

Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of the Complex Contextual Factors Influencing Decisions to
Participate in Professional Learning on Early Reading and their Uptake of Classroom Strategies

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Thesis submitted to the

University of Ottawa

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the

Doctorate of Philosophy Degree in Education

Teaching, Learning and Evaluation Concentration

Faculty of Education

University of Ottawa

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Acknowledgement

Thank you Naomi. A life journey begins when a family completely shifts and uproots to take on new adventures. The love, values and community-inspiring essence of my wife, Naomi, is central to our success and happiness during our most recent journey. Growing up in this transitional life stage Willow (6), Thomas (10) and Oliver (12) are our beacons of curiosity, creativity, conscience and caring. Thank you Naomi, Oliver, Thomas and Willow, for being honest, emotional, empathetic and awake for me. And thank you Saiute for your true soul.

I send ever-present love to my parents, sister and brother: the Fairbrothers. Thank you Dad and Mom for all of your support. My thankfulness and love extend to C & L and every Fishman, Duquette, Bicher and Ford who treated me like family from day one.

I thank the participating school board and the participants in my research. It is an honour to share this personal and professional space; thank you all so very much.

JW, I owe you a debt of gratitude. Inclusion, epistemology, methodology, recycling peanut butter jars, and the joys of parenting are just a few engaging and enlightening topics of conversation I am thankful for having with you. BC, thank you for participatory collaboration, the Cove and data visualization. RK, your support and positive critique shapes my notions of learning and change. CD, thank you for making me a better writer. LS you inspire and shine a warmer light than most, a model to which I aspire.

Community and relationships are the core of being. I do injustice here but thank every friend across my life. Wakefield (ty PCs, Ms, LMs, FRs, HDJs, KF, JK) is home to my dissertation writing. From the bottom of my heart, as with all of my writing these seven years, this acknowledgement comes from my favourite place on Earth; my home on the hill at the dining room table of the earliest inspiration in my life's journey, my grandmother Betty Smith.

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Abstract

Research demonstrates those who fail to learn to read well face unfair and lifelong societal disadvantage (Allington, 2011; Castles et al., 2018; Frontier, College, 2018). The number of children who fail to learn to read proficiently remains unacceptable and persists even as research suggests practices to help struggling readers (Allington, 2011; Castles et al., 2018). Building upon dismal findings from literacy networks and evidence from empirical research this study addresses this problem by exploring how contextual factors influence teachers' learning and practice and student early reading achievement through two research questions: 1) How do contextual variables at the school, board and provincial level influence the planning, delivery and uptake of early reading professional learning opportunities? 2) How do teachers perceive the relationships between (a) their professional learning experiences, (b) their classroom early reading practices, and (c) student reading outcomes? This complexivist multiple instrumental case study explores the role of context upon teachers' ($N = 6$) perspectives in three diverse schools (rural, urban and suburban) in one school board with the voices of principals ($N = 3$) and board-level reading experts ($N = 3$) providing additional layers of context. Within-case findings demonstrate the importance of meeting local teacher and student needs. Contextual networks represent pathways leading to learning, teaching and student reading development. Cross-case findings reveal the universal needs of the participants for meeting students' core social and academic needs. Finally, a conceptual framework depicts the interaction of contextual factors within the teaching, learning and student achievement process. Theoretical, empirical and practical implications anchor a discussion proposing a research agenda situating teacher early reading learning into a professional learning collective compassionate to the learning needs of teachers who in turn can be more responsive to the local and universal needs of their students.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Background and Approach

This thesis presents an exploration of teachers' early reading professional learning within a complexity theory framework. It is an exploration that follows a research process for bringing teachers' voices to the forefront to understand and describe how contextual variables interact upon and influence teachers' professional learning, early reading knowledge and practice, and their students' early reading success. This research utilizes a qualitative multiple case study in a Québec school board with three schools chosen based on their demographic, social, and geographical differences and representative of the urban, suburban and rural characteristics of English schools and communities across the school board and the province. This study's structure opens up understandings of how professional learning opportunities are perceived by teachers to influence their instruction and students' reading development. Conceptualizing teaching and learning within a complexity theory lens, this research integrates iterative and deeply descriptive analysis to illuminate how contextual factors influence teacher learning and practice.

Problem Statement

The root of the problem motivating this study is the alarmingly high and consistent rate of students who fail to learn how to read proficiently and the associated effects of a range of adverse outcomes (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008; Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, 2009, 2012; Frontier College, 2017; Torgesen, 2000; Vanderstaay, 2006). In Canada, approximately 14% of 15-year old students were assessed as scoring below proficiency on the recent international PISA test with significantly higher achievement noted among those with greater socioeconomic advantage (O'Grady et al., 2019). Similarly, on the 2016 Pan-Canadian

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Assessment Program, 11% of Grade 8 students in Québec scored below the baseline level (O'Grady et al., 2018). In Toronto, Canada's largest city, its school board indicated that 53% of students from the lowest income bracket and 34% from the highest income bracket were not meeting provincial reading standards (Frontier College, 2017). The Canadian Council on Learning (2008) project that by 2031, 36% of youth will have limited to very poor reading skills making it hard to function in situations where reading is required and limit their chances in adulthood for developing new skills for jobs that depend on skilled readers. Additional research from the USA indicates that 60-70% of Grade 4 students read at a basic to below-basic level (e.g., Allington, 2011; Washburn et al. 2011).

Noted above are the struggles that students from homes in the lowest income brackets have for meeting provincial reading expectations. Another population of students who have significant difficulties learning to read are students with learning disabilities who need specific reading instruction and intervention in their early years to help decrease the chances of long term reading failure (Wanzek et al., 2018). In 2019 the Ontario Human Rights Commission launched Right to Read - a public inquiry based in the concern that students with reading disabilities were not having their needs met in the public education system. The inquiry cited that many students with special education needs (53% in 2018-2019) fail to score at or above the provincial average in reading (EQAO, 2019). Longitudinal quantitative research interpreting how students with reading disabilities in their early years are experiencing success later in life find students who do not overcome reading disability and difficulty in their early years of school are less likely to attain higher education and a similar income compared to their better reading peers (McLaughlin et al., 2014). The range of students who struggle to learn how to read in school is large. This is particularly so for students with specific characteristics; but it is prevalent for many students who

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are not considered to have a reading disability such as dyslexia or who come from homes not considered low on the socioeconomic scale (Allington, 2011; Canadian Council on Learning, 2010, Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, 2012). A static picture stretches back across years and decades that shows too many children are failing to learn to read at proficient levels and that failing to learn how to read more than likely negatively influences the lives of these children.

Connected to these alarming statistics and concerns, research affirms what is likely a general and widely held assumption: teachers are essential agents for impacting student achievement at school (e.g., Blazar & Kraft, 2017; Chetty et al., 2014; Rockoff, 2004). Primary grade teachers have the position and enormous responsibility to provide their students with their foundational academic and social skills, and often teachers are the ones criticized for not meeting their children's academic, physical and social-emotional needs (Allensworth et al., 2006; Cohen, 2006). Unfortunately, research indicates that many teachers do not possess a strong understanding of the core reading skills required to reach struggling readers and that teachers' negative perceptions towards assisting struggling readers, unfortunately, persist (Cunningham et al., 2004; Joshi et al., 2009; Moreau, 2014; Scharlach, 2008; Washburn et al., 2011).

Though we have evidence of effective early reading professional learning (e.g., Gersten et al., 2010; Joshi et al., 2009) and approaches to remediate struggling students' early reading achievement (e.g., Brady et al., 2009; Carlisle et al., 2011; McCutchen et al., 2002; Podhajski et al., 2009) it does not appear to translate into teacher practice and improved student reading outcomes. The problem is apparent, but the solution is more abstract. Too many students continue to fail to read proficiently. The solution involves a range of elements in need of an in-depth exploration: the role of individual teacher agency, the influence of varying contextual

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factors, and how the education system positions itself to prepare teachers for meeting the multifaceted and varied needs of students and teachers.

Osberg and Biesta (2008) suggest that “education purposely shapes the subjectivity of those being educated ... [that] the function of education is to ‘produce’ certain kinds of subjectivities” (p. 314). These complexivists speak about the messiness of teachers’ epistemologies, the composition of classrooms, and other varying factors at play within schools and influencing learning. A central point emphasized by Osberg and Biesta relates to the emergence of varying phenomena within the education system as being influenced by certain levels of academic achievement: “[E]ducation, for the most part (and for whatever sociopolitical reasons), is organized around the idea that its primary purpose is to promote ‘outcomes’ in certain areas deemed important (for whatever reason), and the curriculum (i.e. the content and pedagogy supporting it) is the primary tool by means of which such competency is achieved” (p. 315). Using this line of reasoning and considering teachers as learners within their systems of education is a unique way for considering acculturating influences upon teachers’ learning, change and practices as they strive to help their students meet their curriculum’s governed expectations. It is interesting to also take a further step outwards from the point of the teacher in the system. Consider the field of educational research and how a range of bodies of literature likely influence provincial planning documents, methods for implementing effective teaching practices, determining means and strategies for improving students’ achievement, and shaping board and school priorities. Relatedly professional learning opportunities emerge out of these interacting perspectives connected in different degrees to overarching system expectations.

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Purpose and Research Questions

In this research project, I seek to understand how teachers perceive the influences of their early reading professional learning on their practice and how they perceive that this shapes their students' reading development. To do this entails opening up and bringing together individual bodies of knowledge existing within the vast field of early reading teaching and learning and requires a research study directed towards understanding how early reading professional learning opportunities need to be more considerate of teachers' individual and contextual landscapes.

Research designed to understand contextual complexities influencing teacher learning and practice will help to unpack teachers' perceptions of the relationships between their early reading professional learning experiences, their classroom early reading practices and student reading achievement. Therefore, this research aims to open up intimate understandings and discussions of how their unique contexts influence teachers in three different schools in the same school board and how more universal aspects of teachers' early reading learning influence their learning and practice. Guiding my exploration are two open-ended questions:

1. How do contextual variables at the school, board, and provincial level influence the planning, delivery and uptake of early reading professional learning opportunities?
2. How do teachers perceive the relationships between (a) their professional learning experiences, (b) their classroom early reading practices, and (c) student reading outcomes?

Each research question helps to frame this exploration for understanding how teachers perceive that their early reading professional learning influences their early reading instruction, and subsequently, their students' reading outcomes. Of note, while I am choosing to use the term student reading outcomes in the second research question the importance is on the perception of

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teachers regarding students becoming confident and fluent readers versus any achievement measure.

Guided in a complexivist qualitative case study approach, these research questions are designed to draw out participants' perceptions in a way that can draw out a multifaceted approach to analysis and lead to within- and cross-case findings with theoretical, empirical and practical implications (Seidman, 2006, 2013, 2019).¹ The flow of this dissertation emerges within a complexity-based perspective, placing value on understanding the influence of and upon human sensitivities to participants' contextually influenced interactions within and across systems. The next section brackets myself into the scope of this study.

Situating Myself

Initial interest in the topic of this research study emerged in my preservice (or Bachelor of Education) teacher education program fourteen years ago. As the first project in our problem-based learning cohort, my partner and I selected the state of current reading instruction to research. This assignment introduced us to the belief systems and reading practices described as a great debate by Jeanne Chall between proponents of phonics- and whole language-based early reading instruction. The tenets of this divide have stayed with me and appear influential and conjoined upon my path as teacher and curious researcher. My educational roots include being an elementary grade school teacher and a special education teacher who created individualized education plans for students with learning difficulties and exceptionalities. The complex nature of the school system, the perceived discord between research and theory, and a long-running

¹ Seidman's *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* is now in its 5th edition. Three editions of his text have been used in the course this dissertation: The third edition (2006), 4th edition (2013) and the 5th edition (2019). Particular editions are referred to as they were used at different times through this research, though I predominantly used the 3rd edition as my go-to text on the 3-series interview process.

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awareness of the number of students who struggle to learn to read have been a part of my life for the last 15 years. Therefore, this topic is not something appearing out of nowhere nor at minimum a shallow choice for the sake of a graduate research project. I am intimately concerned about what I have experienced as a teacher and as a researcher in elementary schools, and this research project helps unpack a perspective I feel is currently lacking in discussions on why too many students continue to struggle to learn to read.

As much as I seek to put personal and professional perspectives aside and equitably portray each participants' perspective, I am aware that aspects of my past will permeate elements of this research. I also ensure that I have maintained conscious integrity to the body of research, the participants' perspectives and present findings with theoretical, empirical and practical implications for early reading research and teacher learning. Underpinning my research method is a process for displaying each participant's perspectives and adherence to a qualitative research methodology to share the teachers' lived experiences (Seidman, 2006). Crafting teachers' lived experiences as profiles and vignettes in the first-person voice, their narratives provide a fertile starting point for an in-depth and saturated collection of findings to emerge. Iterative within-case findings are sensitive to local contexts. A transitional mode of analysis opens up an understanding of the variables and factors at play in early reading professional learning and instruction (Miles et al., 2014; Seidman, 2006), allowing richly representative cross-case findings across cases to emerge. This thorough process of analysis results in a conceptual framework that locates the individual teacher within the related contexts that the students they teach and the learning community that they learn and teach in share.

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Rationale

Prominent reading researchers, social scientists and literacy networks relate the negative life experiences associated with remaining a poor reader (Allington, 2011; Canadian Council on Learning, 2008, 2010; Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, 2009, Castles et al., 2018; 2012 Snow et al., 1998; Torgesen, 2002). The importance of becoming a strong comprehender of written text is undeniable, and too many children struggle to learn how to read effectively. Renowned early reading researcher, J. K. Torgesen (2002), emphasizes that “[c]hildren who are poor readers at the end of first grade almost never acquire average-level reading skills by the end of elementary school” (p.8). Students with reading difficulties not resolved in their first years of school are more likely to incur teen pregnancies, have poorer health, drop out of high school, face incarceration and therefore are likely to be on the fringes of our society that values and depends on skills from literate citizens (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008, 2010; Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, 2009, 2012; Claessens et al., 2009; Frontier College, 2017; Morgan et al., 2008; Torgesen, 2002; Vanderstaay, 2006).

Thankfully, it should appear, that over the last two decades much research espousing evidence-based early reading instructional practices has been produced (e.g., Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2009; Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, 2009, 2012; National Reading Panel, 2000; Ontario, 2003; Snow et al., 1998, Torgesen, 2002). Awareness of these findings should lead to the assumption that there has been a significant decrease in the number of students not becoming proficient readers early on. Unfortunately reading research indicates that many teachers do not possess a core breadth of early reading knowledge, that often professional learning experiences do not effectively help them meet the needs of students who

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struggle to read, and that negative teacher perceptions towards struggling readers persist (Cunningham et al., 2004; Joshi et al., 2009; Scharlach, 2008; Washburn et al., 2011).

Significance of the Study

Together the school (within-case) and the board (cross-case) findings provide an inclusive interpretation of how teachers' perspectives are shaped and influenced. Understanding perspectives in such a fashion provides a depth and richness that though unique to a specific board within a specific region of a specific province, could be considered to reverberate to alternative environments. This study illuminates how professional learning can be conceptualized and understood through empathetic consideration of teachers' readiness and needs, intimately connected to their students' early reading needs. Clarifying the challenges and complexities that exist within boards, yet also shining a light on the similarities, opens avenues for considering how early reading professional learning can be conceptualized for teachers' preservice and inservice professional learning and that positively influence students' reading achievement. This research opens up a way for considering more contextually relevant early reading professional learning that meets teachers' professional needs.

The Roadmap

Chapter 1 broadly outlines this doctoral research project's scope, introducing the problem and research questions and positioning the nature of my complexivist thinking and who I am as an educator and educational researcher. Chapter 2 is multi-purpose: First is a brief background of the state of early reading instruction in the province of Québec and beyond; second, a review of the literature on approaches to early reading instruction, teacher early reading knowledge and professional learning follows; and third, this chapter concludes by opening up complexity theory as the conceptual framework guiding this study. Chapter 3 presents the methodology and frames

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the qualitative case study research methods within the complexity theory approach. This chapter provides a brief introduction of the participants, the unique and in-depth process of three-series interviews with teacher participants, the semi-structured interviews with principals and board-level reading experts, and the steps I undertook throughout data analysis. Chapter 4 comprises the Findings: Contextual introduction of the school board and the case schools, within-case themes nested in three within-case narratives, contextual networks representing pathways involving teachers' perceptions of how contextual variables are perceived to interact and influence their learning and their students' reading development, and finally, themes presented in a cross-case analysis that brings abstractions across cases together and provides a foundation to conceptualize teacher learning and student achievement. Chapter 5 transitions to a discussion on the findings, and Chapter 6 concludes this dissertation by suggesting theoretical, empirical and practical implications to consider for how improving how professional learning can influence students' early reading needs.

