

Research-Based Practices for Teaching Reading in Elementary Classrooms: An Exploration of the Instructional Practices of Former Elementary Education Students

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Abstract. This study explored the instructional reading practices of four elementary teachers, who obtained their Bachelor of Arts in elementary education and have been employed in public elementary schools for nearly three years. The individuals were the researcher's former university students and had previously experienced classroom literacy instruction in the use of research-based instructional practices within a constructivist framework for teaching reading in a university methods course and practicum.

Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, this study explored how these teachers' knowledge about the use of research-based instructional practices, or best practices, for teaching reading to children influenced their classroom instruction, as well as what conditions contributed to or inhibited their use. Through interviews and classroom observations of the four teachers, data were analyzed to describe the factors and dynamics that influenced these teachers' choices for reading instruction. In particular, this study explored whether or not these teachers were implementing the research-based practices for teaching reading that were a large part of their university training in their teacher preparation program, and what may have helped or hindered them from doing so. The classroom teachers described their beliefs regarding how reading should be taught, what influenced these beliefs, how they taught reading, the support or lack of support from their administrators, the pressure they felt from district- and state-mandated assessments of their students, and their sense of self-confidence as teachers. Results of this study indicated that when teachers have a firm understanding of what constitutes research-based practices for teaching reading, and when these beliefs are in-sync with their administrators' and school districts' beliefs, they are given the support they need to teach according to their beliefs and experience greater autonomy in their implementation of reading instruction, and the use of best practices. Additionally, it was found that teachers who experienced the autonomy to teach according to their beliefs experienced a larger degree of self-confidence in their teaching abilities and found more joy in teaching than those who did not. Lastly, it was found that if schools focus solely on the continual assessment of isolated reading skills, they create

teachers who are inhibited from using what they know about good teaching practices and whose main focus becomes teaching for the sake of their students' success in passing tests (Covault, 2011).

Introduction

The recognition and discussion of effective reading instruction and the significance of using research-based practices for teaching reading and writing continue to emerge in scholarly circles as topics of great concern in the educational arena today. There have been many debates about teachers' practices and the need to be certain that all children are learning. The question of *how* they teach reading as well as *what* they teach has created pressure for teachers as they strive for answers to help resolve their students' reading difficulties (Allington, 2002). In addition, legislative efforts and policies that inevitably affect teachers' practices by mandating that school districts find instructional practices to improve reading skills, remain at the forefront of educational debate among policy makers in the United States today (Deshler, & Cornett, 2012). This has been, and continues to be, the focus of concern for policy makers, teacher educators, administrators, teachers, and parents. This is not a new concern or focus for the nation; rather, it has been a topic of discussion since the beginning of formal education in this country.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

What are research-based practices? Calhoun (1994) reported that the use of the particular term *research-based practices* causes some difficulty, because in the past it has been applied and given equal weight to practices that vary considerably in their scientific rigor. Daniels and Bizar (2005) also pointed out that the term is ill-defined because of the many names used for good teaching, or what they termed *best practice*. For example, *exemplary*, *state-of-the-art*, *research-based*, *proficient*, *standards-based*, *instructional efficacy*, and *teaching for engagement* are all terms used as synonyms for *best practice*. However, in their research on research-based practices, or what they choose to instead call *best practices*, Daniels and Bizar (2005) affirmed,

Best Practices does mean something, something very concrete and particular, and something well-worth defending. It is not at all vague. Genuine Best Practices embraces certain educational ideas and activities and clearly rule others out. It has a deep basis in research, in the study of child development and learning, in the history and philosophy of American (and world) education, and has had a long and distinguished pedigree manifested through a limited and distinctive set of classroom practices (p. 11).

Adding to this stance, Hempenstall (1997), pointed to many national studies conducted with regard to defining best practices in reading instruction. This definition, can also be found in the standards documents published by many of the nation's major professional associations, such as the International Reading Association (IRA), the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the National

Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and the National Reading Panel (NRP), to name just a few (Daniels & Bizar, 2005).

Daniels and Bizar (2005) helped to define what good teaching or best practices looked like in each school subject field. They identified seven key best practices garnered from more than 60 years of research, some of which they had documented in their previous works (Zemelman, Daniels, & Bizar, 1998, 1999). These seven practices, which they consider to be the foundation of good instruction, are given many different names, but based on their research and observations they have defined them as “reading as thinking, representing to learn, small-group activities, classroom workshop, authentic experiences, reflective assessment, and integrative units” (Daniels & Bizar, 2005, p. 10). These key practices are reflected in instruction that is student-centered, developmentally appropriate, experiential, collaborative, and constructivist. The converse of this is instruction that requires the students to take a passive role in their learning. In this case, the teacher is the sole means of instruction and the class is totally under her direction. A major influence is also the emphasis of learning facts and figures by rote memorization and standardized tests are used for determining learning.

For the purpose of this study, research-based practices were defined as practices that are the result of reading research that has been conducted and extended over several months or years; where there is evidence the study has been grounded in solid research and that sound research methodology has been applied; where reading research reports have been published in peer-reviewed journals, and there is evidence of student-gain from the use of research-based reading practices (Allington, 2002; Daniels & Bizar, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Dorn, French, & Jones, 1998; Gambrell, Morrow, & Pressley, 2007; Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007, Tompkins, 2014). The best practice strategies specifically looked for when observing teachers reading instruction, were a compilation of research-based practices advocated by the aforementioned authors (Table 1).

Table 1

Research-Based Reading Strategies and Their Implementation in My Teaching

PHONEMIC AWARENESS	
National Reading Panel Research-Based Practices Taught to Students in My University Reading Class (NRP, 1999).	Accomplished Through Modeling and Giving Students the Opportunity to Engage in Activities that Involve (Tompkins, 2006):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Using and experimenting with lots of oral language ▪ Phoneme manipulation (identifying, categorizing, blending, substituting, deleting) of phonemes to form words ▪ Segmenting of sounds in a word and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Using and experimenting with lots of oral language ▪ Wordplay (including wordplay books, songs, nursery rhymes, poetry, riddles) ▪ Sound activities (matching,

