fluency. The ability to appreciate the accomplishments of this group of educators allowed for an avenue to develop a plan for future programming. Built on the premise that early reading program educators are accountable, educated, collaboratively-minded, and reflective practitioners, there are tangible steps for educators to take to build a responsive early reading intervention program within the school setting. Early reading intervention educators play an indispensable role in student development and success.
References List


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Appendix 1

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

As well as being your colleague here at Wickaninnish Community School, you may know that I am a student in the Master of Education in Special Education program at VIU. As partial fulfillment of that degree, I am conducting research about early reading intervention at our school, exploring current practice, and working together with participants through appreciative inquiry to collaboratively plan future initiatives and strategies to address reading needs of primary students.

Participation in this research will primarily be in the form of a focus group discussion that will take 1.5 hours. Given that this research is a collaborative inquiry, those who participate will also be asked to take part in a 0.5 hours member check of transcribed discussion text.

Your confidentiality will be protected as participants will not be individually identifiable in research findings. As well, participants will be asked to respect the anonymity of individual contributions to this focus group. Focus group discussion will be saved upon a CD and data analysis will be conducted electronically on MS Word. All collected data will be shredded and deleted by August 2019.

Your participation in this focus group is voluntary. You may refuse to answer questions that you do not wish to answer. You may stop participation at any time.

If you are interested in participating in this research, please contact me by e-mail. You will be sent more details, and the consent form for review, in a follow up email. If you are willing to participate in this study, please complete and submit a consent form attached that can be returned to a drop box in the main office.
Appendix 2

RECRUITMENT EMAIL SCRIPT

A Study of Early Reading Intervention Through Collaborative Inquiry

E-mail Subject line: Vancouver Island University Study - A Study of Early Reading Intervention Through Collaborative Inquiry

Dear colleague:

As you may know, as well as being a part of the school team here at Wickaninnish Community School, I am also a student in the Master of Education in Special Education program at Vancouver Island University, supervised by Dr. Mary Ann Richards. As a component of the program, I am conducting a collaborative inquiry about early reading intervention that demonstrates an appreciation of our current early reading intervention programming, and the possibilities those insights raise about future work with primary students to improve their reading skills.

Attached is the consent form for participation in this research. Please review it and contact me with any questions. If you would like to be part of this study, please submit a signed hard copy to the drop box in the office within 5 days.

This study has been reviewed by the Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you can contact:

Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board
Lars Apland, Research Officer
Telephone: 250-753-3245 (local 2665)
E-mail: reb@viu.ca

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. After 5 days, I will send you an email where we will set the meeting date.

Amanda Burrows, Graduate Student
Master of Education in Special Education
Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, British Columbia
Appendix 3:

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

“EARLY READING INTERVENTION: A COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY OF SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION”
September, 2015

Amanda Burrows, Graduate Student
Master of Education in Special Education
Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University

Mary Ann Richards, Ph.D.,
Supervisor
Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University
MaryAnn.Richards@viu.ca

I am a student in Vancouver Island University’s Master of Education in Special Education program. As partial fulfillment of the requirements for that degree, I am conducting an appreciative inquiry into the early reading intervention programming at our school, Wickanninnish Community School, in order to both share our understanding of strategies and programs used, and to build on these as we collaboratively plan future directions and possibilities.

During this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion exploring questions about the collective efforts of members of our school team regarding early intervention planning. This study will be recorded with visual and audio technology, then transcribed to print copy of our discussion. As a participant, you will have an opportunity to review the transcript information before it will be analyzed. Statements made and experiences shared may be quoted as part of the findings of the inquiry. Your participation will take approximately 2 hours of your time.

There are no known harms associated with your participation in this research. Please note that, though participants will be asked to keep information shared during the research confidential, there is a social risk due to the nature of focus group research. Participants are asked to reduce social risk by keeping all information shared confidential. Though your identity will not be revealed in the thesis, please note that you may be identifiable to some from experiences that are quoted.

All records of participation will be kept strictly confidential, such that only I will have access to the information. Focus group transcript, audio-visual recording on CD and written documentation from this research will all be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office, and stored digitally on a password protected computer. Data will be destroyed by shredding or electronic deletion at the end of the project, August 2019. The results from this study will be reported in a written research project and an oral report during a class presentation. Information about the project will not be made public in any way that identifies individual participants.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time up to the thesis write up without explanation.

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer, by telephone at 250-753-3245 (ext, 2665) or by email at reb@viu.ca.

If you have any questions about this research project, or would like more information, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. Mary Ann Richards, or myself with the contact information provided above.

I have read the above form, understand the information read, understand that I can ask questions or withdraw from the study at any time up until results are finalized in thesis form. I consent to participate in this research study. I agree to audio and video recording of the focus group for transcription purposes.

___________________________ __________________________
Participant’s Signature E-mail address Date
Appendix 4

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What do we do well at this time to provide early reading intervention programming?
   a. Can you give an example of that?

2. When are we providing the best early reading intervention?
   a. Can you explain a specific situation?

3. What characteristics are present in effective early reading intervention?
   a. Can you explain what you mean by that?

4. What do you consider your most inspiring experience in early reading intervention?
   a. What was it specifically about_______________ that makes you say that?

5. What do we consider the most promising components of our future in early reading intervention programs in our school?
   a. What do you mean by ________?

6. What steps do we need to take as a school team to create the most promising early reading intervention programming?
   a. Can you review one more time the steps you stated/we created?

7. Where do we want our early reading intervention programming to be in the future?
   a. What do you believe are our next steps to achieve that?