Chapter 2 – The Contextual Landscape, Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

This chapter begins by providing a sense of the contextual landscapes of early reading instruction in Québec and North America. First is a brief overview of the Québec curriculum (the Québec Education Program [QEP]) and the state of early reading instruction in Québec. Second, is a portrayal of the landscape of the state of early reading and the swings in differing approaches to early reading instruction. Following this is the literature review on approaches to early reading instruction, teacher knowledge and beliefs, and professional learning. This chapter ends with an in-depth presentation of the role of complexity theory as the conceptual framework for this research design.

Context of the Québec Education Program and Language Arts Curriculum

Officially implemented in 2001, the preparations for Québec's current provincial education plan arose in the mid-1990s, (CEA, 2017). Designed to rewrite an outdated curriculum to be more in line with ideas for a 21st-century knowledge and technology-based society, “[t]he objective of the change was to refocus the school on its main mission: to educate, socialize and qualify today's youth ... to return to the essential knowledge to be passed on, to raise the cultural level of programs, to avoid the compartmentalization of knowledge and to introduce more rigorous evaluation” (Guimond, 2009). The QEP curriculum is competency-based with “[k]nowledges ... organized in terms of competencies to make learning meaningful and open-ended for students” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001, p. 4). In the elementary years, grades are organized around three 2-year cycles (Cycle 1 comprises grades 1 and 2; Cycle 2, grades 3 and 4; and Cycle 3, grades 5 and 6) with the intention that this structure provides room for teachers to connect with students over two years and that teachers will be more able to differentiate instruction according to individual rates of student learning. The framework of the education

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program has three central organizing structures: cross-curricular competencies, broad areas of learning, and core subject competencies. Cross-curricular competencies “transcend the limits of subject-specific knowledges while they reinforce their application and transfer to concrete life situations precisely because of their cross-curricular nature ... they are mutually complimentary” (p. 12) and organized into four categories. Five broad areas of learning are designed and intended to “help students relate subject-specific knowledges to their daily concerns and thus give them a better grasp of reality” (p. 42). See Table 1 to get a clearer picture of each of these three components and to consider the expectations teachers are responsible for across grades and cycles.

Table 1

Elementary Curriculum Expectations for Teachers in Québec

Cross-curricular Competencies	Broad Areas of Learning	Core Subject Areas
I. Intellectual Competencies i. To use information ii. To solve problems II. To exercise critical judgement iii. To use creativity III. Methodological Competencies iv. To adopt effective work methods v. To use information and communications technologies IV. Personal and Social Competencies vi. To construct his/her identity vii. To cooperate with others V. Communication-related competency viii. To communicate appropriately	I. Health and Well-Being II. Personal and Career Planning III. Emotional Awareness and Consumer Rights and Responsibilities IV. Media Literacy V. Citizenship and Community Life	I. Languages i. English Language Arts ii. French Language Arts II. Mathematics, Science and Technology IV. Arts Education V. Personal Development

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For each subject area is a range of competencies (competencies considered as the broad behaviours, skills and knowledge and ability to communicate understanding students are to develop within each of the subjects), which act as the framework for learning. Competencies for each subject are the same across grades 1 to 6, and each competency breaks down into key features that are also the same across the grade levels. Key features are the processes comprising the competencies. Finally, the curriculum prescribes essential knowledges that students need to learn by the end of cycles in order to work towards mastery of competencies by the end of Grade 6. For example, the English Language Arts curriculum is organized first by the competencies, next the key features, and then the essential knowledge to be developed and worked on throughout the elementary years.

In 2009 the government released a document called the Progression of Learning to compliment the 2001 QEP and to “provide more information to teachers about some of the requirements found in the content of the ELA program and their connection to the progressive development of literacy from the beginning to the end of elementary school” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2009, p. 4). It provides more specific information about what expectations to teach in grades instead of just across two-year cycles. Laid out across the years under the umbrella of cycles, the Progression of Learning applies a symbol system to designate whether students are constructing knowledge, applying knowledge, or reinvesting in knowledge. The Progression of Learning provides a sense of at what grade students should be applying specific essential knowledges in terms of learning to read. However, it does not expand on the 2001 curriculum for specifying expectations for how students are to progress in learning how to read.

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The English Language Arts Curriculum

In the Language Arts Curriculum, there are four subject level competencies that occur across the elementary years. These are: (a) to read and listen to literary, popular and information-based texts; (b) to write self-expressive, narrative and information-based texts, (c) to represent literacy in different media; and (d) to use language to communicate and learn (QEP, 2001).

The curriculum states expectations for teachers in Grade 1 and 2 to focus on similarly stated essential knowledges with their students across Cycle 1. In terms of learning to read and the expectations for teachers to help students learn the relationship between sound and print and to develop reading comprehension, the QEP provides broad guidelines, but nothing overtly specific relating to the early years. There is a particular reference in a section on essential knowledge of reading strategies for students to construct meaning from text by using the four cuing systems (semantic, pragmatic, syntax and graphophonemic). However, other than a relatively broad and passing reference, nothing explicitly guides teachers or provides information on what early reading teachers should concretely focus on to help their students learn to read (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1

Essential Knowledges, Reading Systems, the Four Cuing Systems (QEP, p. 77)

READING STRATEGIES			
The student uses the following repertoire of strategies to construct meaning from texts:			
• The four cuing systems, which include:			
– Prior knowledge and personal experience of the content of a text (semantic)	1	2	3
– Knowledge of the ways books work (pragmatic), e.g. most fairy tales begin with, "Once upon a time..."	1	2	3
– Use of pictures and other graphic representations to interpret texts (pragmatic). See also Competency 3, re: reading texts that have images and illustrations	1	2	3
– Knowledge of common language patterns (syntax). See also Competency 2, Writing System	1	2	3
– Knowledge of the relationships between sounds and written symbols (graphophonics)	1	2	3

Several other reading strategies relate to meaning-making, locating information and responding to different genres of text. However, Figure 1 reflects the depth of teaching early reading skills and strategies in Québec's English language curriculum. It appears that teachers, schools and boards are responsible for developing instructional strategies to meet the needs of their beginning readers.

English Language Arts in the Case School Board. This very brief section provides a general overview of the approach to English Language Arts that the school board in which this research project takes place. Reflecting the gist of the description of the English Language Arts curriculum in Québec, the case school board's English Language Arts program follows a Balanced Literacy Model that is broadly defined by the board as a model offering students time to read, time to converse and time to write.² It appears to be a holistic-type model and approach that provide students access to a wide range of literacy skills. Assessment of progression in the case school board comprises diagnostic reading assessments based on reading fluency norms at particular grade levels.

The Contextual Landscape of Reading Instruction

This brief section moves from the expectations of the provincial English Language Arts Curriculum to provide a sense of the field of early reading instruction and the reading wars and literacy paradigms occurring in North America for many decades or as Castles et al. (2018) point out, even centuries. For a more comprehensive background about the landscape of early reading, see Beach and O'Brien (2015), Castles et al. (2018), Kim (2008) and Perry (2012).

² I have withheld the link and reference for this information to maintain anonymity for the participating school board.

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In general, the reading wars are coined as a debate between opposing philosophies to teaching reading; through phonics (or code-based approach) or a whole reading approach (Castles et al., 2018; Kim, 2008). Castles et al. (2018) citing a seminal work about the history of learning to read by Adams (1990) notes that the reading wars can be traced back approximately 200 years when the state of Massachusetts's Secretary of Education considered reading instruction teaching the relationships between sounds and letters to be a soulless enterprise. More recent are the swings in approaches to reading instruction: code-based-vs-whole language. In the 1960s, Jeanne Chall reported in her seminal work on reading instruction that instruction applying a code-based approach was more effective than teaching whole words and sentences; however, Kim (2008) pointed out that this was quickly reproached in research by Kenneth Goodman who argued that "reading was a 'psycholinguistic guessing game'" (Goodman, 1967, p.127), where good readers use context clues and their background knowledge "to predict, confirm, and guess at the identification of new words" (Kim, 2008, p. 373). To many, Goodman's work is the research foundation of the whole language movement in which reading is a natural process that requires immersion within an engaging literacy environment (Kim, 2008), though Goodman slyly disputes this (Goodman, 2014). Kim notes that between the 1970s and 1990s, research in the field of cognitive psychology uncovered the processes that good readers use. These findings comprise a synthesis of phonics and whole language approaches to reading and stress the importance of ensuring phonics instruction for students in their early years of learning to read. Castles et al. (2018) also note how more recently a balanced approach, or a three-cueing approach, that involves teaching semantic (using context, background knowledge to identify words and figure out meaning), syntactic (using the rules of word and sentence structure), and

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graphophonic (using the letter-sound, sound-symbol relationships) skills is what the current reading research demonstrates is crucial for reading instruction to be most effective.

Interestingly, noted in the discussion on the Québec English Language Arts curriculum, teachers are expected to teach students to use a 4-cuing system (QEP, 2001). In addition to the semantic, syntactic and graphophonic in the prior sentence is a pragmatic aspect (using the social and cultural aspects of language) to the cuing system. This simplified version of the rocky contextual landscape of reading instruction presents a sense of the atmosphere in which students and teachers work and learn. Though some of the literature review research will appear dated, it is the essence of how teaching early reading instruction has generally occurred over the last four decades and provides a sense of the research base examining the effect of three main approaches to early reading instruction. Before moving to the literature review, the next section positions literacy instruction within existing literacy paradigms from over the past century.

Literacy Paradigms

Beach and O'Brien (2017) present a historical review of influential paradigms of literacy research since 1920. The choice for the research they review is based on how influential it appeared to be on re-defining literacy learning perspectives and changes in English language arts instruction and comprises four main periods. Formalist and behaviourist perspectives on literacy learning were influential from 1920 to 1960. A formalist paradigm emphasizes the structuring of language in text and writing and reading instruction that focuses on analyzing what the structures of exemplary text are. The 1960s through to 1970 represents an increased focus on cognitive research processes for understanding how to read and write. Emerging in these years were psychological studies of fundamental processes in reading and writing development. Notably, Beach and O'Brien remark that this period informs many of the current strategies for teaching

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word reading (e.g., decoding) and comprehension instruction. In the cognitive paradigm, reading and writing are universal processes that anyone can learn from instruction on reducing elements of words or sentences and larger strings into essential small parts. Dillon and O'Brien (2019) argue for a pragmatic approach to reading research and instruction. They note the prevalence of cognitive processes privileged in scientific paradigms favouring the clear and measurable over ambiguities in sociocultural and qualitative research. For these researchers, this is problematic. It creates a culture prioritizing a simplistic style of thinking and research and maintains a one-sided form of reading instruction creating a deficit discourse and ignoring the effect of society, culture and context on learning to read for students who are not in a majority position in society.

The 1970s through the 1980s began drawing from Dewey's experiential progressivist learning theories with researchers adopting more sociocultural perspectives to focus on how participation in different social and cultural contexts shape literacy practices (Beach & O'Brien, 2017). Branching from this sociocultural paradigm is a notion of social and cultural literacy that challenges the traditional definitions of literacy privileging the dominant culture within their institutions. Sociocultural perspectives emphasize the social and cultural contexts literacy is practiced within and the interacting power relations at play in how literacies are defined. These perspectives differ, however, in how literacy is defined (meaning from print, meaning from and across multimodalities and meaning from reading the word and the world) (Perry, 2012). Perry describes sociocultural perspectives as:

concerned with understanding how people use literacy in their everyday lives, finding ways to make literacy instruction meaningful and relevant by recognizing and incorporating students' out-of-school ways of practicing literacy, and decreasing

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achievement gaps for students whose families and communities practice literacy in ways that differ from those in the mainstream or in positions of power. (p. 51)

O'Brien and Rogers (2015) remark that sociocultural perspectives and frameworks have been a part of literacy research and practice over the past four decades. However, though sociocultural perspectives (e.g., literacy as a social practice, multiliteracies and critical literacy studies) are a regular presence in reading research and instruction, they are not equal with cognitive and psycholinguistic literacy paradigms which continue to dominate institutional expectations for how teachers are to teach reading (Beach & O'Brien, 2017; Perry, 2012). Therefore, though there is an increase in sociocultural literacy research, this is not infiltrating how many schools view and teach reading (Dillon & O'Brien, 2019; Perry, 2012). Subsequently, though elements of the following literature review represent traces of sociocultural perspectives, most of the research comprises cognitive, psycholinguistic reading instruction paradigms.

Literature Review

This literature review, (a) opens up the interconnected landscape of early reading instruction and professional learning through a critique of the extant scholarship in this area, and (b) through this critique identifies under-explored areas in early reading teaching and learning. A complexity theory perspective guides the intention and design of the literature review. Influential to the shape of this literature review is Opfer and Pedder's (2011) complexity theory synthesis of change literature, which brought together varying professional learning and teacher change findings. In this scope, this review unpacks a range of literature connected to early reading instruction: approaches in providing early reading instruction, teacher knowledge and beliefs, and early reading professional learning designs. First, the literature on approaches to early reading instruction is reviewed. This is followed by a review of the literature on teachers'

perceptions of their role in early reading instruction. It concludes with a synthesis of the literature on teacher early reading knowledge and the relevant teacher change and early reading professional learning research. Emerging from this comprehensive review of the literature the gaps in the field of early reading instruction and professional learning research are identified, briefly discussed and positioned into the scope and direction of my research project.

Early Reading Instruction

This section presents a literature review of the three main approaches to early reading instruction over the last half-century: code-based, whole language and balanced reading.

Code-based and Whole Language Approaches to Reading

‘Code-based’ is the term used to represent the approach to early reading instruction for developing fluent reading through stages in which learners gradually acquire numerous subskills, reading ability is mastered and eventually perceived ingrained (McKenna et al., 1990).³ Proponents of code-based early reading instruction generally understand beginning reading as a step-by-step process that involves explicit phonemic awareness (ability to hear and manipulate sounds in spoken words) and phonics instruction (ability to discriminate printed text and produce its corresponding sound) for ensuring that print-sound correspondences happen in specific sequences (Adlof et al., 2010).⁴ Whole language reading approaches stress dependence on a climate in which students exposed to enriching literacy environments will choose to read because they want to read and the process of learning to read within this context echoes the natural way

³ At times code-based instruction will be used interchangeably with phonics-based, skills-based or traditional instruction due to research reported in those terms, though all terms infer the same meaning as described in this paragraph.

⁴ A **phoneme** is the smallest unit of a speech sound which can change the meaning of a word: /k/ is the phoneme represented by the letter ‘k’ in the word kiss, and **phonemic awareness** is the ability to reflect on and manipulate the phonemes in spoken language (Cain, 2010, p. 250).

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children acquire language (Edelsky, 1990; Gee, 1995; Goodman, 1989). Elements considered parts of a whole language approach to reading are broad. They can include quality children's literature, daily read alouds, structured independent reading activities embedded throughout the curriculum and emphasizing higher-order thinking, collaborative groupings, teacher-student conferences, and grammar and spelling (Daniels et al., 1999).

A Comparison of the Whole Language Reading Approach to Code-based Instruction

Five meta-analyses compare whole language reading instruction to code-based instruction. In total, these meta-analyses include 237 research studies and 5 American education projects. These meta-analyses, published between 1989 and 2016, focus on bringing together and comparing the impact of early reading instructional approaches on various reading-related outcomes for average-achieving and struggling students. Outcomes considered in these meta-analyses measured reading readiness, beginning reading achievement and effective approaches and interventions, and student attitudes towards reading. Stahl and Miller (1989) conducted a meta-analysis comparing code-based instruction to whole language-based reading instruction, and Stahl et al. (1994) updated this analysis five years later. Gee (1995), concerned with Stahl and Miller's (1989) and Stahl et al.'s (1994) inclusion of the language experience approach, conducted a meta-analysis comparing code-based instruction to what he considers instruction more fully representative of whole language approaches. Suggate (2010, 2016) conducted two meta-analyses on the effect of reading approaches for students with reading disabilities, learning disabilities or at risk for struggling in reading.

Stahl and Miller (1989) and Stahl et al. (1994) use two procedures to analyze their data. The first was vote-counting, where each study classifies as either favouring whole language or basal reader approach with measures including standard achievement tests, attitude measures,

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miscue analysis and print concepts.⁵ The second procedure is the same that Gee (1995) employs: effect sizes derived from the quantitative data looking at the mean differences resulting from the whole language reading group compared to the skills-based instruction. All three of these meta-analyses point to the whole language reading approaches providing slightly higher achievement in reading for kindergarten students. Stahl and Miller (1989) indicate that 17 kindergarten comparison studies favour whole language/language experience approaches, and two favour the basal reading. Gee's (1995) meta-analysis favoured the whole language approach for kindergarten to third-grade students demonstrating higher achievement scores than code-based approaches with an overall effect size of .70, though he cautions that sample sizes were small. Finally, when comparing students with and without learning disabilities, Gee found that whole language instruction has a positive influence on students' early reading (normal effect size =.59 and learning disability effect size =.53) but cautions that though effect sizes indicate whole reading's effectiveness these differences are not statistically significant between these groups. Gee also suggests that with larger sample sizes, the results could indicate that whole language is not as effective as initially considered.