<p>segmenting a word into its constituent sounds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Manipulating onsets and rimes in words 	<p>isolation, blending, addition, substitution, deletion, and segmentation of sounds)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Group activities ▪ Individual Instruction ▪ Mini-lessons ▪ Connecting reading to writing ▪ Allowing children to develop at their own rate
<p>National Reading Panel Research-Based Practices Taught to Students in My University Reading Class (NRP, 1999).</p>	<p>Accomplished Through Modeling and Giving Students the Opportunity to Engage in Activities that Involve (Tompkins, 2006):</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Letter identification ▪ Identifying, blending and combining sounds to form words ▪ Teaching Analytic, Synthetic, Embedded, and Analogy Phonics ▪ Teaching phonics through spelling ▪ Manipulation of onsets and rimes ▪ Phonics generalizations and their utility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Singing the alphabet song ▪ Learning letters in their own names and their friends' names ▪ Blending or combining sounds for decoding words ▪ Making words with blends, digraphs, diphthongs, short and long vowels, words that follow word patterns (cv, cvc, cvce) ▪ Sorting objects and pictures by beginning and ending sounds ▪ Locating and choosing words that demonstrate different phonic principles ▪ Game-like activities such as arranging groups of magnetic letters or letter cards to spell words or creating word sorts on the basis of spelling patterns ▪ Reading books with many phonetically regular words ▪ Writing alphabet and other books with phonetically regular words ▪ Connecting phonics instruction to spelling words by making charts of words representing spelling patterns and other phonics generalizations and encouraging children to use invented spelling ▪ Allowing them to see that phonics generalizations and their percentage of utility vary greatly ▪ Explicit Instruction, mini-lessons, and making use of teachable moments ▪ Writing independently and interactively
<p>National Reading Panel Research-Based Practices Taught to Students in My</p>	<p>Accomplished Through Modeling and Giving Students the Opportunity to</p>

University Reading Class (NRP, 1999).	Engage in Activities that Involve (Tompkins, 2006):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Practice in guided and independent oral and silent reading using a wide variety of instructional materials ▪ Providing students with one-on-one feedback about their reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Orally and silently reading and rereading a wide variety of both informational and expository text ▪ Guiding and providing students with one-on-one feedback about their reading ▪ Reading while listening (practicing reading along with a tape recorded text ▪ Reader's Theater and other dramatic presentations ▪ Reading expressively varying and improving their reading speed ▪ Vocabulary, sight, high frequency and technical words in expository and informational text ▪ Using word walls to extend vocabulary ▪ Phrasing and chunking of words ▪ Modeling and using Guided Reading
National Reading Panel Research-Based Practices Taught to Students in My University Reading Class (NRP, 1999).	Accomplished Through Modeling and Giving Students the Opportunity to Engage in Activities that Involve (Tompkins, 2006):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teaching vocabulary both explicitly and implicitly in rich contexts ▪ Making connections to students' prior knowledge ▪ Using multiple instructional methods to allow students to have multiple and repeated exposure to vocabulary words ▪ Promoting wide reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introducing and discussing words before, during and after reading ▪ Making connections to students' background knowledge ▪ Being given opportunities to read both orally and independently from expository and informational text and to be read to from these as well ▪ Using learning activities that help students learn new vocabulary words and their meanings, words in context, and context clues ▪ Higher- level word knowledge ▪ Choosing words to study from books or units of study ▪ Highlighting and using words on word walls ▪ Learning polysyllabic words, multiple meanings of words, using Latin and Greek root words and affixes, word histories and figurative meanings of words ▪ Learning individual words, vocabulary concepts and word-

	<p>learning strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teaching using mini lessons to introduce a topic, present information, provide structured practice, and review and application activities ▪ Using dictionaries and thesauri during mini lessons and other word study activities ▪ Creating word posters, word maps, word sorts and chains ▪ Dramatizing words
<p>National Reading Panel Research-Based Practices Taught to Students in My University Reading Class (NRP, 1999).</p>	<p>Accomplished Through Modeling and Giving Students the Opportunity to Engage in Activities that Involve (Tompkins, 2006):</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teaching using multiple method strategies for comprehension ▪ Teaching students to work cooperatively in groups ▪ Teaching using both direct instruction and teachable moments ▪ Teaching students to tap into their prior knowledge and make predictions before, during, and after reading ▪ Teaching students to make text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections ▪ Teaching students to answer teacher questions and receive immediate feedback ▪ Teaching students to organize their ideas and make graphic organizers ▪ Teaching students how to figure out unknown words by using phonic analysis, analogies, syllabic and morphemic analysis, context clues, and or to skip over unknown words ▪ Teaching students how to visualize words by creating mental pictures ▪ Teaching students to discuss, elaborate, revise, monitor and reflect, and summarize what they are reading or have read ▪ Teaching students to identify important ideas in a story or passage ▪ Teaching students how to ask questions about what they are reading ▪ Teaching students about story structure to help them recall story content in order to answer questions about what they have read ▪ Teaching students about 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developing background knowledge with books, videos, and hands-on materials ▪ Using anticipation guides to activate background knowledge with K-W-L charts, quick-writes, and discussions ▪ Making predictions ▪ Preparing, using, and completing graphic organizers ▪ Reading aloud using independent, guided, and shared reading as well as reading to partners ▪ Modeling reading strategies ▪ Monitoring students' use of strategies ▪ Using think-alouds ▪ Discussing the text in a grand or instructional conversation ▪ Writing in reading log or journals ▪ Using drama to reenact a story ▪ Rereading and retelling the text ▪ Using story boards to sequence events in a text ▪ Teaching reading lessons on reading strategies and skills, the structure of texts (plot, cause and effect), and about the author or genre ▪ Making open-minded portraits ▪ Examining selected sentences and paragraphs in the texts ▪ Creating projects to deepen their understanding of what they have read ▪ Reading other books on the same topic

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> comprehension in the context of specific academic areas, such as social studies ▪ Teaching students to evaluate and give their opinions on a story or passage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comparing related books or book and film versions ▪ Writing reports and other books on the same topic
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A Conceptual Framework for Teaching Reading

This study utilized a constructivist framework for teaching reading. A general view of a constructivist theory of learning is grounded in the work of two well-known learning theorists, Piaget (1973) and Vygotsky (1978). Although both theorists agreed that knowledge is constructed by individuals, they differed by the role they give to social/verbal interaction during learning. Constructivist and social constructivist theories of learning provided the framework for the basis of this study.

Constructivist philosophy specifically maintains an emphasis on contextual and reflective thinking and practice. It has powerful implications for teacher educators, pre-service teachers, and practicing teachers. Constructivist teachers see themselves as *facilitators* of knowledge and believe their role is to challenge students to rethink and reevaluate their current schema to help scaffold them to the next level of understanding (Piaget, 1985). Constructivist teachers believe that learning is based upon one's prior knowledge, and because everyone's background of knowledge differs it cannot be assumed that all children learn in the same manner, or by the same methods (Piaget, 1985). Constructivist teachers know that in order to facilitate children's learning, they may need to construct different learning experiences for children to help them move to their next level of understanding, and that these learning experiences should include large amounts of time and opportunities to collaborate and engage in dialogue, as well as to reflect on these experiences.