Suggate's (2010) meta-analysis of 85 experimental or quasi-experimental studies investigates the effectiveness of reading intervention approaches for students from preschool through Grade 7 considered at-risk for reading difficulties or struggling to read. Broadly Suggate finds that phonemic awareness and phonics interventions are more effective in the early years and that whole language interventions demonstrate greater effect sizes in the later primary and elementary years. The reading interventions comprised phonics, phonemic awareness and whole

⁵ Generally, basal reading programs equate to published reading programs where teachers teach students the basics of learning to read in a step-wise, generally code-based prescribed fashion (Smith et al., 2001).

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language interventions for 116 treatment-control groups ($N = 7,522$). The following class levels represent the comparison groups: (a) preschool and kindergarten, (b) Grade 1, (c) Grade 2, (d) Grades 3 and 4, and (e) Grades 5, 6 and 7. Comparison groupings also comprised groups of at-risk and struggling readers. Effect sizes were generated based on the intervention (phonemic and phonological awareness, phonics, and whole language) on the different groupings of students.⁶ Generally, the results indicate that there are statistically larger effect sizes, and therefore advantages to providing phonics ($d = .59$) and phonemic awareness ($d = .67$) for developing pre-reading skills that are foundational to reading and comprehension skills in the early grades (Pre-K to Grade 3). Whole language (comprehension-based) interventions had large effects ($d = .69$) on measures of reading (e.g., word reading, passage reading) and on comprehension ($d = .60$). Even though this meta-analysis looks only at intervention effectiveness on struggling readers across Pre-K to Grade 7 and comprises small instructor to student ratios (e.g., $M = 3.68$), it has relevance to my research. Suggate demonstrates that teaching students how to break the code (phonemic awareness, phonological awareness and phonics instruction) will help students who struggle to read in their critical early years and that providing an engaging whole language environment is critical in all elementary grades.

Suggate's (2016) meta-analysis explores the long term effects of reading interventions for average and struggling readers. The main differences to his 2010 research include changes to the number of intervention types, risk status (including average readers), more intervention features and outcome variables (e.g., the inclusion of spelling), and seeking to understand what interventions have long term effects approximately 11-12 months following posttest. Grouping

⁶ **Phonological awareness** is the ability to reflect on and manipulate the spoken sounds in the language (Cain, 2010, p. 250).

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levels also slightly differ: (a) Preschool and kindergarten, (b) Grades 1 and 2, and (c) Grades 3 to 6. The four categories of risk status are average, at-risk (low SES, reading below the 50th percentile, a parent with dyslexia), low readers (reading between the 11th and 25th percentiles), and reading and learning disabled (reading below the 10th percentile, having an IQ-reading discrepancy of 1 standard deviation, or a general learning disability). Interestingly average readers lost some advantage over control groups in follow-up measures. The largest effect-sizes at follow-up are phonemic and phonological awareness (posttest $d = .42$, follow-up $d = .46$) and comprehension interventions (posttest $d = .33$, follow-up $d = .42$). Phonics (posttest $d = .44$, follow-up $d = .25$) and fluency interventions (posttest $d = .59$, follow-up $d = .33$) indicate decreased effects at the follow-up. Of interest to my current research, the most effective interventions at posttest for preschool to Grade 2 students were phonemic and phonological awareness and phonics interventions. However, when compared at follow-up, the phonemic and phonological awareness intervention demonstrates a distinct advantage. Possible reasons are that phonics intervention groups had much higher sample sizes and were assigned greater weights that led to overall smaller effect sizes.

Focusing specifically on struggling early readers, research from Maddox and Feng (2013) suggest that a phonics-based approach is more impactful than a whole language approach for increasing spelling and word recognition ability. Maddox and Feng's (2013) quasi-experimental action research design includes 22 first grade students (13 boys, 9 girls) with students randomly assigned to either a whole language or phonics group with stratified sampling used. Out of the 12 students in each group 3 were assessed as above, at, or below grade level and over 4 weeks students met with their teacher each school day for 20 minutes of phonics or whole language reading instruction. Results indicate that though there was not a significant difference between

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the two groups the phonics groups showed greater improvements in reading and spelling and that both instructional methods related to noticeable changes in students' reading fluency (students in the phonics group improved reading fluency by 8 points, and students in the whole language group increased by approximately 4 points). Ryder et al. (2007) explore whether explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and phonemically-based decoding skills is an effective intervention for children with early reading difficulties taught in a mainly whole language instructional environment. The 24 lowest performing year 2 and 3 students in reading were organized into 12 closely matched pairs randomly assigned to an intervention (phonics) or control (whole language) group. The intervention occurred over 24 weeks during the first three terms of a four-term school year. Each group of three students received four lessons per week, varying between 20 and 30 minutes. The intervention was supplemental to their classroom whole language reading instruction. Posttest measures reveal the intervention group outperforming the control group at posttest on all measures of phonemic awareness, phonological decoding ability, the accuracy of recognizing words in connected text, and reading comprehension. In their two-year follow-up, Ryder et al. demonstrate that the phonics intervention group significantly outperforming the whole language control group.

Summary to code-based and whole language reading approaches. Three meta-analyses conducted between 1989 and 1995 conclude that both approaches to reading are comparable in their impact on students' reading achievement, but whole reading instruction appears to be more effective in kindergarten. Two meta-analyses conducted in 2010 and 2016 indicate that phonemic and phonological awareness and phonics interventions are effective approaches for helping struggling readers develop decoding skills and that phonemic and phonological interventions lead to large follow-up effects up to one year later (Suggate 2010,

2016). Implications of Suggate's (2010, 2016) findings indicate the value of providing students effective phonemic and phonological instruction in the early years, that phonics instruction leads to moderate to large effect sizes following intervention and that regular progress monitoring of pre-reading and reading skills is essential to ensure students maintain levels of pre-reading and reading skills and that they continue to develop. Results from Suggate's (2010, 2016) meta-analyses also highlight the effect of providing comprehension skills for early readers and whole language comprehension instruction across the elementary years for all students, regardless of reading ability. This contrasts in degrees with Stahl and Miller (1989) and Stahl et al. (1994) who indicate that whole language instruction in kindergarten might better prepare students by "promot[ing] children's conceptual base for reading" (Stahl et al., 1994, p. 176), but does support their findings that code-based instruction can be more effective in grade 1. As students reach grade 1 the research suggests that a more structured approach focusing on code-based learning leads to improved reading achievement (Maddox & Fengh, 2013; Ryder et al., 2007; Stahl & Miller, 1989; Stahl et al., 1994; Suggate 2010, 2016), but this can also be contested (Gee, 1995). Apparent above is research supporting the blending of code-based instruction with whole language-based approaches in boosting the long-term reading achievement of students with reading difficulties (Ryder et al., 2007; Suggate, 2010, 2016). A blend of code-based and whole language approaches can loosely be understood as the tenet of balanced reading instruction (see Freppon & Dahl, 1998) and is reviewed next.

Balanced Reading Instruction

A small body of research explores the impact of balanced reading approaches on student reading outcomes (e.g. Bitter et al., 2009; Diamond & Ongwuebuzie, 2000; Donat, 2006; Guthrie et al., 2001). Large-scale studies by Bitter et al., Donat, and Guthrie et al. find that students in

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balanced reading classes make significant gains and overall, the need for supplemental reading intervention decreases. More specifically, students receiving balanced reading instruction have higher reading comprehension and word recognition scores and demonstrate greater reading readiness than students not provided a balanced reading approach (Bitter et al.; Donat; Guthrie et al.). In contrast, Diamond and Ongwuebuzie find that balanced reading is associated with significantly lower reading achievement and poorer attitudes toward reading.

Of the four studies reviewed, three involving approximately 5400 students provide evidence that a balanced reading approach cultivates a readiness to read; and improves basic word reading ability and overall reading achievement (Bitter et al., 2009; Donat, 2006; Guthrie et al., 2001). Providing support that balanced instruction improves reading comprehension is research from Bitter et al. (2009). They explore a hypothesis that aligning instructional approaches within a balanced literacy model will improve student reading outcomes. Their intensive case study conducted in 101 classrooms from 9 primarily high poverty school districts that grade 3, 4 and 5 students' reading found that comprehension scores were positively related to balanced instruction elements.⁷ Comparative research from Donat (2006) and Guthrie et al. (2001) provide robust experimental data supporting a balanced reading approach, notably in how it can effectively support struggling readers.

Donat (2006) evaluates the effectiveness of a balanced reading program implemented gradually into 12 schools to 4500 students. Overall findings indicate that reading readiness and word recognition achievement to be higher for students who receive balanced reading instruction. Comparisons between students in the balanced reading program to students in

⁷ For example, higher level meaning of text, writing instruction and the presence of accountable talk, higher-level questioning about the meaning of text.

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schools that had not implemented it yet and schools in various implementation stages suggest the effectiveness of a balanced reading approach for students who struggle to read. Descriptive analyses of posttest measurements reveal that 40% of the kindergarten students required supplemental services pre-implementation, but the percentage of students requiring these services decreased to 19% over the next three years. The first six schools that implemented the program demonstrated a statistically significantly lower need for supplemental services than the last six schools to begin their balanced reading program. Further, after only one year of implementation, supplemental services for all schools were considerably reduced.

Guthrie et al. (2001) find that classrooms with teachers providing more balanced reading instruction have higher achieving and engaged readers than students from classes with fewer opportunities for engaging in their reading interests. Results from a sample size of 576 grade 4 students lead Guthrie et al. (2001) with confidence to generalize their findings statewide. By controlling for mothers' levels of education, student gender, and amount of engaged reading (three variables that correlate significantly with achievement) and using between-group variables of balanced reading instruction and time spent reading, the researchers conclude that balanced reading instruction has a significant effect on student reading achievement.

Contrary to Bitter et al. (2009), Donat, (2005), and Guthrie et al. (2001), Diamond and Ongwuebuze (2000) exploring the effect of a newly implemented balanced reading program on 2127 students enrolled in four k-3 schools and two 4th and 5th grade schools in the state of Georgia is not as supportive of the balanced reading approach. Diamond and Ongwuebuze (2000) find that balanced reading is associated with lower reading achievement and less favourable attitudes toward reading. They find that overall, students in grade 1 demonstrate the greatest reading achievement and that reading achievement generally decreases from grade 2 to

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grade 5 with a slight bump in achievement in grade 4 before dipping again in grade 5.

Researchers caution that because this was a recent implementation, longer-term findings might be different.

What is lacking in this balanced reading research are comparisons with other approaches to early reading, as was done by the code-based and whole language research presented earlier in the review (Gee, 1995; Stahl & Miller, 1989, Stahl et al., 1994; Suggate, 2010, 2016). However, balanced reading instruction can be considered an approach to early reading that borrows from code-based and whole reading. Additionally, the literature review presented above indicates that balanced reading has a positive impact on many early reading students' achievement, particularly for students struggling to read. A balanced approach decreases the need for supplemental services for struggling students in one state, increases reading outcomes for all ranges of achieving students but conversely can be considered a strong reason for decreased test scores and enjoyment of reading for students in a school district from another state (Bitter et al., 2009; Diamond & Onguewubuzie, 2000; Donat, 2006). This review of the literature demonstrates that balanced approaches to reading contribute positively to the early reading outcomes of some students (see Bitter et al., 2009; Donat, 2006; Guthrie et al., 2001) but negatively influence others (Diamond & Ongwuebuzie, 2000).

Discussion

Further, as in the case of Maddox and Feng, students are assessed on limited elements of reading (spelling and reading fluency) and involve only one classroom, yet results of statistical significance ascribe a sense of generalizability and transferability. In terms of findings from the balanced reading research, these designs comprise quantitative analyses where the researchers admit their research designs omit certain elements inherent in teaching reading and student

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learning (Bitter et al., 2009; Diamond & Onwuegbuzie, 2000; Donat, 2006; Guthrie et al., 2001). Examples include: the differential selection of teachers (see Diamond & Onwuegbuzie) where increased numbers of teachers in experimental studies increase the likelihood of partial implementation of instructional innovations; Donat finds that a comparison group of teachers noticing the effects of a balanced reading program sought ways to learn about it, implement it and in doing so weakened experimental-control comparisons; and Guthrie et al. and Bitter et al. acknowledge that their data collection methods limit their understanding of the complexities involved in instruction and student learning with Bitter et al. admitting their observation of classroom instruction considers only a small portion of what might be happening in reading and Guthrie et al. conceding their survey could not represent a clear picture of classroom practices and reading activities. This critique of these researchers' designs is not an attempt to devalue their findings but is an attempt to identify and address a gap in early reading research: the need for emergent research designs concentrating on drawing out more holistic interpretations.

Whether teachers employ code-based, whole language or balanced approaches to reading instruction, teachers must have the skills and knowledge to provide instruction that suits their students' particular reading needs. The next section presents the state of preservice teachers', their instructors', and inservice teachers' foundational early reading knowledge.

Teacher Knowledge

In broad terms, teacher change refers to increases in teacher knowledge in an area that alters and improves professional practices and increases their students' achievement (Guskey, 2002; Timperley et al., 2007). Before moving towards the state of early reading professional learning research, the ensuing section of the literature review explores how teachers' assumptions influence their perceptions of struggling readers, what level of early reading

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knowledge teachers possess at preservice and inservice stages, and the role of experience and qualifications on teacher knowledge. Considering teachers' beliefs and teachers' overall knowledge in early reading is important as widespread teacher change is less likely if teachers do not know how their knowledge and assumptions influence their instruction (Borko & Putnam, 1995; Guskey, 1988, 2002).

Teacher Knowledge about Early Reading Instruction: Preservice Level

Perceptions of responsibility for struggling early readers. Though limited in quantity, it is important to present the extant research on the explicit and implicit perceptions evident within preservice programs towards the role of teachers in supporting students struggling with early reading. This is especially important as multi-tiered learner-centred models such as response to intervention are becoming more popular across Canada with expectations for classroom teachers to provide research-supported reading instruction and assessment differentiated to effectively meet the needs of all their students before specialized assistance outside of their classroom is offered (Government of Alberta, 2019; McIntosh et al., 2011).

One aspect of Joshi et al.'s (2009) research reports the perceptions 40 university instructors of early reading hold towards the factors they believe contribute to students' early reading difficulties. Not one of the instructors in their survey attributes the difficulties that struggling readers face to the quality of classroom instruction; instead, they cite the three most common factors: socioeconomic status, family background, and English as a second language background. Scharlach's (2008) research demonstrates that preservice teachers hold similar attitudes. In her four-month qualitative multiple case study exploring attitudes of preservice teachers, Scharlach's analysis uncovers the following themes regarding motivation, responsibility and self-efficacy to improve reading achievement for struggling readers: (a)

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reading is a developmental process aided by exposure to print; (b) in all probability students, who continue to struggle with reading have a biological disability; (c) parents need to be more involved; (d) at school, it is mainly the responsibility of the resource teacher to improve reading outcomes for struggling students. Findings from Joshi et al. and Scharlach are important to consider because if prevailing perceptions of university instructors (implicitly in the case of Joshi et al.) and preservice teachers (explicitly in the case of Scharlach) do not focus more upon the teachers' role in assisting struggling early readers, where will the impetus for developing one's knowledge to help these students take root? Thus if perceptions of responsibility are low, the knowledge that teachers will need to help struggling students may be lacking; findings which the following literature espouses.

Knowledge about early reading essentials. Joshi et al. (2009) and Washburn et al. (2011) suggest that many university preservice education programs do not align with current reading research. For instance, Joshi et al. find that many instructors lack understanding of core early reading principles and Washburn et al. show that university preservice education classes are not facilitating the core early reading skills their preservice teachers will require for providing effective early reading instruction. Their research indicates that many instructors, preservice teachers and inservice teachers perceive they know more than they do about early reading and that this likely contributes to the large number of students struggling to learn to read.

Washburn et al.'s (2011) research also highlights areas where preservice teachers lack knowledge. Ninety-one preservice teachers surveyed on their code-based knowledge and on their perceived ability to teach typical and struggling readers resulted in quite low scores.⁸ On one

⁸Code-based knowledge assessed included phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle/phonics, and morphology (Washburn et al., 2011).

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knowledge test, the mean score on a phonics measure was 45%, with few participants having explicit knowledge of terminology associated with phonics instruction and knowledge of phonics principles for teaching decoding. Further, results from comparisons of perceived knowledge to demonstrated knowledge and skill reveal that in every component except for phonics instruction, preservice teachers believe their knowledge in these areas is higher than it is. Results from research that moves out of the preservice stage and into the state of inservice teachers indicate that this trend continues.

Teacher Knowledge about Early Reading Instruction: Inservice Level

Three studies illustrate discrepancies existing in teacher knowledge at the inservice level, both in absolute terms and relative to preservice. Spear-Swerling et al. (2005), Mather et al. (2001), and Cunningham et al. (2004) all find that teachers tend to be overconfident of their early reading knowledge in comparison to actual measures about the skills that early reading research espouses.

In their comparison of 131 experienced and 293 preservice teachers, Mather et al. (2001) report that inservice teachers are more confident in their code-based instruction than preservice teachers. However, on measures of reading knowledge essential for teaching struggling readers, both groups of teachers demonstrate relatively low knowledge. Similarly, a few years later, Cunningham et al. (2004) reveal the imbalance between teachers' perceptions of foundational elements in early reading instruction and their actual knowledge. Measuring 722 kindergarten to grade 3 teachers' knowledge of children's literature and code-based early reading skills and comparing their knowledge to early reading measures of self-perception results indicate that 90% of teachers are unfamiliar with many popular children's books and that 72% could not answer more than half of the knowledge items correctly. Cunningham et al. find that teachers' self-

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perceptions of knowledge are overinflated with categorized high-perceivers scoring significantly lower on code-based tasks than the low-perceivers suggesting that even though many teachers believe they are prepared to aid struggling readers, for many this is likely not the case. One question not explored in Cunningham et al.'s work is how qualification and experience correlate with inservice teachers' perceived knowledge and measured knowledge about early reading.

Spear-Swerling et al.'s (2005) research indicates that teaching experience and level of qualification impact inservice teachers' depth of reading knowledge. After sorting 132 teachers into a high, medium or low group classified by varying qualifications, experience and training, they find that the high-background group consistently demonstrates higher scores on a perceived and actual knowledge test. In contrast, the low-background group score significantly lower than the other two groups. However, comparable to Mather et al. (2001) and Cunningham et al. (2004), the qualified and more experienced teachers, while outperforming less qualified and experienced teachers, score relatively low on questions on code-based early reading. This research on teacher knowledge is crucial because it highlights that many teachers, regardless of qualification and experience, require inservice code-based early reading professional learning. For the most part, this is where early reading professional learning programs focus.

Professional Learning Research

The literature on teacher change and its relation to professional learning has been a topic of discussion in educational research for three decades. Professional learning practices have evolved from one-off out of school conference-style workshops to include more school-based, situative, continuous and reflective professional learning communities (Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 1986; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Vescio et al., 2008; Webster-Wright, 2009). Producing long-lasting changes in teachers' practice is challenging due to the diverse experiences, attitudes,

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and knowledge that individuals bring to their profession (Timperley et al., 2007). Prominent professional learning researcher Guskey found that systematic efforts are essential to change beliefs, attitudes and classroom practices (Guskey, 1988; 2002). Timperley et al.'s (2007) findings emerging from their best evidence synthesis section on teacher professional learning and development in literacy instruction indicate that though many teachers are committed to learning new theory and applying instructional practices, many continue to rely on method and theory not in alignment with research-supported evidence. Opfer and Pedder (2011), reviewing the general state of teacher learning and change through a complexivist lens, uncover contextually focused reasons for successful and unsuccessful professional learning: demonstrating how the elements of three systems they identified (the teacher, the school and the learning activities) interact and combine in different ways and with varying intensities to influence teacher learning. Though they illustrate the strengths in seeking to explain causality within the broader context of the school, most early reading professional learning literature encompasses linear cause and effect relations. The remainder of this section provides a review of the literature on quasi-experimental and comparative professional learning approaches and programs that provide teachers with instruction to develop their early reading knowledge at the pre and inservice levels.

Early Reading Professional Learning: Preservice Level

The literature discussing the role of professional learning for influencing the quality of instruction that early reading preservice teachers receive is minimal. However, one long-term study provides a perspective on how professional learning can improve instructors' and preservice teachers' early reading knowledge. Binks-Cantrell et al. (2012) studied the impact of long-term (three years) professional learning promoting empirically-based reading research on instructors' and their preservice teachers' knowledge of skills needed for effectively teaching

struggling students. Results from their survey measuring understanding of basic language constructs⁹ demonstrate a significant difference between the experimental group (48 professors) and their preservice teachers) and the control group (66 instructors and their preservice teachers). The comparative analysis indicates that preservice teachers with professors in the experimental group scored significantly higher than their peers in all areas except one.¹⁰ This research is relevant because it indicates that change can happen at a preservice level when professional learning sustains for a lengthy period and focuses on areas that the research indicates teachers need development in, such as learning about early reading instruction.

Early Reading Professional Learning: Inservice Level

Several studies explore the impact of professional learning approaches on teacher knowledge of early reading concepts and the effect of new learning on their students' early reading achievement. These studies demonstrate the importance of learning core early reading skills in expertly guided professional learning collaboratively and with mentors. The combination of learning core skills, expert leadership and collaborative learning effectively supports teachers' early reading knowledge, perceptions of their practice and improves student reading achievement (Brady et al., 2009; Carlisle et al., 2011; McCutchen et al., 2002; Podhajski et al., 2009).

Sustained professional learning coordinated by literacy experts, mentors, and research teams contribute to increases in teachers' knowledge and self-perceptions as reading teachers (Brady et al., 2009; Carlisle et al., 2011, McCutchen et al., 2002; Podhajski et al., 2009). Brady et al. 's (2009) demonstrated that teachers with mentors who provide feedback, model strategies

⁹ Measures of phonology, phonics, and morphology.

¹⁰ Preservice teachers did not differ significantly in a measure of phonological ability items.

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and offer ongoing support correlate significantly with teachers' growth in early reading knowledge over the year, especially for teachers who initially scored low on pretest measures. Further, McCutchen et al. (2002) compare the reading knowledge of an experimental group of 23 teachers receiving two weeks of intensive training at the beginning of the school year along with visits throughout the year, to a control group of 20 teachers. McCutchen et al. find that with this sustained professional learning deepens teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness, teachers can use that knowledge to change their classroom practice and that changes in teacher knowledge and classroom practice can improve student learning. These findings are confirmed in a small study by Podhajski et al. (2009), focusing on first and second-grade teachers ($N = 4$) where coursework on explicit code-based early reading instruction had a significant impact on teacher knowledge and student outcomes. Teachers' engagement in their learning and teaching appears to increase when pairing early-reading professional learning with a sustained relationship with a reading expert. For example, though Carlisle et al. (2011) relate how all 111 teachers in their research developed their understanding and self-efficacy in teaching early reading, one-third of participants with literacy coaches rated their professional learning more useful and engaging than the two groups without one.

The four studies above demonstrate the instrumental role of mentors in helping teachers develop their reading instruction. The value of learning with peers across time, in conjunction with sustained professional learning, also appears as an essential ingredient for improving teachers' perceptions towards their learning and their knowledge of the early reading process (Gersten et al. 2010). Gersten et al. (2010) focus on reading comprehension and vocabulary instruction exploring the differences between 39 teachers in an experimental study group to 42 teachers in a control group. The control and experimental group took part in the same reading

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initiative and have similar professional learning, but the experimental group also receive sixteen 75-minute small group interactions held twice a month during the school year. Teacher knowledge, classroom practices and student reading achievement were measured. Findings reveal that the experimental group scored higher on comprehension and vocabulary knowledge measures relative to the control group with the effect on vocabulary instruction being statistically significant ($d = .73$). Appraisals from the experimental group on their professional learning show that 97% of these participants perceive that their professional learning was much more useful than their previous professional learning experiences.

Discussion

The findings outlined in this section of the review unpacks literature on teacher (preservice and inservice) knowledge, learning and change. This research indicates (implicitly and explicitly) that there exists a strong need for professional learning that can create long-lasting changes to teachers' early reading knowledge that improves their instruction and subsequently help students who are struggling to read. Many teachers at the preservice level demonstrate a lack of code-based knowledge of early reading principles (Joshi et al., 2009; Washburn et al., 2011). Research on inservice teachers' knowledge indicates that though teacher qualification and experience correlates with increases in student early reading achievement (see Spear-Swerling et al., 2005) many early reading teachers do not possess a vast wealth of early reading knowledge (Cunningham et al., 2004; Mather et al., 2001; Spear-Swerling et al., 2005). However designing learning opportunities for instructors in preservice education programs and inservice teachers can develop their early reading knowledge and subsequently improve early reading outcomes for primary grade students (Brady et al., 2009; Carlisle et al., 2011; Gersten et al., 2010; McCutchen et al., 2002; Podhajski et al., 2009).

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There are several gaps and limits in the early reading teacher knowledge and learning literature. The majority of the research in the field of early reading (instructional approaches, teacher knowledge, and teacher change), is quantitative and focuses on documenting the lack of code-based knowledge teachers have and on preordained structures and designs of professional learning and reading interventions. This research communicates the impact of quasi- and experimental research, yet understanding what teachers are realistically undertaking in their professional learning and the opportunities presented to them is underexplored. The majority of these research designs synthesized in the review of the studies above omit deep considerations of the complex variables interacting in school systems and, therefore, silence how contextual factors influence teachers' early reading professional learning and teachers' knowledge and classroom instruction. This current study explores teachers' professional learning through a complexivist lens to seek a more holistic interpretation and understanding of context.

Complexity Theory as a Conceptual Framework

Complexity thinking might be positioned somewhere between a belief in a fixed and fully knowable universe and a fear the meaning and reality are so dynamic that attempts to explicate are little more than self-delusions. In fact, complexity thinking commits to neither of these extremes, but listens to both. (Davis & Sumara, 2008, p. 35)

Self-Organization and Emergence, Nestedness, Complexity Reduction

Although this section separates and describes complexity theory through these terms below, self-organization, emergence, nestedness and complexity reduction are theoretically and practically interacting components. Morrison (2008) outlines that a central way to consider complex systems is their characteristics of self-organization in which changes in systems emerge from within and outwards and in reactions to the varying strengths of tensions across other

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systems (termed autocatalysis). For Morrison, the central features of self-organizing systems are their adaptability, openness, ability to learn from and react to feedback through inward and outward communication, the ongoing emergence through change and interaction in disequilibrium and the infinite connectedness that varies to proximity, and their concern and relatability with and to other systems. In this way, education is a system comprised of and nested within and across all social systems.

This research applies three main elements of complexity theory for considering the interactions at play in the educational system: (1a) self-organization and (1b) emergence, which Morrison (2008) considers partners to each other. For a system to self-organize infers that change is happening, and the change that happens is the newly emergent system. Emergence then creates a force through the momentums that have changed it and this change (or emergence) moves in different directions that informs and influences itself and other systems that are intimately connected to it; and those systems to other systems in varying degrees and in continuum. This relates to another feature of complexity theory, the notion of nestedness; (2) the section on nestedness illuminates the importance of understanding the place of early reading within varying systems, which connects to the system that early reading teachers, their students, the school and the board are in. Bringing to the surface here the nature of nestedness ensures that a consideration of relationships between systems are implicated in the search to unpack the influence of context upon varying systems that are interconnected but also likely have differing self-interests interacting within and upon each other; (3) understanding complexity reduction is central to guiding this research project to illuminate how contextual variables interact and influence teachers' learning. Research with complexity reduction explicitly in the forefront helps bring back purposes of education and balance what is, with what could be by ensuring context is

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opened up, considered and valued so that self-organization and emergence reflect a need being met rather than a reaction to presumed norms in which teachers and students work, live, and learn.

Self-organization and emergence. According to Morrison (2008), self-organization is a central pillar of complexity theory and that “local circumstances dictate the nature of the emerging self-organization” (p. 20). Each system possesses its uniqueness and identity, and these characteristics enable systems to renew and perpetuate. A principle of self-organization is that for emergence to be possible systems require a transcendental quality that naturally belies the ability to change and influence change (Morrison, 2008; Koopmans, 2017). Each system that is a part of another system has a homeostatic intent and systems nested within other systems where non-linearity prevails challenges conclusions of specific cause and effect. Koopmans (2017) suggests shifting the aims of research from a static quest for momentary results at a specific time to a descriptive process of research and analysis seeking to understand the process of transformation through how systems process their self-organization. Nestedness is discussed below, though it is important to point out here that within systems there are many other related systems. In my research, I am looking at teachers who are nested in their classrooms, nested in their schools, and nested in a school board that is nested in a province. Along with these blunt categorizations, there are many other systems that individuals and groups are nested within.

An aim of this research is to understand how professional learning is perceived to be influencing early reading instruction for teachers in three different schools that comprise students coming from distinctly different communities and therefore having different background knowledge and experience. Each class, school, and the board itself are different but connected systems. Therefore these varying open systems who possess unique characteristics are also

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involved in similar professional learning opportunities that will vary in how well they meet their students' early reading needs. From this the emergence of knowledge and practice of reading is going to be perceived in varying ways with varying degrees of effective practices emerging. Morrison (2008) describes the adapting and renewing natures of systems are what preserves systems over time. However, by considering how differently situated systems (e.g., different schools in a board) emerge and self-organize based on the availability and accessibility of early reading professional learning, it is likely that the status quo will have some schools trending in a positive direction. However, for others the opportunities are restricting opportunities to develop in areas of need.

Research that considers the self-organization of contextually different systems (e.g., pairs of teachers in demographically different schools) can illuminate how learning and practice are perceived to have emerged from past experiences. Then, research can bring the local perspectives together so that larger systems can reflect the needs of systems that are similar (grades, subjects) but also inherently different (because of context and influence of demographics). Opening up systems to better understand the role of context on self-organization and emergence allows (or at least eases towards) more effective learning experiences for teachers and students to emerge (Davis et al., 2012).

Nestedness. Bridging complexity theory with critical realism, Cochran-Smith et al. (2014) acknowledge the strength in using complexity theory for contributing to “a unique platform for teacher education research, which has theoretical consistency, methodological integrity, and practical significance” (p. 2). Rather than using a traditional linear, cause and effect investigation, Cochran-Smith et al. (2014) recognize complexity theory's versatility for holistically exploring and interpreting the varying effects of the complex interactions within

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systems, nested within systems. The notion of nestedness denotes that entities exist in systems, yet also give rise to systems (Davis & Simmt, 2006; Davis & Sumara, 2008, 2012). For example, one group of teachers' professional learning needs are given priority over others and from this certain practices are improved while others are neglected with these actions influencing the development of different aspects of students' learning and teacher change.

Davis and Simmt (2006) offer a theoretical discussion of complexity science as a framework for interpreting teachers' mathematics professional learning. They present the notion of four interacting aspects of their learning system and how it opens up new possibilities for considering new learning experiences for preservice teachers. Labelling four aspects (mathematical objects, curriculum structures, classroom collectivity, and subjective understanding), they consider how each aspect is nested in one another. In a similar notion, my research is framed to conceptualize the contextual variables that relate to teacher early reading learning by considering how nestedness enables and constrains their learning opportunities (in their school, in their board, in relation to responsibilities that are parts of their other systems). Davis and Simmt relate the notion of nestedness and the boundaries between nested systems:

complex forms are often nested, with many intermediate layers of organization, any of which might be properly identified as complex and all of which influence (both enabling and constraining) one another. Complexity science prompts attentions toward several dynamic, co-implicated, and integrated levels – including the neurological, the experiential, the contextual/material, the social, the symbolic, the cultural, and the ecological – rather than isolated phenomena. (p. 296).

Though Davis and Simmt are relating how the nested and interconnected nature of inservice teaching and learning relate to learning about mathematics concepts and instructional practice, it

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illuminates the need to be considerate of the different levels of nestedness of social learning systems within one domain of curricular knowledge.

In my research I am interested in the perceptions of experiences of teachers who teach early-reading (and also teach a number of other subjects) and are nested in classrooms with their particularities, and schools with their particularities, and boards with their particularities but also are nested in their social systems (e.g., families and other communities that have their different particularities). I am interested in unpacking how these interacting systems influence instruction and how the system that these teachers work and live in might be better considered so that the learning needs of their students who are nested in their own particularities can be more empathetically met. Therefore, a focus on nested systems is an element of complexity theory made explicit here and is at the forefront of my complexivist conceptual framework and research.

Cochran-Smith et al. (2014) discussing social learning systems such as teacher education emphasizes the importance of ensuring that social systems should not be considered hierarchically; that social systems are parts of sets of social systems that are nested within and amongst each other and therefore have to be considered holistically rather than individually or as top-down in order of presumed importance. It could be considered that the current system is hierarchical and has existed in educational research and policy for too long (see Gough, 2012) and that a complexivist led educational research approach re-conceptualizes and attempts to balance the hierarchical experiences that many in the system confront. Power imbalance and traditional structures are discussed next in terms of complexity reduction.