Teachers who follow a constructivist framework engage their students in problem-oriented activities and use instructional strategies to help students build good mental models of problems they are working to solve. They also create rich learning environments where the primary source of information is not the textbook (Allington & Johnston, 2002). They use cooperative or collaborative groups for helping children to learn, invite children to learn through exploration, and advocate authentic assessment methods to evaluate students' progress. Constructivist teachers use these theories when they teach phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and fluency, but they also know that simply focusing on these areas is not enough (Allington, & Johnston, 2002, Allington, 2006, Beck & Beck, 2012, Brady, 2011, Carreker, 2011). They know that constructivist methods also help to foster students' oral language and critical thinking skills as well (Chard, Pikulski, & McDonagh, 2012, De Naeghel, Van Keer, Vansteenkiste, & Rosseel, 2012). The constructivism framework was the framework taught to all study participants during their pre-professional university experience. It was expected that they would use constructivist methods when teaching reading in their own classrooms.

This study utilized Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism as well. Vygotsky advocated that learning is socially constructed, viewed as an active

and constructive task, and what is learned is viewed as subjective. According to Vygotsky, learning occurs in social, historical, cultural, and political contexts mediating the ways in which individuals process information. Vygotsky (1978) viewed an individual's development as a process of active adaptation of the cultural environment coupled with the use of language and social interactions within that social context. He asserted that language is the precursor to developing cognition, and learning is socially mediated. It is the process of meaningful dialogue between learners in social and cultural contexts through which thought, problem solving, and language processes and patterns are internalized by learners. He suggested that meanings are first constructed in context and then through many experiences are gradually restructured until they are similar to conventional meanings. Individuals take everyday concepts and add to and refine their meaning through their daily experiences. Through mediation by a knowledgeable other, one internalizes problem-solving strategies (Wertsch, 1991).

In social constructivist classrooms, students are typically put in situations where there are lots of opportunities to interact with one another. The main premise is that *learning is socially constructed*. In these classrooms, much learning occurs as groups of learners' dialogue with each other and work together. It is in literacy instruction in these classrooms that children are able to move around the room as they engage in dialogue, read, and learn with one another. There is a great deal of emphasis on conversation and discussion of texts as students strive to make themselves be understood and to understand others. When children are given the opportunity to both articulate and reflect on what they already know, they are engaging in both social and verbal interactions and in turn become active participants in the process of problem solving. Teachers who use *responsive teaching* practices teach students during all phases of reading, using before, during, and after reading teaching strategies. The purpose of this is to discuss with students the connections they have made with the text they have read. When discussing a text, student responses are encouraged by the teacher and the teacher is present to help students make connections with all they have read. Throughout the before, during, and after phases of reading, students are encouraged to make text-to-self, and text-to-world connections (Clay, 1991; Dorn et al., 1998, Keene & Zimmermann, 2007).

As to a learner's formal education with issues of reading and writing, Vygotsky (1978) concluded that reading and writing must have a necessary and authentic purpose, as students learn best when the assignments in which they are engaged are based on something that they feel they need to do or learn, rather than those that are generated entirely by the teacher. He theorized that learning is born from intensely personal, human social processes (Vygotsky, 1978).

As suggested in the previous review, the constructivist/social constructivist models of teaching are in direct contrast to the traditional or transmission model of teaching. In this study, participants were taught both constructivist and social constructivist theory, and all work completed during their university coursework (lesson plans, etc.) were expected to reflect these theories.

Reading Instruction and the Teacher's Role

In today's educational climate there is a large degree of focus on teacher reform as well as on accountability for educators and teacher educators, with particular attention on how teachers teach reading to their students. There have been myriad debates about teaching practices as researchers and educators discuss whether or not the opportunities children have for learning reading at home fosters their learning or creates a disconnect between what is learned at home and then at school, whether phonics should or should not be explicitly and/or systematically taught, whether basal readers should be given up for literature-based instruction, whether heterogeneous grouping versus homogeneous grouping should be used, and whether direct instruction methods are better than discovery methods of teaching. Is there a *right way* to teach reading? What knowledge does past research offer about successful learning environments, methods, and practices for helping children to learn to read?

What is known is that a preschooler's early home experiences with literacy plays a critical role in learning to read (Clay, 1991; Cox & Sulzby, 1982; Fang & Cox, 1999; Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007); the characteristics and role of the classroom teacher have a profound effect on student learning (Allington, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2006); and using research-based or *best practices* for teaching reading to students helps them to become successful readers and writers (Gambrell et al., 2007). Many preschoolers' experiences with reading begin in their early years well before they enter school and prior to any formal reading instruction. Research has shown that during this emergent stage of reading, when children experience reading development in the home, it offers them the opportunities to effectively bridge the divide between home and school literacies which in turn enhances their own reading development (Clay, 1991; Cox & Sulzby, 1982; Fang & Cox, 1999; Purcell-Gates & Duke, 1993).

In addition to the importance of early literacy learning in the home environment, it was found that one of the most important variables in children's learning is the classroom teacher. Research has shown that teachers who teach reading using research-based practices have higher gains in student achievement in reading (Allington, 2002; Daniels & Bizar, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Dorn et al., 1998; Gambrell et al., 2007). It is the classroom teacher to whom one looks for student success, and anticipate that they have an understanding of how children acquire literacy skills.

The recognition of the importance of the classroom teacher in helping children acquire reading skills, and the methods of teaching reading using research-based instructional practices provided the motivation for this study. As a result of an exploration of effective research-based instructional practices for teaching reading, the researcher drew upon these practices in university reading courses by teaching and modeling them for students. This is important because these are the tenets that impact students' reading instruction in their own classrooms. In short, this study helped to determine if the practices the students were being

taught in a university reading course were indeed being implemented in their own classrooms when they began teaching.

Research Questions

1. What research based reading practices, if any, do graduates of a small Midwestern university teacher preparation program, actually implement when they are teaching young children to read and write?
2. What perceived barriers to using research-based reading practices in their classrooms do the study participants illuminate, and how do they overcome those barriers?

Methods

Approach to the Study. This research study utilized a mixed-methods, hermeneutic-phenomenological, case study approach to determine four teachers' instructional practices for teaching reading. This study explored whether or not the teachers used the research-based instructional practices they had learned in a literacy methods course and the reasons why they may or may not have chosen to not teach using these particular instructional practices. The study also explored the perceived barriers to using research-based practices to teach reading, and how those barriers were overcome. Phenomenology was explained through teacher interviews, discussions with teachers, email communications, classroom observations, and document analysis. Data were analyzed to describe the factors and dynamics that influenced these teachers' choices, the relationship between their knowledge of the use of research-based practices for teaching reading, their implementation in actual classroom practice, and the conditions or factors that impacted the instructional practices they used. In particular, this study explored whether or not these teachers were implementing the research-based practices for teaching reading that were a large part of their university training in their teacher preparation program.