Complexity reduction. Some aspects of interactions within systems are considered impediments or controlling agents over possibilities for what could be argued as more natural

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emergences (Fenwick, 2012; Hetherington, 2013). This unnatural process is considered complexity reduction and is an unavoidable aspect of social semiotic systems where the push and pull (or exchanges) that happen occur between levels in the realm of meaning making (Biesta, 2010; Hetherington, 2013). Complexity reduction refers to actions from elements within systems that impact how emergence is directed (Hetherington, 2013). By limiting options for actions between elements in a system or through measures used to control language within a system emerging possibilities are restricted (Hetherington, 2013). Aspects of school systems such as “timetables, curricula, classroom organization and layout, and school hierarchies may all contribute to the reduction of the potential complexity of schooling, or mitigate against the conditions for emergence in various ways” (Hetherington, 2013, p. 74).

Considering the nature and issues of and resulting from complexity reduction, a complexity theory approach can work towards uncovering half (or at least partial) understandings (Davis & Sumara, 2012). Making explicit the availability of options that teachers have in their professional learning provides a way to show that what might be assumed to work for the whole, is in fact, only effective for a few (Biesta, 2010). This is a central reason for utilizing the notion of complexity theory in educational research and ensures that the perspectives of those responsible for ensuring students are having their needs met in contextually considerate ways. Theoretically and practically, this provides a path for educational research to open up some of the current limitations teachers appear to be facing in relation to their learning opportunities and how this, in turn, influences their instruction and the accessibility to the learning environment that their students need (Biesta, 2010). Over time, placement in systems, such as schools that are nested in systems that are limited by provincial oversight bodies, a certain kind of learning opportunity for everyone that is part of the school system is shaped and

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over time considered or assumed to be the norm. In this environment, a certain type of top-down normalcy is assumed and what is reducing equitable opportunities for students and teachers is less visible and is not normal:

Rather than to think of such regularities as naturally occurring phenomena, they are actually in the most literal sense social constructions. To say that these are social constructions is neither to say they are good nor they are bad. While in some places complexity reduction can be beneficial, in other cases it can be restraining. But since any attempt to reduce the number of available options for action for the 'elements' within a system is about the exertion of power, complexity reduction should therefore be understood as a political act. (Biesta, 2010, p. 498)

Biesta continues along these lines as he questions the purpose of evidence-based educational practices. Before limiting the nature of teaching and learning by using prescribed practices – or in this research's goals, teachers' learning opportunities which in turn affects their students' learning – the educationally-connected body/ies (teachers, students, administrators, parents, governments, researchers) need/s to when considering the teleological character of education make their/our first question to be questions of purpose. What is the purpose of doing what we are doing, and how is this equitable for our learners, or how is it not?

Therefore in my case, where an attempt to understand why too many students are continuing to fail to learn how to read proficiently, considering what realm of factors reduces complexity reduction provides balanced considerations of these tensions and possibilities. The role of context and how limitations that teachers face depending on the degree that theirs and their students' contextual uniquenesses are not being considered through the professional learning opportunities that are available (or are not) is opened up by showing how teachers who

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are trying to meet the needs of students in urban or rural lower socioeconomic communities than say a suburban middle-class community likely exhibit quite contrasting but also comparable needs.

Discussion: Complexity Theory and Educational Research

This doctoral research study is conceptualized through a complexity theory lens. Complexity thinking underpins the literature review, the research questions and the methodology. Epistemologically, complexity theory positions research and researcher as embracive and inclusive of the uniqueness that emerges in the collected perspectives of those most directly influenced within a particular context and topic. As a metatheory, complexity theory represents a paradigm shift in how to consider and conceptualize systems more holistically; and a way forward in researching “discontinuities, ruptures and emergence instead of relying on commonalities and the central tendency in groups” (Koopmans, 2014, p. 26). Complex systems can be understood as self-organized, composed of dynamic elements transmitting and receiving varying strengths of interactions working together and in opposition, from which new forms of action or information emerge as unique to that specific system (Morrison, 2008). Focused on the interactions between the components comprising the system, complexity theory is well situated to be used as a dynamic form for conceptualizing and developing a multifaceted knowledge about the elements connected to the context of professional learning and early reading instruction (Cochran-Smith et al., 2014). Systems, as considered through the lens of complexity theory are self-organizing bottom-up processes (Mason, 2008; Morrison, 2008). Citing the unpredictable nature of systems, a process of exploring systems from a bottom-up perspective reveals more profound ways for representing the relatedness of interactions and emergence (Osberg et al., 2008).

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Complexity theorists acknowledge the dynamic role context plays in uniquely shaping each system (see Byrne, 2001; Davis & Sumara, 2012; Haggis, 2008; Kuhn, 2008). Within this project's complexity theory lens, context is considered as a combination of initial conditions, with history through time acting on and in current particular conditions. This tension gives rise to ever-adapting systems shaped in their "specific history of emergent and ongoing conditions" (Haggis, 2009, p.54). Complexity theorists accept that all systems are unique, connected and ever-changing (Osberg et al., 2008). Particular configurations of the present system are also connected with other systems, influenced and influencing, so that the effects that emerge, though connected with other systems, are also always importantly unique (Haggis, 2009). Considering systems as emergent entities sheds light on how emergent needs within systems are reflected by understanding a system's proximity to varying contextual environments.

In relation to a school system, this speaks to how children are linked to families, teachers, peers, society (local and at-large) and groups with varying strengths of interactions on and amongst all agents and elements (Morrison, 2008). Looking at this in another, but still connected level, teachers are linked to other teachers, support agencies, policy-making bodies, funding bodies, and governing bodies (Cohen et al., 2011). Considering that each individual that is connected to this system and is also connected with many other elements that are parts of other systems it is reasonable to expect to find unique aspects in different schools guided in large part by particular, local contexts (Osberg et al., 2008).

A strength in using complexity theory is how it embraces the dynamic and emergent natures of and in systems, including teachers as co-learners and co-constructors of knowledge (Morrison, 2008). An inherent responsibility that most elementary teachers have is providing instruction across a spectrum of topics. It is understood that teachers will vary in their

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experiences, skills and knowledge compared with colleagues (Gardner, 2006). To consider, in one school, teachers will differ in years of experience, styles and approaches to teaching, and in many other ways that explicitly and implicitly shape and influence theirs and, in some aspects, their colleagues' instruction. School principals will have varying interpretations of what is most instructionally important for their teachers to focus on, which professional learning experiences are necessary, or how school personnel can be best utilized. This conjecture on the complex natures that co-exist within a system very likely captures a fraction of the complexities comprising a school system. Even in just one school, interpretation of what professional learning means, how it should be used, or the type of instructional approaches suited for different elements of early-reading instruction is likely to have elements that are understood similarly and differently across and between every educator (Guskey, 2002).

Moving forward. A complexity theory mindset implies positioning one's self from an epistemological standpoint in which knowledge is transactional, unfixed and "(becoming educated) is no longer about understanding a finished universe, or even about participating in a finished and stable universe. It is the result, rather, of participating in the creation of an unfinished universe" (Osberg et al., 2008, p. 215). A research design that deeply interprets the processes of interactions appearing to underpin early reading teachers' professional learning can clarify aspects of uniqueness (similarity and difference). Understanding how context is at play and related to specific groups of teachers in multiple schools in the same board offers a way to consider the richness of the features emerging out of different self-organizing systems. How does physical distance from the central school board office and teaching a student population whose first language is not the first language of instruction influence teachers' perspectives towards their learning experiences and opportunities? How does teaching in an urban core influence

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students' and teachers' early reading needs? How does the environment appear to influence learning needs when you are not isolated or urban? What kinds of patterns in perspectives are there across schools, and how can professional learning address similarity and difference?

Approaching these kinds of questions from a complexity theory lens opens up the nature of self-organization of systems nested in systems, represents visible and seemingly invisible forms of complexity reduction and how learning and practice are influenced, and provides a textured snapshot of the emergent and emerging interactions between variables influencing the teaching and learning process. Challenges about a complexity theory-informed research are raised by Cochran-Smith et al. (2014) because this kind of research is descriptive and rejects causal implications; they suggest that complexity theory can be used as the framework for qualitative educational research that can help to empirically trace the learning processes teachers interact within and use this information to enhance the learning of teachers and all students. In the next chapter, I describe the methodological underpinnings of my research.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Schools have unique attributes, the result of daily interactions amongst staff and students, with each person having a different role in the collective system constituting the school. Investigating how teachers perceive their learning opportunities, how complex elements within their schools impact the types of learning experiences they have, and whether and how these influence their reading instruction fits well with a complexity theory qualitative case study approach (Cohen et al., 2011; Hetherington, 2013). A more inclusive portrayal of the state of early reading instruction and teacher learning is generated from framing research in this fashion and from this a new stance for viewing teachers' professional learning. This qualitative complexity theory framework for portraying the non-linear and dynamic perceptions teachers have of their professional learning experiences and how this influences their early reading instruction embraces the complex natures inherent in schools and school boards. Informed through the body of literature on the approaches to early reading, teacher knowledge and change, and early reading professional learning and guided in a complexity theory conceptual framework, two overarching research questions guide my research. I present these in the next section. I follow this up with a description of the details of the emergent qualitative research design I employ to answer the research questions.

Research Questions

To open up the exploration into the complexities of early reading instruction and learning, two broad research questions guide my qualitative research study:

1. How do contextual variables at the school, board, and provincial level influence the planning, delivery and uptake of early reading professional learning opportunities?

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2. How do teachers perceive the relationships between (a) their professional learning experiences, (b) their classroom early reading practices, and (c) student reading outcomes?

Qualitative Research Methodology

An epistemological assumption inherent in qualitative research is its emerging approach to inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Creswell (2007) remarks how collecting data in a natural setting is sensitive to the local context, and that data analysis that works towards establishing patterns and themes is best suited to reflect the voices of participants by providing a complex description and interpretation of the phenomenon under study. The roles of educators in schools across North America are generally the same (e.g., principals, teachers, students), yet individual schools are going to differ in many aspects because of the demographics of their particular environment. Therefore each school will retain its uniqueness. Focused on how people construct meaning from their experiences, qualitative research seeks deep, rich meaning from interpreting people's experiences in their specific, natural settings (Merriam, 2009).

The choice of a qualitative case study research design is due to its capacity to open up depth to a topic at localized levels for drawing out meaningful abstractions across multiple settings (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2019). In my research, I seek to understand the complexity of the variables interacting upon and within teachers' professional learning, early reading practices and students' reading achievement. The purpose of my research is not to evaluate what specific professional learning improves practice and increases student reading achievement. Rather, my research design contributes to reading research and teacher learning by conceptualizing how context influences learning opportunities and teaching practice. Through my qualitative research

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design, I seek to understand how contextually conceptualizing teachers' early reading professional learning can lead to real change and reductions of reading failure.

Case Study Design

The research design follows an instrumental multiple case study structure. Stake (1995) differentiates between intrinsic and instrumental cases. Intrinsic case studies have a particular case as an object of interest. Instrumental case study refers to a way where seeking to understand a particular phenomenon is above and beyond the case itself (Grandy, 2010; Stake, 1995). My research intends to understand how teachers' early reading professional learning is perceived to influence their instruction and their students' reading outcomes. Underlying this phenomenon is an interest in understanding how variables are interacting to influence teacher learning and practice. The design is characterized as multiple because I seek to understand the phenomenon beyond one bounded case (Chmiliar, 2010). This multiple instrumental case study extends the depth of understanding of the phenomenon of teachers' professional learning through exploring early reading teachers within multiple schools and works to draw out the uniquenesses and abstractions from three different schools across the same school board.

This instrumental qualitative case study design comprises two teachers nested within three schools. It involves an exploration of interview data from teachers, school principals and school board early reading experts: All participants in the position to have a deep sense of the process of early reading or the nature of professional learning within their particular schools and across the school board. Teachers are the central participants in my study. They are necessary for gathering perspectives on how their learning experiences influence their reading instruction, what elements and interactions influence their professional learning (school, board and beyond) and if and how they perceive these experiences impact their early reading instruction. The

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perceptions of school principals provide insight into the context of their schools, and what kinds of interactions appear to be at play and how these factors contribute to teachers' perceptions of their early reading knowledge and practice. School leadership forcefully shapes the school learning environment, and having an awareness of the leadership levels within schools is, therefore, essential to elaborate upon (Sider et al., 2017). The board personnel's perceptions of how the school board provides opportunities for early reading professional learning adds depth and provides contextual information supplementing the data from the teachers and principals at their particular schools.

Participant Recruitment

Purposeful sampling underlies the selection of early reading teachers, principals, board reading experts and the case schools. The "logic of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation ... in contrast to the random sampling procedures that characterize quantitative research" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 69). Further, the choice for purposeful sampling is anchored in striving for participants' perspectives reflective of their diverse teaching contexts and the reflective influences these have upon their perceptions of professional learning and practice (see Emmel, 2013, on maximum variation).

Gaining access to the board and school participants required following multiple steps; broadly, school board and school willingness and university ethics approval. Approximately two months following ethics application submission, I received official university approval to formally contact the school board and prospective research participants (see Appendix A, B, and C to view the university and school board ethics approval). A doctoral colleague with ties to the school board formally introduced me to the Director of Education. I sent a letter to the Director

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of Education, cc'ing my colleague, introducing myself and my research intentions and needs. I asked for a sample of three schools differing in terms of geographic location, the linguistic context of the community, and socioeconomic status because purposeful sampling was a crucial part of my research design for unpacking contextual influences on teachers' learning. I also requested an interview with a board reading specialist for authentically understanding the perceptions of literacy and teacher learning within this level of the educational system. The Director of Education forwarded my request to the Director of Human Resources (DHR) who was the gatekeeper to conducting research in the board. The DHR responded that they would discuss my project with a group of principals to gauge their interest in participating. One week later, the DHR notified me that two schools were interested (Blending Elementary School and Outer Elementary School, one rural and one suburban). The principals were cc'd, followed up with, and research relationships were established (see Appendix D and E for the letters of recruitment letters that I shared with the principals and teachers).

With research permission granted, I also reached out to two early reading consultants who became participants SB1 and SB2 (see Appendix F for the school board recruitment letter). In the course of introductory emails, SB1 suggested that Central Elementary School was ideal for this research because of its particular urban demographic and its contrast to the two other participating schools. Formal introductions made to principals regarding the nature and needs of my research occurred first. The principals provided this information to their early reading teachers (see Appendix G, H and I for these consent forms). I received interest and agreement from two early reading teachers at each school.

SB3, the third school board participant, was added to my research after multiple participants suggested I interview her because of her depth of early reading knowledge and time

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spent working in the school board. Collectively, each participant in this study was provided ethics information, permission slips, reasons for the research, their particular role in the research, and guarantees of their rights as participants and assurance of confidentiality. Based on principles of purposeful sampling, and through the positive receptivity of those I contacted at the board, and school level, an important piece of the research design was in place.

Overview of Participants

An overview of the participants and their position within the board is presented in Table 2. The three school board participants are identified as SB1, SB2, and SB3. The six teachers and 3 principals are identified first by their school, second by their participant role, and third by their identifier as 1 or 2 for teachers. For example, the principal from Outer Elementary School is OP. The two teachers at OES are OT1 and OT2. Such identifiers maintain the awareness of the context participants speak from and shift attention from how randomly chosen pseudonyms might influence readers' initial perceptions and possible biases. Two of the three principal participants, all six teacher participants and the three board early reading participants are female. A scan of the elementary school websites from the case school board indicates that of the 213 kindergarten to grade 7 teachers, 85% are female. Specifically, 91% of grade 1 and 2 teachers are female, and in regards to principals, 64% are female. Data from the Government of Québec (2003) and Statistics Canada (2017) indicate that approximately 85% of elementary teachers are female. These descriptive statistics suggest that female participants' representation in this study aligns with female and male representations in the case school board and teachers, provincially and nationally.

Relevant contextual, demographic information about the nine participants from the three schools is in Table 2 (below), moving from board, then through schools. In-depth teacher

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profiles, voiced in the first-person, are in Appendixes J-O. These narratives provide a story of each teacher participant and offer the reader an intimate portrayal of their perceptions to and beyond this study's exploration. Below are truncated descriptions of each of the study's participants.

Table 2

Overview of Study Participants

Pseudonym	Position	Gender	Years in Current Role	Years of Teaching Experience	Years in Board	Additional Educational
Board Literacy Experts and Consultants						
SB1	Board Literacy Specialist	F	3	14	14	No
SB2	Low SES Schools Coordinator	F	1	13	25+	Reading Recovery
SB3	Literacy Consultant	F	8	30+	40	Reading Recovery
Blending Elementary School						
BT1	Gr 1 & 2 Teacher	F	10	20	15	No
BT2	Gr 1 Teacher	F	6	18	17	No
BP	Principal	F	3	5-6	22	Masters of Education
Outer Elementary School						
OT1	Gr 1 Teacher	F	4	5	4	3 Additional Qualifications (ESL, SPED, Early Reading)
OT2	Gr 2 Teacher	F	1	3	3	No
OP	Principal	F	6	15	+10	Unknown
Central Elementary School						
CT1	Gr. 2 Teacher	F	1	18	18	No

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Pseudonym	Position	Gender	Years in Current Role	Years of Teaching Experience	Years in Board	Additional Educational
CT2	Gr. 1 Teacher	F	6	11	11	No
CP	Principal	M	7	7	21	Masters of Education

School Board Participants

SB1. At the time of our interviews, SB1 a third year full-time board literacy specialist worked out of the school board office to support the English Language Arts for all schools in the school board. Prior to this position, she was a classroom (grades 2, 4 and 6) and resource (grades 3-6) teacher for eleven years, as well as a coordinator of the board's new teacher induction program.

SB2. SB2's 31-year career spans 13 years as a teacher and 18 as principal. At university, she specialized in early childhood education. At the time of our interview, she was coordinator in this board for a provincial grant that allots funds towards helping teachers working in rural, low socioeconomic schools such as OES. She has been with the board since the early 1990s. SB2 is a trained Reading Recovery teacher, with the bulk of her teaching in kindergarten and grade one, though she has taught every elementary grade.

SB3. SB3 graduated in the 1970s with a bachelor of education and reading specialist designation. At the time of our interview, she was in her 40th year with the board. Most of her teaching experiences are in grade 2, 3 and 4 classrooms, and as a resource teacher, she provided Reading Recovery to students up to grade 6. At the time of our interview, she was retired from teaching, and was working with the board as a special education consultant and working with

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SB1 to support teachers' implementation of two board-supported reading initiatives with most elementary schools across the board.

Blending Elementary School Participants

BT1: Teacher, Grade 1&2. Over her approximately 20-year teaching career, BT1 has taught pre-kindergarten to grade 4. Beginning her career in this case school board, she moved away to a neighbouring province to teach in a large city for several years before she and her family moved back. BT1 has had three children during her teaching career. Her teaching experiences consist of mostly grade 1 and 2, and her career goal is to work as a resource teacher.

BT2: Teacher, Grade 1. BT2 obtained her Bachelor of Education degree in the early 1990s. Following a short teaching contract and around the time of massive layoffs in her first school board in a neighbouring province, she decided to move to this board and school to teach a grade one-two class. BT2 taught kindergarten to grade six for just over ten years before going on an extended maternity leave from which she returned six years ago. She has taught in a 70% teaching capacity within the grade one language arts environment ever since.

BP: Principal. BP started with the board in 1995, teaching pre-kindergarten up to grade 3. Returning from maternity leave in the early 2000s, she took on a job comprising 80% teaching and 20% as administrator for four years before taking another maternity leave. Upon her return, she became a full-time principal at a middle and high school for eight years. At the time of our interview, BP had been the principal at BES for three years.

Outer Elementary School Participants

OT1: Teacher, Grade 1. Following her one-year teacher education program, OT1 moved to teach in a rural school in a western Canadian province where she taught for one year. After receiving news of the school's financial troubles and with no immediate prospects in that

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area, she returned home to an eastern Canadian city and completed three additional qualifications (ESL, Literacy and Special Education) before being hired at OES. At the time of our interview, OT1 was in her fourth year teaching at OES in the primary grades.

OT2: Teacher, Grade 2. OT2 began her career in the school board as a kindergarten teacher in a small rural school, spending the better part of two years there. At the time of our interview, OT2 was in her first year teaching grade 2 at OES.

OP: Principal. OP graduated from her bachelor of education program in the early 1990s. Her first teaching position was in her childhood elementary school, and having taught a decade and a half in primarily rural schools, she is currently in her sixth year as the principal of OES.

Central Elementary School Participants

CT1: Teacher, Grade 2. CT1 is in her eighteenth year as a teacher. She transferred from a grade 11 position in the rural school where she started her career to CES seventeen years ago, exclusively teaching grades 1-3. At the time of our interview, she was teaching grade 2. Across her teaching career, she has taken two maternity leaves.

CT2: Teacher, Grade 1. After completing a psychology degree, CT2 took a one year bachelor of education program and began teaching at CES in the mid-2000s. In her eleventh year at CES, she taught grades 2-6 in her first few years before being moved into a grade 1 classroom where she has taught the past six years.

CP: Principal. CP has been with the school board for 21 years: Fourteen years were spent teaching (7) and as a vice-principal (7) in the same high school. He has spent the past seven years as the principal of CES.

Data Collection: Interview Process

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The choice to conduct in-depth interviews for the method of data collection is because of the intimacy the structure provides participants for deeply sharing their perspectives on a particular phenomenon of interest. Interviewing says Stake (1995), “is the main road to multiple realities” (p. 64), able to access what cannot be observed. Connecting to social and educational issues is effectively approached through interviewing (Seidman, 2006). The interview’s value is in how it draws out interviewees’ perceptions: a synthesis of abstractions based on interviewees’ perceptions representing their interpretations of their educational and social experiences (Seidman, 2006). Though other forms of data collection provide a way to approach the experience under exploration, interviewing done well unpacks the meanings people construct from their experiences (Seidman, 2006). Teacher and principal interviews took place in the schools, usually in a resource or staff room, sometimes in a teacher’s classroom, once in the principal’s office, and once in my home office. Each interview with board-level participants occurred at the central board office. All teacher, principal and board interviews were completed within five months. The structures of the interview process with participants are explained below.

Teacher In-Depth Three-Series Interviews

The interview approach with teacher participants follows Seidman’s (2006, 2013, 2019) in-depth three-series design. This process comprises a stage-like approach to interviewing that works to access teachers’ lived experiences of early reading and early reading professional learning. Each of the three interviews ranges from 60 to 90 minutes.

Interview 1: Focused life history. Questions in the first interview focus on participants’ reconstruction of their past learning experiences up to their present. Reconstruction occurs through questions guided in a range of categories and connects to constructing a sense of

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participants' perspective on reading (learning and teaching) across their lives (Seidman, 2006). Questions relate to teachers' past lives and up to their most recent teaching and learning experiences. Delving into the past in the first interview provides a platform for understanding how teachers interact and react to their past learning experiences. Questions to nudge perspectives around reading and learning uncovered in the review of the literature (e.g. motivation towards struggling readers, preparation to teach reading, the influence of professional learning) illuminate how teachers perceive their experiences shape them and influence their professional learning opportunities (see samples of open-ended questions and probes used in Interview 1 in Appendix P).

Interview 2: The details of experience. The second interview opens up the “concrete details of the participants' lived experiences” (Seidman, 2013, p. 21) within early reading instruction and professional learning. The purpose of this interview is to have participants provide details rather than opinions on their teaching and learning experiences. In this interview, the compilation of a range of specific details informs the direction and focus for the third interview in this process (see Appendix Q for probes used in Interview 2).

Interview 3: Reflection on the meaning. The third and final interview has participants “reflect on the meaning of their experience ... [to address] the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life” (Seidman, 2013, p. 22). This interview is akin to a synthesis of the first two. It facilitates an experience with the participant to have the participants consider how different factors are interacting and influence their early reading teaching and professional learning: See Appendix R for the kinds of probes used in this interview.

Principals and Board-Level Participants: Semi-Structured Interviews

One hour focused semi-structured interviews with the three school principals, and board participants tease out how aspects of context appear to influence professional learning opportunities, early reading instruction and student achievement. The contextual data these participants provide contribute to illuminating the complexities interacting within the learning network at the board and in each school. Themes guiding interview probes for principals centre on their educational background, leadership characteristics, perspectives on school guidelines and expectations for professional learning, and reading instruction in general. The board participants responded to a list of questions regarding their knowledge of, experience with and perspectives on early reading instruction and professional learning (see Appendix S and T for the respective interview forums).

Data Analysis

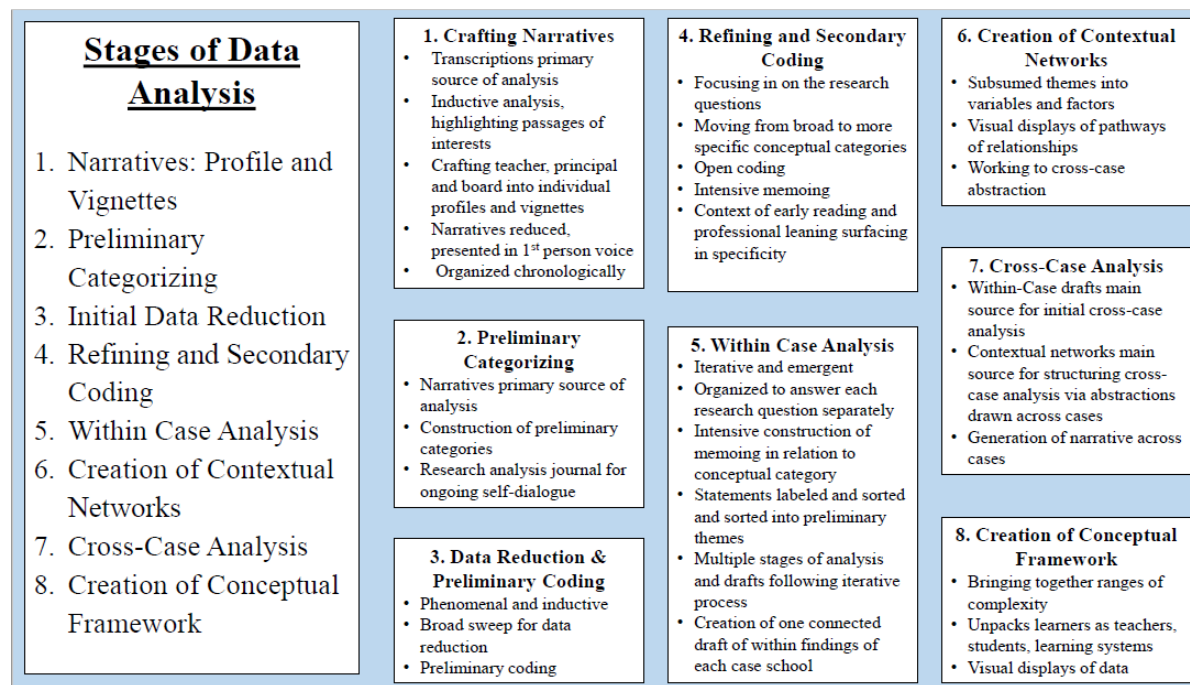
An emergent and iterative process guides the data analysis (see Figure 2 below). According to Attinasi, Jr. (1991), a phenomenological inductive process is a place for concept and hypotheses to emerge out of the “the informants’ lives reported in the interviews [with the] induction process ... constrained only by the research perspective” (p. 3). In embracing the messiness of complexivist research methodology, the analysis occurs across eight stages involving multiple deep steps of exploration and continuous data reduction (e.g., Koopmans, 2014). Seidman’s in-depth three-series interview process structures the deep probe into the lived experiences of participants. Following the suggestion of grounded theorists Glaser and Strauss (1999), I initiated a process of memoing in each stage of analysis to streamline the depth of data into their working categories. Initially, I transcribed the 24 interviews verbatim using Microsoft Word 2010. Transcripts were transferred to QSR International’s NVivo 11 software for

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preliminary analysis and conceptual sorting before transferring the data back to MS Word for most of the heavy work in the data analysis. Seidman's (2013) processes for data analysis of my in-depth three-series interviews with teachers broadly structure my data analysis: (a) studying, reducing and analyzing the text, (b) creating participant profiles and themes, and (c) making and analyzing thematic connections. Narratives in the form of extensive profiles for teachers and shorter vignettes for principals are the initial reductions of the data. They occur inductively rather than deductively by allowing the first stage of analysis to provide emerging conceptual categories (see Appendix J-O for the full profiles of the teacher participants).

Figure 2

Stages of Data Analysis



According to Attinasi, Jr. (1991), a phenomenological inductive process is a place for concept and hypotheses to emerge out of the “the informants’ lives reported in the interviews [with the] induction process ... constrained only by the research perspective” (p. 3). In embracing the

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messiness of complexivist research methodology, the analysis occurs across eight stages involving multiple deep steps of exploration and continuous data reduction (e.g., Koopmans, 2014). Seidman's in-depth three-series interview process structures the deep probe into the lived experiences of participants. Following the suggestion of grounded theorists Glaser and Strauss (1999), I initiated a process of memoing in each stage of analysis to streamline the depth of data into their working categories. Initially, I transcribed the 24 interviews verbatim using Microsoft Word 2010. Transcripts were transferred to QSR International's NVivo 11 software for preliminary analysis and conceptual sorting before transferring the data back to MS Word for most of the heavy work in the data analysis. Seidman's (2013) processes for data analysis of my in-depth three-series interviews with teachers broadly structure my data analysis: (a) studying, reducing and analyzing the text, (b) creating participant profiles and themes, and (c) making and analyzing thematic connections. Narratives in the form of extensive profiles for teachers and shorter vignettes for principals are the initial reductions of the data. They occur inductively rather than deductively by allowing the first stage of analysis to provide emerging conceptual categories (see Appendix J-O for the full profiles of the teacher participants).

Across all interview data, Merriam's (2009) guidelines for category management and coding construction influence the analyses. Based on the reasoning and work of Seidman (2013), the teacher and principal participants' profiles develop from the interviews and portray a layered narrative for structuring perspectives across levels. Following the profile construction, the narratives were then used as the primary resources in the categorizing and coding processes for the within-case analyses (teachers and principals).

The construction of contextual networks arose after multiple in-depth within-case analysis and the resulting within-case findings. These networks provide a way to open up cross-

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case abstractions. Creating contextual networks is a unique process, and so there is a description of this in more depth below. Following multiple iterations of in-depth within-case analyses, I borrow from Miles and Huberman's process of creating visual displays of causal networks to demonstrate teachers' perceptions of how their early reading professional learning influences their practice and how contextual variables interact to influence their teaching and learning and their students' early reading achievement (Miles et al., 2014). From a complexity perspective, this process provides a representation of contextual variables and factors interplaying within the scope of the research questions and continues to move from sequentially answering each question separately while developing an understanding of how these relationships appear across cases (Davis & Sumara, 2006). To create these networks, this part of the analysis follows Miles and Huberman's suggestion for listing antecedent and mediating variables (1 antecedent through multiple mediating) and outcomes. It is an iterative phase of analysis, and an example of this process is in Appendix U.

Connecting to this stage of analysis are three figures to display how themes subsume into the different contextual variables of each contextual network. There is a more in-depth discussion on this, along with visual displays in the next chapter. This stage of analysis takes its formal shape through seeking to identify the variables and factors linking to perceptions of influential early reading professional learning and also how they link to participants' perceptions of what influences their students' reading success; in the barest sense, this is exactly what the research questions seek to answer. Miles and Huberman speak to the value of narratives as secondary but essential aspects of data analysis and representation. Following the creation of pathways, are narratives for each contextual network that synthesize the within-case findings of contextual variables at play within each participant's teaching lives at each of their schools. In

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doing this, I distil the themes derived in the process of within-case analysis and move from case narratives to contextual networks that portray the movement of and between the variables participants perceive influential to early reading professional learning and student reading success. The contextual networks then contribute to the generation of the themes in the cross-case findings.

Following within- and cross-case analyses and the writing of these findings is one more step of analysis: the development of a conceptual framework. This conceptual framework emerges from answering each research question using content from each theme in each stage of analysis. The within- and cross-case themes are colour-coded to relate resemblances with each theme numbered in tables for answering the research questions. These tables were organized by research question to understand (a) how contextual variables at the school, board, and other levels are perceived to influence the planning, delivery and uptake of early reading professional learning and (b) how teachers perceive the relationship between their professional learning, their early reading practices and student reading outcomes. These tables are used to generate how varying factors influence the main variables (teachers, students, school system). Taken together, notions of self, the nature of teaching, empathy to the nature of the student, and the relationship to learning in a learning system paves a path for conceptualizing the complex interrelationships relating to teacher learning and change and student achievement (see Appendix U for more details and a lengthier explanation of my process of data analysis).

Trustworthiness

Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are four major criteria qualitative researchers have expectations to meet for ensuring trustworthiness of their research (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Nowell et al., 2017).

Credibility

Credibility relates to the interpretation of the data representing realities expressed in the perspectives of the study's participants. Guba and Lincoln (1982) emphasize that "the crucial question for the naturalist becomes, 'Do the data sources (most often human) find the inquirer's analysis, formulation, and interpretations to be credible (believable)?" (p. 246). They list six ways to help safeguard against the loss of credibility (prolonged engagement at a site, persistent observation, peer debriefing, triangulation, referential adequacy of materials and member checks), and these are all met to varying degrees in this study. Interviews with principal and school board participants gather their perspectives around the context of the school and board and enhance an understanding of teacher learning and early reading instruction in schools and across the board. Principal and board participant data provide context and a part of triangulation through collecting their different perspectives. Each of these participants and the six teacher participants were provided with their transcripts to review and make changes if they perceived any misrepresentation; no participant made changes. The structure of Seidman's (2006) three-series interview process with teachers provides the opportunity for prolonged engagement and persistent observation, the first two ways to safeguard credibility as listed by Guba and Lincoln (1982).