A phenomenological approach, according to Creswell (2013), "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 47-48). For this particular study, questions were developed that sought to investigate one's experience of teaching reading to children and how this occurred in teachers' classrooms. Data were collected from the teachers' experiencing this phenomenon through engaging them in lengthy interviews, and each teacher's instructional reading practices were observed for a period of forty hours. During data analysis, specific 'themes' or 'units' were identified to describe how each teacher experienced the phenomenon, and last, the study ended with an attempt to delineate and synthesize the data picture so the reader may be able to better understand the teacher's experiences.

Creswell (1998) argued that in order to understand and analyze phenomenological data there must be a method to reduce the data in order for the researcher to analyze and explore specific statements and themes. It is

through this method of reduction and analysis that the researcher is able to explore and examine all probable meanings. Moustakas' (1994) study also provided thorough recommendations for the researcher to maintain a balance between what one views as subjective and objective findings. Moustakas emphasized that "establishing the truth of things" (p. 57) begins and ends with the perceptions of the researcher. Creswell also emphasizes the work of van Manen (1990) and stated, "The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" wherein van Manen describes this as (a "grasp of the very nature of the thing," p. 177).

Hermeneutics and Phenomenology. Hermeneutics, originating from the god Hermes, is the practice of revealing and interpreting, as did Hermes in his role as divine messenger and interpreter. Hermeneutic phenomenology stresses the human experience and how it is lived in the world. It focuses on exploring and revealing details and perceived inconsequential properties within experiences that we pay no particular attention to in our lives. The goal of hermeneutic phenomenology is to establish meaning and understanding (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). It is through a hermeneutic lens that one aims to understand the process of understanding. In this process, language plays a crucial role as it is a fundamental way in which humans understand the world and share their perspectives with others (Birsh, 2011). Furthermore, it is this emphasis on language that supports the distinction between scientific thinking and hermeneutical reflective thinking.

In a phenomenological study, the researcher first has to identify a phenomenon. After the phenomenon is identified, the researcher must gather data from those involved with it, and then must analyze and describe the fundamental nature or the crux of the experience. According to Moustakas, 1994, "This description describes *what* the individuals experienced as well as *how* they experienced it" (as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Creswell, acknowledged the value of the research in phenomenology by other researchers such as Dukes (1984), Tesch (1990), Giorgi (1985, 1994, 2009), Polkinghorne (1989), and Moustakas (1994), supported Moustakas's (1994) approach for conducting phenomenological research as desirable "because it has systematic steps in the data analysis procedures and guidelines for assembling the textual and structural descriptions" (as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 80).

Participants. Purposeful criterion sampling was used for this study. According to Creswell (2013), when conducting phenomenological research for a case study, no more than four to five case studies should be included in a single study. In addition, Creswell believed that criterion sampling works well for this type of research if all of the individuals being studied are those who have experienced the same phenomenon. Aiming one's focus on just the site or the individuals being studied is not enough. The researcher must also explore and collect a wide range of details about each individual or site being studied.

Four teachers, Jana, Lindsay, Paige, and Sara (all pseudonyms) were purposefully chosen to participate in this study, because they were students previously taught by me in several reading courses in which best practices were taught, and were graduates of a four-year teacher-training program at a mid-western university. The individuals chosen were those who had grade point averages of 3.5 or higher, were those of whom it was believed had the greatest understanding of research-based reading practices, and understood and used these practices while they were tutoring children during the field experience components of my courses. All teacher participants were classroom teachers who were nearing the end of their third year of teaching. Although all of them were working as classroom teachers, each teacher had previous experience in another grade level besides the grade in which they were currently teaching. Two of the teachers taught in the same school corporation and same building; one taught kindergarten, and the other taught fourth-grade. The other two teachers both taught second grade in two different school corporations.

Three of the four teachers were viewed as school leaders, and were asked by their principals and superintendents to work on various curricula initiatives, chaired committees, served as team leaders of their grade level, attended professional development conferences, and wrote several grants to obtain funding for their schools. All four of the teachers were open to innovative approaches to education and were eager to learn about new research in their field. Their class sizes ranged from 22-35 students with the largest number of students being in kindergarten. The kindergarten and the two second-grade teachers each had a part time instructional aide; the fourth-grade teacher did not. Each of the participants had some form of resource or instructional support through a Title-I teacher, or a reading specialist. Although this study's participant level was relatively low, it was due to the fact that in these students' cohort group only 15 students were enrolled. Out of the 15, only these four students met the criteria. Each of the participants, through their discussions, interviews, email communications, and explanations of why they chose particular instructional strategies for teaching reading provided a lens through which I was able to understand and interpret how and why they taught reading as they did. These teachers were employed as full-time teachers in public elementary schools and were from three different school corporations.

Data Collection

Teacher Interviews. Data were collected in the field over a four-month period of time. Teacher interviews focused on five different areas – teacher beliefs and instructional practices about teaching reading, instructional planning and implementation, learning outcomes for students following instruction, the instructional beliefs of the school district (principals and superintendents) about reading instruction, and the effects of the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB, 2002) on their teaching practices. Each teacher was asked the same series of 10 interview questions followed by the same prompts.

Classroom Observations. Following the interviews, each teacher was then observed teaching reading and language arts in their classroom on five different

occasions over a four month period for a total of six hours each time equaling 30 hours of observation. This block of time also allowed for the integration of other subject area matter that might have been studied at the time. For example, if the life cycle of plants was studied in the afternoon science block, it might have been integrated into the language arts block in the morning's language arts session as well. Even though each observation took place during the teacher's language arts block, the observations ranged anywhere from 180 to 240 minutes per visit, depending on the teacher's schedule and grade level being observed.

Four standards of quality and verification recommended by Creswell (2003) were used in this study. Rich, thick description of data, triangulation, member checking and clarification of researcher bias provided for increased precision and rigor of the results. Triangulation of the data allowed for the use of varied and multiple sources to corroborate evidence. Member checking was performed to derive the credibility of the findings, analyses and interpretations. Three graduate students enrolled in a qualitative research course helped to code the data collected from the teacher and principal interviews to ensure the reliability of information and assisted in creating the themes analyzed for this study. In addition, they engaged in discussions with me about the research questions and teaching practices of each of the participants in the study. Written field notes and transcriptions were sent to the teachers for verification.