The three-interview structure incorporates features that enhance the accomplishment of validity. It places participants' comments in context. It encourages interviewing participants over the course of 1 to 3 weeks to account for idiosyncratic days and to check for the internal consistency of what they say. Furthermore, by interviewing a number of participants, we can connect their experiences and check the comments of one participant against those of others. Finally, the goal of the process is to understand how our

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participants understand and make meaning of the experience. If the interview structure works to allow them to make sense to themselves as well to the interviewer, then it has gone a long way toward validity. (Seidman, 2006, p. 24)

Peer debriefing, the third way to deliver credibility, occurs in the conversations with my doctoral supervisor throughout this research journey (electronically and face to face). Regular meetings throughout each stage of research provided the “opportunity to test [my] growing insights against those of uninvolved peers, to receive advice about important methodological steps in the emergent design ... and to discharge personal feelings, anxieties and stresses that otherwise might affect the inquiry adversely” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 247). This ongoing dialogue and the inclusion of perspectives from a range of participants across the various contexts of the case schools contribute to triangulation.

Referential adequacy materials, the fifth element to ensuring credibility Guba and Lincoln (1982) espouse, reflects in my adherence to maintaining and storing materials beyond the data that I collected for analysis. An electronic research journal of over 150 mostly single-spaced pages was maintained throughout the analysis and writing up of the findings. A collection of paper notebooks contain detailed notes of my research process and early drafts and conceptualizations of the visual representations in the dissertation (e.g., emerging thematic relationships and connections, contextual pathways, conceptual framework). Stages of analysis are documented on paper and these files are organized and securely stored away; available for demonstrating the direction of this part of my research. The final element to establish credibility listed by Guba and Lincoln (1982) is member checking. I shared transcripts with all participants with offers to provide feedback, and none did. The nature of the analysis is emergent, and analysis comprises a lengthy process of varying stages, as shown in Figure 6 above. Using

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crafted profiles based on the first-person voice of my participants and ensuring regular communication with my doctoral supervisor helps me provide findings deeply based on the teacher participants' lived experiences in their case schools. Additionally, I will share the findings with the case school board and case schools at a time and in a format that is convenient for them.

Transferability

The second criteria for establishing trustworthiness is transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). The two elements to ensuring that the data and findings can be transferable are theoretical/purposeful sampling and findings presented through thick description. My research design utilizes purposeful sampling. Context is provided by administrators and board level reading experts, along with the teachers. Purposeful sampling of teachers focuses on early reading teachers, and the case schools are selected based on their demographic differences and representation of other schools in their school board (rural, urban, suburban). Thick description of the teacher data is a result of my in-depth three-series interviews. First, all interviews were organized into first person narratives. The teacher narratives are in Appendix J-O for transparency and because they provide an intimate portrayal of the lived experiences of these teachers as readers and as professional practitioners. These narratives provide “enough context, first, to impart a vicarious experience of it, and, second, to facilitate judgements about the extent to which working hypotheses from that context might be transferable to a second and similar context” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 248). Within-case findings provide a depth and range of direct quotations from the participants so that their voices resonate throughout the findings.

Dependability

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The concept of dependability relates to stability of the study so that the methods that are used would, if used by another researcher, generate similarly expressed interpretations (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Three strategies Guba and Lincoln suggest for establishing dependability are, (a) the use of overlap methods, (b) stepwise replication, and (c) the dependability audit. Though interviewing is the vehicle for data collection for all participants, I employ various interview styles depending on the type of participant. Step-wise replication occurs through the structure of my three-series interviews with teachers. Setting the series of interviews over three weeks for teacher participants ensures consistency in perspectives and adds depth to the intentions of each of the interviews. A dependability audit occurs in the professional conversations with my doctoral supervisor: throughout this research, the details and the direction of this research are transparently and thoughtfully shared. Further, I document the research process, how I organize and store data, the stages of analysis, and writing of findings in each stage of this research journey.

Confirmability

The final criteria Guba and Lincoln (1982) list for ensuring trustworthiness is confirmability: “The onus of objectivity, ought, therefore to be removed from the inquirer and placed on data; it is not the inquirer’s certifiability we are interested in but the confirmation of the data” (p. 247). Achievement of confirmability occurs through triangulation, practicing reflexivity and an audit. Triangulation, mentioned earlier, is ensured by including different perspectives (varying teachers, principals and board-level reading experts), using different interview structures (three-series, in-depth with teachers, focused semi-structured with principals and board participants) and having a diversity of case schools (rural, urban and suburban). Keeping a research journal to challenge my underlying epistemologies, to self-dialogue on the

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emerging themes in my research, and as a place to document the development of my interpretations is maintained throughout my research, but particularly during my analysis and write up of the findings. In terms of a confirmability audit I speak above to the maintenance, orderliness and storage of the process of my research (e.g., labeled, time-stamped and organized according to aspects within each stage of my research).

Summary

This research bases its findings on the utilization of thick descriptions of the participants in this study by using various interviewing styles. I ensure that my interpretations derive explicitly through their direct words and that this process is documented electronically and on paper. Ongoing dialogue with my doctoral supervisor provided the critical peer to help me debrief throughout the entire research process. Maintaining an orderly and sensible electronic and paper trail of this research journey ensures transparency to my process of interpretations. In summary, ensuring trustworthiness was of the utmost importance. This section displays and expresses how I fulfill the criteria for credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability and how this leads to a research study exemplifying trustworthiness.

Chapter 4 – Findings

The purpose of this research project is to explore, interpret and understand how early reading teachers perceive that their early reading professional learning influences their reading instruction and improves their students' reading achievement and, secondly how contextual variables from varying levels interact and are perceived to influence teachers' early reading professional learning experiences. This chapter presents key findings from the analysis of 24 interviews of teachers, principals and board-level reading specialists. A qualitative case study approach at the school and board level shows the contextual uniquenesses and abstractions across cases. In relation to teaching, learning and early reading instruction, this chapter begins by presenting a brief description of contextually relevant information regarding the province where this research took place. This context mostly derives from the perspectives of the school board participants. This information provides an introductory contextual setting that leads into the contextual descriptions of each of the case schools. To answer the research questions, I then proceed through the within-case findings, contextual pathways and cross-case findings before presenting the conceptual framework generated from the deep stages of analyses.

Provincial Context and the School Board

This section illustrates the elements related to early reading instruction and professional learning through the perspective of the board-level participants, all who have extensive early reading knowledge and experience. This descriptive account merges the perspectives of the three school board early reading participants to provide a general sense of reading instruction within the structures of the provincial education plan as well as the collective sense of early reading from a board-level perspective. Next, a contextual snapshot of professional learning in general

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and reading professional learning, more specifically, is presented based on my interviews with SB1, SB2 and SB3.

The Provincial Education Plan

As described in Chapter 2, the implementation of the current provincial Education Plan at the beginning of the twenty-first century shifted the curriculum from traditional outcomes towards competency-based learning. The traditional single grade system became cycles comprising two grades. There are three cycles in elementary schools (Cycle 1: grades 1 & 2; Cycle 2: grades 3 & 4; Cycle 3: grades 5 & 6). At the board level, SB3 remarks that, for teachers, the competency-based expectations have been “really hard for them,” and that she and SB1 currently worked with teachers to help simplify an understanding of the curriculum and how literacy instruction looks across a cycle and, more specifically, within grades. In theory, SB3 notes that it is a framework of a curriculum for connecting community needs, resources and context that make learning more meaningful than the more traditional curriculum before it. She suggests that the education plan is a modern curriculum that provides space for teachers to be flexible in how they teach, which is not prescriptive and is cross-curricular.

However, the board participants perceive that the plan lacks specific learning outcomes, making it hard for teachers to assess specific skill development. SB1 remarks, “The QEP when it came ... was a curriculum ahead of its time ... and the problem is ... it’s so difficult to apply to the classroom. There’s so much wiggle room that people don’t even know what they should be teaching and because of that it’s very hard to ... build on skills.” SB2 believes the plan ambiguously states outcomes for students and that its competency-based framework is somewhat unclear for teachers to help them design their reading programs. There have been changes in how reporting student achievement is done and that the changes do not necessarily align with the

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competency-based nature of learning in cycles. These changes appear inconsistent with ministry expected products for teaching, evaluation of progress, and formal reporting expectations represented in the provincial curriculum. For example, initially, the education plan required teachers to report achievement on a four-point scale from “not meeting” to “exceeding.” Enough parents complained that this was not transparent and specific, “and so the government came and said we need to be clear and so now you are going to start using percentages ... they don’t match ... and that’s just the way it is and so yeah we’ve got a conflict going on here of how things are supposed to be going and then how we’re going to assess it but they don’t match.”

The board participants clearly empathize with the challenges teachers face in terms of the unease and conflicting expectations they are experiencing in teaching within the current curriculum. A lack of specificity within the curriculum on the early reading skills to teach and equitably assess reading achievement appears to provoke some discord in how language arts are understood and approached.

Professional Learning Structures

A sense of the nature of professional learning in the board can be understood by how SB1, SB2, and SB3 perceive how professional learning subject and availability can vary in terms of access, topic, and style of delivery. SB1 considers this school board to be small in population. She also suggests that this board allots more funding for academic consultants than any other board in the province with the current board participants in this study being highly experienced and knowledgeable of early reading programming and instructional strategies. It also appears that the nature of the consultants’ roles has changed. Whereas consultants used to be quite field-based, SB3 believes that the board would like them to work centrally and providing resources for teachers instead. While geographically large, similar to the size of Nova Scotia, its overall

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population is considered small and all board participants mention this limits the amount and variety of professional learning that the board can offer. It is challenging for consultants to go out and see all the schools. Likewise, as identified by OT1, OT2 and OP, it is difficult for many teachers who are distant from the board office to participate in person in centralized professional learning. In this scenario, it appears that schools that are remote from the central board are less likely to visit or receive the professional learning available to other schools. Partly for reasons of equity, SB3 is a proponent for literacy experts attending schools and notes that working with teachers over a few days is the most effective way to influence teaching.

The structure and topics of board-supported professional learning initiatives have gone through varying transformations over the last couple of decades. Two of the previous board-wide learning initiatives focused on instructional intelligence and a cooperative learning team-building initiative. SB3 remarks on how the board integrated the two topics and that this was “hugely positive and really good [professional development]” across the school board. She notes that some workshop opportunities for learning about and implementing the team-building initiative for teachers new to the board were available. However, this initiative was mainly focused on individual schools and not often offered across schools by the board as professional learning. SB3 notes how following the widespread focus on instructional intelligence and cooperative team-building, the structure of much board provided professional learning moved to learning networks and a “train the trainer” model.

For early literacy professional learning, this comprises a focus on developing networks of literacy leaders who bring knowledge and resources back to their schools following workshops at the board. SB3 finds this a useful and engaging experience for literacy leads from each school. However, the same teachers will often represent their schools, excluding many teachers from

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having first-hand learning opportunities: “When you go back and you just tell people what you did it’s not the same, you don’t own it” (SB3). She finds that this network does not work well for teachers in more distant locations with SB3 suggesting that virtual conferencing lacks the quality and social intimacy of in-person experiences.

Change of directors who oversee literacy and professional learning, maternity leaves by literacy leaders, and union directives also appear to influence the flow and opportunities of professional learning. SB2 and SB3 both speak about the change in direction and directives that occur when new directors take control of structuring professional learning or board learning goals. Short term leaves also influence and disrupt the flow of different learning initiatives or ways of doing things. For example, recently, SB1 returned from a two-year maternity leave. Initiatives had finished up during her leave, and nothing new had begun while she was gone. SB1 was about to begin her second maternity leave, likely causing another disruption. On this, SB3 remarks how hard this lack of continuity is on longer-range planning.

Scheduling and timing are critical barriers to getting teachers together. For example, I was told there are union protections or priorities that influence teachers’ opportunities to attend board provided professional learning. SB1 explains that the union mandates professional learning to occur within work hours. For the few teachers who come from far away, they are often late and leave early. There are also challenges for teachers to attend learning outside of their schools, although there are quite a few PD days during the calendar year. Says SB1,

the unions have negotiated that teachers shouldn’t be pulled from their schools too often ... Like they’re supposed to be able to use those PD days to get work done in the classroom and because teachers’ PD days are connected with bigger conferences

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happening twice a year it is hard to create times for all teachers to meet on professional learning days.

In this section, environmental context, professional learning design, personnel changes, and varying controls over how professional learning can be utilized indicate the constant ripples of change interacting upon and influencing the products of professional learning experiences. Next comes an opening up of the perspectives on reading in general and in the board, offering a portrayal of the current reading environment through the eyes of the three school board reading consultants.

Reading Professional Learning

Currently, SB1 sees the initiatives in early literacy focusing on narrative writing and response because these are the “two components on our provincial exams.” SB2 perceives that professional learning focuses on preparing grade 4 and 6 students for provincial exams. She notes the board’s past push on early literacy, but that lately, the focus is on boosting literacy and numeracy assessment scores of the grade 6 students.

In terms of learning strategies in early reading professional learning, SB2 perceives that the board is not helping early reading teachers develop their reading instruction: “I don’t think there’s been anything for years.” In response to a question on availability of training, SB1 remarks, “I’m going to be really honest and say none [and] we have no formal training that we do through the school board in early reading. I mean we offer PD workshops where we look at different areas in reading and writing but we don’t sort of follow any kind of program.”

Though there is no mandated early reading professional learning and instructional program, there are two board supported reading initiatives occurring over the past ten years that the consultants consider useful for providing a balanced literacy approach. One program relates

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to learning how to implement a reading program comprising a range of learning centres such as guided reading, and reading and writing to self and peers. The second partially resembles a code-based program where students learn nonfiction vocabulary while developing some phonological awareness. SB1 mentions that many teachers implement these initiatives in varying forms in classrooms throughout schools and across the board. There is an expectation that teachers who receive training in one or both of these initiatives are implementing them similarly board-wide. However, the consultants also perceive that resources from Pinterest, Teachers Pay Teachers and other Google searches embed themselves into teachers' early reading instruction.

Perspectives on the State of Early Reading Instruction

The school board tends to encourage a balanced literacy approach to Language Arts. Over approximately the past ten years, the two board supported reading initiatives and teacher learning opportunities reflect this. As noted above, one initiative focuses on setting up literacy stations, and the other initiative is a phonics-based vocabulary program. Though there is a general perception that most teachers provide a balanced approach, implementation varies quite a bit across classrooms. SB1 suggests that only about 20% of the teachers who commit to the board supported reading initiatives are implementing them in a student-centred fashion, the way these programs are intended. According to SB1, one reason for this range of variability is teacher changeover: "I'm sure half the teachers I've worked with are somewhere else now." SB1 and SB3 also believe that many teachers do not include significant parts of the program in their teaching by either skipping elements or trying to implement the whole approach too soon rather than setting up routines necessary to help students understand how to work independently at the different literacy stations.

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Teaching, Learning and Transitions in Grade 1

The board participants perceive that teaching grade 1 is one of the most challenging teaching assignments. Transitioning from a play-based environment into an environment of standardized reading and assessment is tough on students, and SB1 believes that teachers' needs are not reasonably considered: "teachers aren't being supported the way they need to be and that's because assessment drives pedagogy." SB3 sees teachers stuck in the pressures of getting kids to move levels and that often this excludes students' social and emotional development: "I find that's the hard part for them. I think they feel they have an obligation to teach that kid to read and this is how it's done ... [for teachers] I think it's feeling confident enough to say 'I'm going to take my time here.'" SB2 calls for a rethinking of the role of assessment and believes there needs to be "almost an enriched kindergarten program for the grade 1s coming in and forget about the testing ... and see where they are in January, February" instead of assessing reading ability in October on standardized reading diagnostics. Continuing, she speaks about the limited scope of reading achievement and the limiting role that assessment appears to play in teaching:

I think teachers are teaching to the test ... And that it follows under the umbrella of the school board ... it's all results driven which every school board is ... So yes it's the improvement of the literacy but at every school it's more finite and every teacher it's more finite so it just trickles down but it's very general you know, it's very general but there's no specific direction.

A sense of pessimism continues with SB1 remarking how even though some principals are implementing more social and emotional learning opportunities in their schools, it is not going to

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“change anything in terms of culture” because teachers are locked into a milieu of assessment and measuring student achievement by norms that are not currently relatable for many students.