Data Analysis. Data were analyzed by using simple frequency counts during the hours of classroom observation each time a research-based reading practice was seen being implemented. Each time a research-based reading practice was used, it was tabulated to provide a percentage of use for each participant. Next, significant themes from the teacher interviews, indicating what they knew about research-based practices and how they used them in their teaching, were generated. The research-based practices I looked for were listed in Table 1. From the analyses of the data, three assertions were proposed.

Results

Question 1. What research-based reading practices, if any, do graduates of a small Midwestern university teacher preparation program actually implement when they are teaching young children to read and write?

Based upon interviews with teachers and evidence from field notes and observations, it was clear that Paige, Lindsay, and Jana were able to articulate and demonstrate the meaning of research-based instructional practices and were implementing those practices in their classroom reading instruction. Sara had a much more difficult time articulating her idea of research-based practices for teaching reading and, in addition, demonstrated fewer times that research-based practices were implemented in her reading instruction. This is evident in the responses that followed the question, "How do your beliefs, well as what you know about literacy instruction influence your creation of lessons plans and the choices of instructional strategies and assessments you use?" Following is a brief synopsis of some of the responses of each participant:

Paige said, “At the kindergarten level, I feel reading should encompass everything they do in their daily lives. There are many opportunities to experience literacy on top of reading books.” Lindsay responded, “Working with kids at their instructional level, not the independent but the instructional level, where you could still help them and they’re not so struggling that they’re stressed out and not wanting to learn it.” Jana stated, “I first think that children who are surrounded by literacy, and are read to, strive in reading.”

Sara, who it was thought had a solid grasp of research-based instructional strategies for teaching reading, could not adequately and clearly express what research-based strategies are and how they were used in her classroom. It is uncertain why this was so, especially in light of the fact that during her time in her literacy methods course as well as during her student teaching practicum, she was observed implementing many research-based practices in her instruction. She was not a student who simply “talked the talk.” She could “walk the walk” as well. In addition, while observing some research-based practices were implemented in her reading instruction, they were less frequent and more random. Sara responded,

I think best practices changes so much. Because best practices for me last year, is nothing like what best practice is for me this year. Because my kids are so different. To me best practice is whatever works in your classroom at that time with those children. I may go back to using Four-Block at some time if I know that works well with a group. I just think it’s such a fluid thing; I mean it changes; it doesn’t mean the same thing.

Paige, Lindsay, and Jana were able to clearly articulate actual research-based practices they used in their teaching including modeling reading aloud for children, reading aloud to them at school and at home, the importance of activating prior knowledge, the importance of meeting them at their instructional level, exposure to print, creating lesson plans tailored to the individual needs of students, and assessing their instructional needs. It was evident that Sara did not have a clear understanding of what is meant by research-based practices.

Teacher interview data showed 143 citations which indicated their understanding of the meaning and use of research-based practices. Paige demonstrated her understanding by mentioning and describing how she used them 45 times (31%), Lindsay, 46 times (32%), and Jana, 43 times (30%), and Sara only nine times (6%).

Of the four participants, Paige, Lindsay, and Jana used, and were more purposeful about using, research-based practices in their classroom reading instruction than Sara. Paige, Lindsay, and Jana also viewed the teaching of reading not as the teaching of a single subject area, but as one that should be integrated with other subject areas throughout the day. Sara showed significantly fewer instances of when and how she used these practices, and she also could not justify why she chose the instructional practices she did. Her

choices of using research-based practices seemed to occur in a much more haphazard manner without seeming to give much thought as to why she was using the practices she had chosen. Sara also placed much more emphasis on student assessment and the teaching and acquisition of specific skills, such as phonics skills. This was apparent in her discussion and use of the number of 'morning' worksheets she assigned to her students each day, which reviewed previous skills taught. She taught her class using only large group instruction where every child was reading the same story out of the basal reader at the same time, and she did not mention incorporating content from other subject areas. Sara followed a much more traditional approach to teaching reading than the other participants. In analyzing data of the 2,609 total occurrences from all of the categories of research-based practices, (i.e. classroom environment, classroom management, developmentally appropriate practices, and reading practices for teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension), Paige was witnessed using them 773 times (30%), Lindsay, 544 times (21%), and Jana, 898 times (34%) and Sara 394 times (15%) as shown in Figure 1.

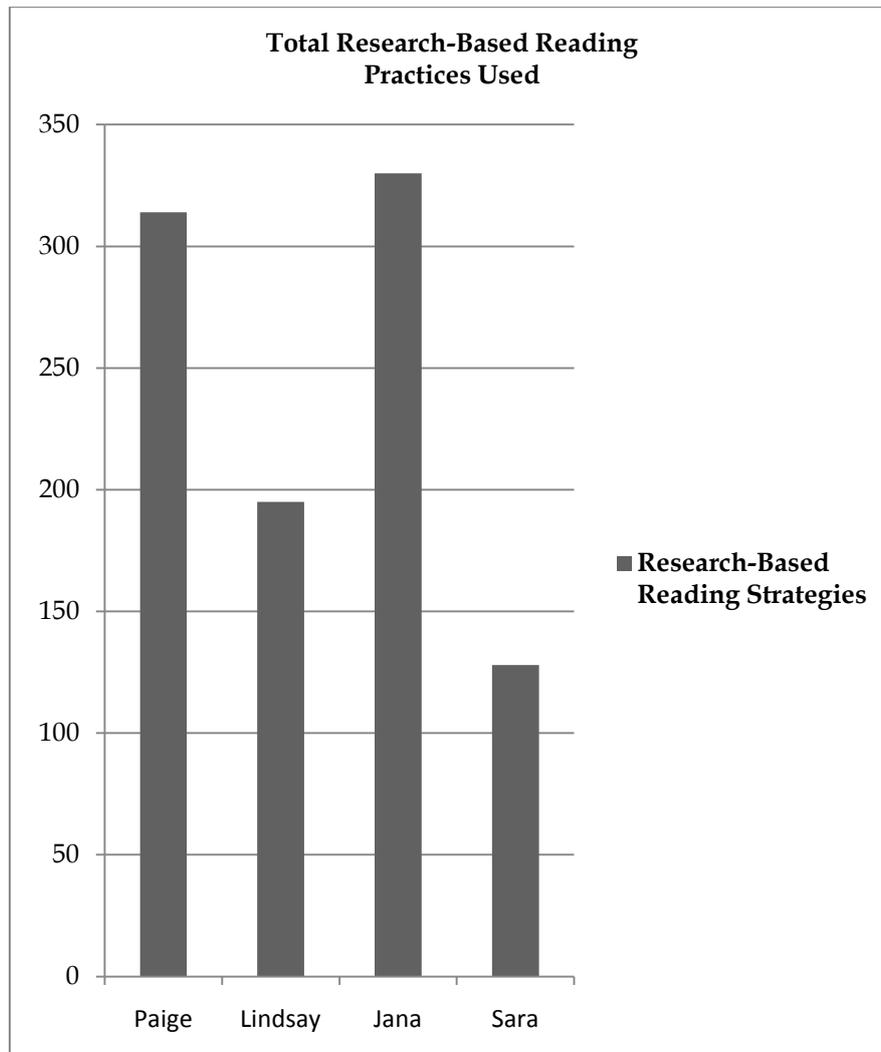


Figure 1. Participants' use of research-based reading strategies.

Some of the research-based strategies they discussed during their interviews, and were observed happening in their classrooms were strategies for activating prior knowledge, scaffolding students' knowledge, asking higher-level questions, engaging students in dialogue with the teacher or their peers, collaborating frequently with each other, making connections between their reading and writing, engaging in both interactive reading and writing strategies, and using different comprehension strategies such as making text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections. These strategies occurred much more frequently in Paige's, Lindsay's and Jana's classrooms than they did in Sara's classroom. Sara's classroom instruction consisted much more of practices such as *round-robin* reading, total large group instruction, and a heavy reliance on the teaching of skills and use of worksheets and workbook pages from the reading curriculum adopted by the school.

Assertion 1. Pre-service teachers who are taught to teach reading in a university teacher preparation program that emphasizes the use of research-based instructional practices within a constructivist framework will use these practices when they teach reading to students in their own classrooms. However, if the expectations of the school administrators (principals and/or superintendents) conflict with the teachers' ideas of how reading should be taught, and/or the teacher is intimidated by the environment in which he or she teaches, (as appeared to be in Sara's situation), they may succumb to the wishes of the school district and teach in the manner that is expected of them (See Assertion 2). When teachers experience this type of conflict, their use of research-based instructional practices for teaching reading diminishes. In addition, the self-confidence they possessed in regard to their teaching abilities also is seen.

Question 2. What perceived barriers to using research based reading practices in their classrooms do the study participants illuminate, and how do they overcome those barriers?

Paige, Lindsay, and Jana were using research-based reading practices in their classrooms as illustrated in the data clips of classroom observations in Question 2; however, there was a marked difference in Sara's use of research-based reading practices. Even though Sara said she was able to choose which instructional practices to use, she was using far fewer research-based instructional practices for teaching reading than the other participants and in a much more random manner. Sara also placed a great deal of emphasis on the standardized testing that was required by either the school district or the state. All four teachers discussed that they felt pressure from the assessment requirements of NCLB, but three teachers did not let it impact how they taught reading and remained true to their beliefs about using research-based practices; two of the three principals supported their teachers in their instructional choices. In addition to the aforementioned field notes from classroom observations, data clips from all four teachers' interviews offer rationales for why they felt they were able to use research-based reading practices or not.

Paige said,

Literacy groups are a strong program our school has been implementing in kindergarten through second grade for several years and has shown serious growth. Our principal sees the importance and notices the program's success. That is very comforting to me as a teacher who shares the same philosophy. Teachers do have the flexibility to select the text that drives instruction, so there is flexibility of book choice and reading strategies to use for instructing the group.

Lindsay said,

I most definitely **do not** feel like my school district dictates or prescribes the way I need to teach. I have the flexibility to teach how I want to. . . When I talk to the principal he will ask what I am doing to meet my students' needs. As far as he is concerned if our I-STEP scores are acceptable then we must be doing something right. I really feel like he gives me the freedom to teach reading how I think it should be taught.

Jana said,

We have guidance from our district as far as what to teach, but not necessarily how to teach. They stress the importance of direct instruction and really want us to not teach directly from the basal. . . We have a committee that meets to pick out the reading series that we will be using for the year, and as a second grade team, we create direct instruction lessons and ways to help our struggling readers and enrich our strong readers.

When asked, "Is your school district committed to your professional growth? How do they show this?" Jana replied, "Yes, we are given PLC (Professional Learning Community) time which is an hour on Wednesdays to create direct instruction lessons and discuss ways to improve our classroom. We are also given daily common planning time." Sara said,

We have to teach, re-teach, and test, and re-teach and test, and re-teach and test all of the, what we call, Power Indicators for Reading, Language and Math. In order to meet the state standards, a group (in the school corporation) got together and said, "O.K., these are the indicators; which ones do we want to put emphasis on? And let's make up five tests for each one of these, and we will continue to remediate and give the test until they reach mastery," which is 80%. I feel like literacy gets lost in that. I'm teaching to these power indicators and it's just not authentic.

When asked, "So when you say you're teaching to these power indicators, are you saying you have to follow the way it's done in your basal, or are you saying you can come up with your own things, but there isn't time?" Sara replied,

I'm saying the time element is not there, and what you're teaching might teach them the concept, but the way that the test is made up is just completely different. . . I don't know how to explain it. . . We're teaching to these little tests. I guess it's sort of like, "We don't care how you do it, but they just better pass these assessments." They have sent us to a couple of professional development workshops. They really seem to monitor us. We have to send our students test scores to the superintendent each week as far as how students are progressing on their mastery of reading and math skills.

When asked to clarify with the following question, "So, if I am understanding you correctly, are you saying you could basically be testing somebody on something every day, because they're all at different points as far as the indicators they've mastered?" Sara replied,

Yes. We test skills on someone every day. Because we move on as a class, but I have to come back at some point to the indicators (that the students haven't mastered) and try to test them again. And that doesn't mean that they've mastered it. Just because they can pass a test doesn't mean that they understand compare and contrast. There's got to be a better way. I don't know what it is yet. But I think you get caught up in just the testing, and so you sort of lose the teaching; you know, the authentic concept that you're trying to do. District wide, there are certain things, assessments that we have to do, like DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Elementary Literacy Skills) testing eight times a year, STAR Reading and Math assessments three times a year, Trimester Tests three times a year.

Sara was then asked, "So do you feel that your view for how you should teach literacy is the same or different from your district's view?" Sara said,

Different! I would do it different than the state! We think our district would probably get rid of Sustained Silent Reading as a waste of time. They haven't said that; it's just sort of the feeling that we get, because you could be testing or re-teaching.

When asked to clarify, "How would you do it differently?" Sara replied,

If you could just take maybe 10 really important concepts and spend time and do some hands-on activities, or some in-depth things with them instead of rushing through. . . I guess it's sort of like, "We don't care how you do it, but they just better pass these assessments." We are able to choose which instructional strategies to use, you know, unless they see a problem. I'm sure you'd have a visitor or someone checking up on you. . . The district decides what assessments we use. There are the trimester exit exams I mentioned. Then for every, we call them indicators, the standards, power indicators, there'll be tests. There'll be test A, test B, test C, test D. Sometimes there's an E and an F. At one time

we all, every school, had to make up their own, an A and a B, um, now they're on-line, so I can go and look up [names another school in the district] and see what assessments they use. But they're all from the same school. We also do DIBELS testing eight times a year.

She was next prompted with, "And, do these assessments, when you give those, what do you do with the information you get from them?" to which Sara replied, "They inform my instruction. The trimester tests are usually really telling. . . I then asked, "So, you're saying you're looking at their assessments, and if they don't pass them, then you know you've got to come up with some different type of a strategy?" Sara replied,

Right. We have trimester exit tests for reading, language arts, and math. Every week, we have to fill out a sheet [for the superintendent] saying "these are the strategies we are hitting this week." They look at two things. They look at what we're doing in the classroom, and they also look specifically at what my goals are for my students.

Teacher responses to the question, "Do you feel pressure about giving assessments, or do you feel like you are not pressured by them?" differed. Jana stated,

Because of state testing requirements for my students, I feel pressured, but I don't feel that from my administrators. I think they trust us to teach our students and know that we are doing our best to educate them. The state tests are always in the back of my mind, but I don't feel like they are driving how I teach.

Lindsay replied, "There is tremendous pressure about I-STEP testing, but I don't really feel this comes from the principal or the superintendent. I think it comes from me." Paige said, "There is always pressure to get students as far as one can. Sometimes I feel the pressure is self-induced. I am really hard on myself and just want the best for each and every student." Sara responded,

Yes, very pressured. For the last couple of years, as the year ends, they've (Administration) put this graph in our mailboxes where they've taken the four of us, teachers' students' reading scores and compared them. They are just looking at the scores. They're not looking at how much growth they made this year. Because the district is pressured by the state, the district is just looking at test scores. We're doing our best, but we feel the pressure.

Assertion 2. Teachers who have learned about using research-based practices for teaching reading within a constructivist framework in their university teacher preparation programs will not use them, or will use them less frequently, when they feel pressured or intimidated by their school administrators or school district to teach in ways that are in conflict with what they believe about teaching; especially when they are directed to continuously teach, test, re-teach, and retest discrete reading skills in order to satisfy their district's assessment requirements. In addition,

teachers who feel that their teaching time is limited because of their school district's emphasis on time spent on testing, will not use, or will less frequently use research-based practices for teaching reading. When teachers are fearful of repercussions by being held accountable for their students' performance on various assessments, they will not use, or use less frequently, research-based instructional practices for teaching reading. This environment of fear also causes them to experience little joy in teaching. When teachers are supported by their administrators and school districts to teach children using what they know about research-based practices, they will implement these practices in their classrooms, and are less likely to teach to the attainment of discrete skills.

The triangulation of data showed an educationally important correspondence between the teachers' feelings of self-confidence and how they were teaching reading, and the expectations and culture of the school in which they were employed. The data showed that only three of the four teachers used more research-based practices during their classroom instruction and that one used very few of these practices. It showed that even though all four teachers felt pressured by the assessment requirements of the No Child Left Behind act, three of the four teachers did not let it impact their use of research-based practices, and they remained true to their beliefs and use of them.

Findings. The results of this study provide insights into and reveal how four teachers taught reading to their students and the types of practices they implemented in their classroom environments. The discussion that follows is organized according to the study's two research interviews and classroom observations of teachers' reading instruction, and are as follows:

1. One of the most important observations was that when teachers have a firm understanding of what constitutes research-based practices for teaching reading, and when these beliefs match and are in-sync with their administrators' and school districts' beliefs, teachers are given the support they need to teach according to their beliefs. Thus, they experience greater autonomy in their implementation of reading instruction.
2. A second observation was that teachers who experience the autonomy to teach according to their beliefs have a greater sense of self-confidence in their teaching abilities and find more joy in teaching than those who do not.
3. A third observation was that schools whose main focus is on the continual assessment of discrete reading skills create teachers who are inhibited from using what they know about good teaching practices, whose sense of self-confidence as teachers and joy in teaching is diminished, and whose main focus becomes teaching for the sake of their students' success in passing tests.

Results of the study confirmed that teachers who are taught using research-based practices for teaching reading can and do implement them in their classroom practice. However, it must be said that of the four teachers who participated in the study, only three of the four did this in an exemplary fashion. The fourth teacher used some research-based instructional practices in her teaching, but these were not implemented nearly to the extent of the other three. Three of the four teachers frequently and systematically, used many of the research-based instructional practices they had learned in their teacher preparation program. They supported their use of research-based practices for teaching reading with research-based practices for creating and maintaining a classroom environment that focused upon creating a community of learners. These teachers worked to ensure that they incorporated literacy as part of their entire day and created an environment where many materials were available for their children to experience challenging activities, choice, social interaction, and success. The children in these three teachers' classrooms also had many opportunities to work independently and to engage in dialogue and work collaboratively with their peers. These teachers worked to engage and motivate their students, were excited about teaching and learning, and held high expectations for them.

These teachers successfully implemented these practices by placing a large emphasis on how they managed their classrooms. They established routines for themselves and their students and followed them. They also possessed very good organizational and management skills and used them daily. Interactions with their students were kind and respectful and they worked at building and establishing rapport with and among them. They modeled and taught this kind of behavior and encouraged their students to treat others well.

The teachers showed that they understood the developmental learning stages of literacy and were able to provide their students with developmentally appropriate, meaningful, and varied learning experiences at their level. They created differentiated lessons based on their students' needs, interests, and learning styles and then utilized one-on-one, small group and large group instruction in their teaching. These teachers were concerned with the *whole* child by being cognizant and responding to their social, emotional, and intellectual development.

In the teaching of reading, they worked to carry out meaning-based literacy instruction, and to give their students many experiences with reading. They incorporated the use of authentic texts in order to motivate their students' interest. In order to foster their students' development in reading, they also incorporated a program of skills development that focused on the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency, and provided specific skills instruction to meet students' individual needs. They utilized a long, uninterrupted time period for teaching literacy, and integrated their language arts curriculum with different content areas. Reading was extended into all different kinds of classroom activities and incorporated throughout the day as well. They focused on helping their students develop

listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing skills. As previously stated, Table 1 listed the instructional practices they were taught in their university methods course and used in their classroom instruction.

One of the four teachers used some of the research-based practices for teaching reading she had learned in her university courses, however, the percentage of occurrence was much lower than the other three teachers. Data from the teacher interviews, as well as notes from the observations I conducted in her classroom indicated that this teacher felt a great deal of pressure from her principal, the superintendent, and the school district in making certain her students performed well on district and state-mandated assessments. This teacher also had to administer many more tests to her students throughout the semester than did the other teachers in the study. Knowing that teacher accountability rated very highly in her district, and that she was responsible for sending weekly progress reports and goals for her students to her superintendent to ensure they had met specific benchmarks and district and state-standards resulted in increased pressure for her to continuously teach, test, re-teach and retest her students. She felt that the pressure to be accountable for having her students master discrete skills caused her to abandon most of what she knew about how children learn best and caused her to teach using mostly large group, direct-instruction and a skills-driven approach. In essence she felt she was, and appeared to be, 'teaching to a test.' This teacher also indicated her loss of a sense of joy about teaching and a diminishing sense of her feelings of self-confidence. The culture of the school environment impacted this teacher's ability to teach using what she knows about research-based practices. If she were to teach in a school environment similar to the other three teachers, the outcomes for her may have proved different.

Implications

Prior research on teacher education has found that teachers come to the classroom with inherent beliefs about students, teaching and learning, that affect the teaching practices they implement in their own classrooms. This research has shown that there is a clear relationship between what teachers believe about teaching and learning, and how they put these beliefs into practice. This research suggests that teachers tend to teach the way they were taught unless their university coursework strives to address their preconceptions about teaching (Fang, 1996; Borko & Putnam, 1996; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Britzman, 1986; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Fosnot, 1996; Jackson, 1974; Kennedy, 1999; Lortie, 1975; Munby, Russell, & Martin, 2001; Schweiker & Schweiker, 1993; Smith & Rhodes, 2006). Prior research also indicated a relatively strong correlation between what teachers believe about reading and their instructional practices. The manner in which teachers teach reading has a direct connection to their belief system. This belief system influences the manner in which they plan their lessons, which in turn directly affects their students' learning (Cheek, Steward, Laurenry, & Borgia, 2004; Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991). Although this correlation may be accurate, one teacher in this study, Sara, contradicted those findings. Interviews and classroom observations confirmed this. Even though she originally believed that using a

constructivist approach to helping children learn to read produced successful outcomes, her beliefs were severely challenged when she became a member of a school environment whose mandates contradicted her beliefs. There was a definite difference of opinion between Sara's beliefs about using research-based reading practices and her school's. This difference of opinion hindered Sara in implementing what she knew about using research-based practices because it caused her to feel threatened if she did not do so. This threat, either real or perceived, caused her to teach using methods that she did not really believe in. Knowing that "you would receive a visitor" if your students' test scores were not up to par was a very real motivation for her to teach in the manner in which she did. This may have been the reason that caused her to teach using instructional approaches she did not believe were the best for her students. The pressures on this teacher to have her students pass many district-level assessments; more so than any of the other teacher participants in this study, and the requirements of the school for her to teach using a teaching model that emphasized the specific teaching of vocabulary, decoding and word recognition strategies caused her to abandon her beliefs about teaching using research-based practices.

One recommendation is that teachers who believe students learn best by a constructivist approach that utilizes research-based instructional reading practices be given the opportunity, by their administrators, to share their beliefs with them. Sharing their beliefs could serve as a vehicle for engaging in effective dialogue between teachers and administrators about a) why they hold these beliefs, and b) the impact of these beliefs on their teaching practices for helping students become successful readers. A second recommendation is for school administrators to give teachers the freedom to teach using methods they believe are the most excellent for helping students learn to read. A third recommendation is that efforts are made to educate leaders in school districts and government positions, that students may not be getting the best instruction in learning how to read through a *bottoms-up* approach. They must be made aware that there is not a *silver bullet*, or one-size fits all approach to teaching reading. They need to understand that requiring teachers to use behaviorist methods for reading instruction by having their teachers teach using scripted programs and materials may not be using sound instructional practices.

All of the teachers felt the pressure of accountability for their students' learning and struggled with feeling that they never had enough time to teach reading. Because of this, Sara tried to use the time she had to teach reading by utilizing only large group instruction. The other teachers utilized frequent individual, small and large group instruction by working one-on-one with students, using literacy groups, and having students grouped in a large group for certain types of instruction; Sara seemed to set aside her beliefs about teaching reading because of time constraints and the accountability she felt. In short, she felt that because she had so many skills to cover with her students and so little time in which to cover them, she taught to the whole class rather than diversifying her instruction.

Another recommendation is there needs to be increased dialogue between literacy instructors in colleges of education with legislators, school administrators, teachers, and parents about the value of using research-based instructional practices for teaching reading as opposed to the current emphasis on student assessment and performance-based learning as opposed to the use of research-based instructional practices needs to be addressed. Having students engaged in field experiences is not enough. Instructors of methods courses that require a field component should work to create a partnership with the teachers and administrators of the schools in which their students are placed. Doing so may be important in helping them to understand why they are promoting the instructional practices for teaching reading that they are teaching their students. I believe this is important in light of the fact that the interviews with the principals showed that of the three, the two principals who had a better understanding of what constitutes research-based practices and why we use them in teaching students to learn to read, showed greater confidence in their teachers' abilities, and gave them the freedom to teach using these practices.

Limitations & Future Research

As is true of all studies, this study too had its limitations. Although this study shows promise for understanding what happens to teachers when they teach in a school environment whose beliefs about teaching reading match and support their own, and those who teach in schools whose beliefs do not match theirs, the conclusions are limited because of the small size of the teacher and principal population studied, and the fact that the four teachers were former students of mine. These factors limited my ability to create generalizations of the study's findings. Because of this a study utilizing a greater population is necessary. Additionally, if Sara were to leave the school where she is currently employed to teach in a different school environment whose administrators shared her beliefs about teaching reading, placed much less emphasis on testing and meeting district and state standards, and gave her the freedom to teach according to her beliefs, it would be interesting to see if she would teach reading using what she learned about using research-based practices. It is also suggested that a longitudinal study be conducted to see if these results remain the same over time. Research studies that focus on teacher accountability, teacher practices, teachers' sense of self-confidence and teacher retention should also be conducted to examine what happens when teachers are denied the ability to teach in ways they believe help children become successful readers.

A Final Word

Since the introduction of the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2002, teacher practices, student assessment, and teacher accountability have been heatedly discussed in educational and political circles. The results of this discussion have engendered much controversy and opposition among those who favor a bottoms-up, top-down, or interactionist

approach teaching reading. The results of this study appear to acknowledge that when there is a difference, or a *disconnect* in what teachers and administrators believe about the methods used for teaching reading to children, and when the main objective of the school is on student assessment and teacher accountability, the teacher may abandon what he or she knows about teaching using research-based practices and succumb to the more behaviorist approach being advocated by the school and federal government.

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