All three board participants remark that many students in this board from rural and urban areas lack a literature-rich background and do not have the proficient language comprehension and vocabulary skills that are important predictors of learning to read. SB3 sees teachers too reliant on levelled texts, and students are learning skills, but often in their early years their vocabulary is not there and that “they’re going to have trouble holding that language pattern in their head.” She suggests incorporating more play into early literacy instruction by using poetry and chants as engaging settings to help students build their vocabulary banks.

SB2 suggests that there is not enough early intervention happening in kindergarten and grade 1. Too often, students receive interventions too late, and early intervention would help many students learn helpful strategies to compensate or overcome their struggles. SB3 also believes that understanding the nature of why different students struggle with reading is not well understood by teachers and SB2 perceives that currently, teachers are too quick to suggest a learning disability or to request outside intervention because they are not confident in their ability to help students who are struggling to learn. There is a perception that there is not much assistance from the board to help teachers develop more effective ways to meet struggling readers’ needs with SB1 lamenting:

teachers are very overwhelmed ... they have lots of kids in their classroom and I think differentiating for different learners is really an area of weakness in a lot of our classes ... it gets compacted with every year that goes by ... I think we know what we need to do. I don’t think we have as many teachers that are skillfully doing it.

Case Schools: General Context and Description

This section describes the context of the three case schools beginning with Blending Elementary, moving to Outer Elementary and ending with Central Elementary School. A general overview for each school is in Table 3 below. The structure of the case narratives provides a short description of the school context and includes information from each case school's participants. Included in each narrative, a section on school leadership represents the principal's role in school professional learning, opening up the general context of each school and situating each principal into the school's local interactions.

Table 3

Overview of School Demographics

School Name and Abbrev.	Type of Pop. Density	Grades	Student Enrol.	Majority First Language Spoken at Home	Teachers on staff	Classes with Grade 1	Classes with Grade 2
Blending (BES)	Suburban	PK-6	330	English	21	2	2
Outer (OES)	Rural	PK-8	100	French	7	1	1
Central (CES)	Urban	K-6	550	English	35	5	5

Blending Elementary School

Blending Elementary School has bright open rooms and a large fenced-off schoolyard with a modern playground. Blending is one of several villages comprising a small municipality with an approximate population of 7500. Predominantly an English speaking community, Blending Elementary School services a population of about 330 students from pre-kindergarten to grade 6. There are about 20 full-time teachers and a school principal. Blending and a few other villages very close by feed into BES. The population comprises a mixed socioeconomic range.

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Many of Blending's working population commute to one of the two larger cities, approximately 25-45 minutes south. Other adults comprise a population who work out of their homes, work in agriculture, in the trades, or hospitality businesses. There are ski hills close by, and the scenic outdoor opportunities, as well as Blending's proximity to urban populations, draws tourists throughout the year. Participants describe the school community as a staff of educators who cooperate and collaborate; and that a core group of teachers remain and help shape a general perception that teachers are on board with and available to each other.

Context of Leadership at BES. BP spoke to me about how she sees herself as a school leader with over 20 elementary teachers. She remarks that she expects teachers to self-initiate their learning processes and that she is always willing to help out those who strive to professionally develop. She says that "there's a cultural expectation to keep learning" at Blending and that, for the most part, teachers display a growth mindset. She enacts a sense of distributed leadership in which everyone acts as a team, and experts within the school need to be tapped into. Success rates are of obvious importance, and BP strives to hire teachers who fit in with her instructional beliefs: "You have to really find somebody that fits your way of thinking and not everyone does ... I am looking for somebody who works collaboratively, who wants to share, who wants to learn, who wants to grow as a professional and who wants to focus on teaching and learning, not on you know, all the minutiae that comes up."

BP perceives herself as a flexible administrator, teacher-centred in her leadership approach, but firm in her expectations that teachers are accountable for their self-development. She sees herself supporting her teachers' professional learning needs in three overarching ways: (a) providing resources to attend learning experiences or suggesting other classrooms in the board to scaffold their practice; (b) bringing in consultants to help with teachers who are

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struggling in certain areas; and (c) providing in-school professional growth topics for her staff that she believes will contribute to whole school success (e.g., recent universal design for learning sessions and ways for making learning a visible and student-centred process).

The school's professional image is critical to her and so she has had to intervene on how and when the school schedules their four floater professional learning days. She will hold back introducing new professional learning topics (up to a year or more) until she is confident the teaching staff will be receptive. Organizationally, she prefers teachers to work in pods and cycle teams on common professional development topics relevant to their teaching grades and responsibilities. BP views the main barriers to teachers obtaining effective professional learning often are the teachers themselves. Too often, when teachers miss an opportunity, the teacher has decided that they do not have the time or professional willingness to take on new learning challenges.

BP is interested in John Hattie's visible learning research and believes that this has been a turning point for her in how she conceptualizes instructional dialogue in and as student-centred learning. She reserves some of the school's professional learning times for working with teachers to develop an understanding of the relationship between learning intentions and success criteria, and in bringing the students more explicitly into this process. In terms of literacy and, more specifically, reading instruction, she speaks about the shift from earlier in her career where whole language was the philosophical approach in universities and schools. With the recent board reading initiatives she believes that opportunities for more students to learn at their levels are available as the approach to reading instruction that is currently supported by the board "allows you to have the kids autonomously walk through at their level ... with real meaningful texts but then the teacher can also have that guided reading group going on all the time."

Outer Elementary School

Outer Elementary School is located in Extère, a small, rural, and predominantly (90%) French-speaking community. Extère has a population of approximately 600 that contributes to OES' student body along with pulling students in from eleven rural municipalities located nearby. Extère's leading source of employment is forestry. Tourism is a much smaller but still significant source of the region's economy as Extère's proximity to rivers, lakes, and mountains makes it an idyllic location for outdoor adventurers. However, Extère is not an economically thriving area. Ranked nine on a 10 point socioeconomic scale, OES is designated as a low socioeconomic school that receives extra resources from a consultant with expertise in helping teachers in low-income schools. Having 90% of students with French as their first language and a high rate of poverty creates unique challenges for teachers and students. However, it is the high level of poverty that OP sees affecting her students' learning upon entry into schooling remarking,

what you're seeing is those students even if they're first language speakers, they're coming to school with a third of the vocabulary of an average child whose been read to nightly, who has not been babysat by a screen for a majority of their time, has had time to interact and develop vocabulary and it puts them at a loss right from the very get go ... And in our situation their vocabulary in their mother tongue is weak and then we're throwing in an extra language ... those first years are spent catching up on a lot of oral language before we even get to reading and writing things.

OP spoke about how she and the staff continuously try to build relationships with students' parents. Many families have a long history of living in this area, and the notion of schooling is not a positive one for many parents. Trying to bring parents in for workshops on

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how to handle homework and sharing reading tips for reading with their children is challenging. OP speaks of trying to create an inclusive environment for parents by “spend[ing] a lot of time looking at what those parents experienced as students ... so just getting them back through the door is the challenge at the beginning ... it’s constantly about trying to get them comfortable in the building and having that open-door policy.” A cycle of sensitivity and negativity is trying to be eroded by OP and her school team. Building better relationships between the school and home are essential for bridging the learning gaps their students face.

There are less than ten teachers and one administrator at OES. The principal, OP, has a forty percent teaching assignment, and the annual student population hovers close to 100- comprising four-year-old kindergartners and up to grade seven students. Teaching assistants and supply teachers are not necessarily professionally trained. Several teachers live an hour or more from Extère, and the central board office is a 115 km drive from OES, which can make it challenging to attend professional learning at the board. OP remarked that staffing had undergone much change with teachers moving to more centrally located schools making it a challenge to develop their school identity. However, a sense of stability with a current core group of teachers who have remained is emerging. Extère’s rurality is associated with poor internet connectivity, and this is perceived to negatively impact web conferencing and the use of assistive technology in the classroom. OT1 sums this up: “Like technology here ... especially in this rural area where we’re not serviced properly and we lose power often you can’t depend on it ... You know probably 30% of the time our internet’s down ... So while technology is awesome it’s almost twice as much work sifting through things and you anticipating the worst.”

The Context of Leadership and Learning at OES. OP appears as a leader who seeks change through her close connections and understanding of the school community’s needs. In her

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administrative role, she spends as much time as she can to visit classrooms. She believes this creates close connections with students and teachers and acknowledges how her relationships influence her thinking towards professional learning and school success. OES' small population also requires that two-fifths of her position is teaching. It provides her opportunities to work one on one, in small groups and classrooms with a range of students. A principal with this teaching responsibility has a viewpoint for closely observing and understanding the most current student needs and sees herself "as someone who can take the vision and help carry it forward."

OP's accumulating professional experience and maturity as the school principal also appears influential upon the structural supports to school-based professional learning. Her first few years as the principal at OES were overwhelming due to engaging in too many staff professional learning initiatives. Following her first few years, she now perceives that it is healthier to reject much of what is available and develop professional learning through a collaborative process with teachers to determine their school's priority needs. Part of this she believes is by helping to instill a sense of passion for reading within students: "we always come back to the point they never lose the love for good literature and that they learn to not look at reading as a chore but something that you do that opens up the world to you." She also understands the challenge of instilling this passion when many of the students at OES have limited English language backgrounds and experiences and, therefore, a low English vocabulary bank necessary to decode, predict and comprehend and meet board reading standards for English Language Arts. OP's perspective on the challenges struggling readers face illustrates the complexities that exist as the staff considers what early reading professional learning can be meaningful within their school's context. Together it appears these perspectives intertwine in the

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direction of school-based professional learning goals that focus on vocabulary development and visible learning (externalizing perspectives on metacognition and learning needs).

OP senses that there is a growing connection between the staff and how they take on professional learning. Reverberations emanate from student and school needs, travel between staff by bridging learning to classroom practices and then regularly looping back into staff discussions. Learning occurs in staff meetings between triads planning their classroom strategies and in the halls and classes, during teaching and over lunch. Speaking about the ongoing nature of their learning OP says: “we have homework between our PD sessions so they will naturally go to groups of two and three and work on something and come back. It’s nice to see.” OES’ school growth planning and professional learning appear to be a collaborative process directly based on their students’ needs and OP’s leadership philosophy: “As soon as I step out of that classroom I worry that I’m going to lose that perspective ... I worry that losing that perspective will make me a distant administrator rather than a hands-on one, and I still need to be there for my own professional learning.”

Central Elementary School

Comprising junior kindergarten to grade 6 students in either the English or French immersion stream, CES is located in the urban heart of a large city with a population of approximately 330, 000 and is one kilometre north and divided by a provincial line from a larger Canadian city with a population of nearly 1, 000 000. Though CES is a downtown urban school, the students bus in from as far as a ten-kilometre radius, not walking or biking because these students do not live in the middle and upper-class neighbourhoods their school is tucked away in. It is an old school nearing its 60th anniversary. CES is low on the socioeconomic factor, an eight out ten, and receives additional grants from the Ministry of Education. Though it is

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predominantly a low socioeconomic school, it includes many students from professional families who are more prosperous than the school's rating suggests.

CES is a community-based school. The principal believes this is largely because many of the students do not live close to each other and are bussed to the school, creating the school as the natural hub that connects parents, children and school staff. CP dedicates his time to create a community for families at the school:

[CES has] had things that other schools, that probably wouldn't dream of, cultural activities, Pow Wows, weekend events that are constantly going on to bring parents and families and teachers into the school whether it's to play together, whether it's to celebrate together, have fun together, learn together. (CP)

CES provides a lengthy list of services as a community learning centre such as parenting, anti-bullying and business workshops, a range of clubs, breakfast and lunch services for many students, evening sports nights, and monthly activity afternoons. CP exemplifies CES' community-minded philosophy in how he views the connection between all members of the school community:

When there is that interplay or interchange of parents and teachers and kids, the kids see their teachers differently, the parents see the teachers differently and then most importantly the teachers see the kids differently ... They see their strengths and when they take that back into the classroom the teaching and learning and the behaviour is all going to be better ... So it's just a different, it's way of looking at things ... Then you have to organize differently. There's a creativity to organizing a school that can't be traditional because if you get stuck in the same 19th century way of organizing a school the kids

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aren't going to be learning the way they should be learning today. It's maybe a touch unique but that's what the school needs I think.

A staff of 55 educators, more than 500 students and their parents who regularly volunteer and take part in many of the services offered to families, CES is literally bursting at its seams. Previously under the threat of being underpopulated, CES has doubled in population over the past five years and now is in danger of being overcrowded. With classes over the size and composition limits, not enough books for student home reading, resource teachers without a home base for working with struggling students, a library regularly used for a grade 6 math class instead of enriching-literature opportunities, CT1 remarks that

it's great to be an awesome school, it's not great to be an awesome school stuffed to the rafters ... you can really feel it in this school from day to day. You can really feel the energy, feel the crampedness ... some of the classes are really big and really hard to teach and teachers are burning out and ... I don't think it's a great scenario. I don't think the size [population] of it is a problem, I think the [principal] has to solve it by making more space and bringing the class sizes [down] so the teachers aren't taxed so hard.

The popularity of CES is largely attributable to its commitment to the community and other attractions to the area that pulls a range of families in for a limited time and this contributes to a transitory environment. Its central location, being adjacent to a sizeable Canadian city in another province, proximity to housing for military families, opportunities for cheaper housing within the catchment area, and its closeness to an adult education centre combine to create a current of children in and out of the school throughout the year. Many of the students making up the transitory population are children who have moved multiple times, are in and out of CES as their parents come from northern communities to complete a course at the adult education centre,

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move back upon completion, and then return later repeating this process. In other instances, families use the catchment area as a temporary stopover before moving into more desirable locations.

Part of understanding the contextual uniqueness of CES is that it provides two streams of instruction for students, and these streams appear to play a central role in how classes are composed. There is an English stream and a French immersion stream to compete with other schools in the vicinity. CP speaking about the importance of offering French immersion at CES:

if you don't offer a 50-50 immersion program many parents are not going to select your school because they want as much French as possible and ideally [for] professionals or government workers they know you need as much English as French and if you just go to the French school you can't get the English.

At CES, the principal, with consultation from the teachers, arranges classes based on students' overall readiness (academic and social and emotional). Based on their readiness, students are placed into one of four quadrants. In the principal's perspective more than half of the current students are not ready for learning in the traditional classroom setting, so most classes are composed of students at comparable readiness levels. However, according to CT1, this can be a challenging undertaking for teachers provided with academic and socially emotionally struggling students. Of note, the higher academically and socially ready students are more likely to be in the French immersion stream, less ready students tend to be placed in the English stream.

Connecting to this, it appears that immersion teachers often request that their struggling students be placed into the English stream. CT2 conveying a tone of desperation was emphatic about a double standard impacting lower level students in the French immersion stream:

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you can't kick them out of grade one French immersion and that's what happened ...

We're trying to get away from that but it happened again because they can't learn French immersion because they're really weak. So where do I throw my kids if they can't read English ... You don't get to pick who you teach. You get [your] child, you adapt things and teach them to who they are.

This sentiment echoes in the words of CT1, teaching in the French immersion stream during this study with a relatively high achieving group of students, as she reflects on ideals she perceives missing within the French side of schooling:

There's been a lot of dissatisfaction in the local French schools and I think that their language instruction from what I gather is very different. It seems the way kids learn in the French schools is very different from the way we teach things in the English system ... You know how we differentiate a lot right, we've been even going through that with our French teachers here. Like they're "well they can't pass," and we're "so bring it down for those students," you know. They kind of teach [at] one level whereas we're all taught, which I think is really important, to differentiate.

The Context of Leadership at Central Elementary School. At CES, CP holds particular beliefs about the critical attributes primary grade (and particularly grade one) teachers should possess. He also believes that it is his responsibility to help transform CES into the community hub. Noting that students are bused in from across a ten-kilometre urban radius, he seeks to create opportunities to bring teachers, parents and students together and soften the boundaries differentiating those with different roles. Capitalizing on these opportunities is one way that he sees that school communities can organize themselves to connect to students' social and emotional attachment needs. Estimating approximately 40% of CES students are not reading

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at board-level grade one expectations, he believes that early literacy needs to be reconceptualized by including more opportunities that develop teachers' social and emotional competencies.

CP describes how he prioritizes pedagogy that places students' learning experiences within their individual social and emotional needs as the new lens for "understanding the preconditions getting to that point" of detachment. Additionally, he values how a uniform approach to early reading instruction can create a positive learning environment and would like all the early reading teachers at CES to actively practice the board supported programs. CP recognizes grade one as the most critical year for most students. In his words, the grade one teacher

has to be at the top of their game ... taking it to another level, who's got the capacity, relationship and even philosophical to a degree and can see a different way of doing things, could collaborate with kindergarten teachers, could find a way to make room in their grade one class for what the kindergarten teachers are doing with structured play and movements and taking less of a focus on what the curriculum is expecting them to do.

Noting that "teachers there have to have it at all levels" he also realizes that he cannot place all he considers to be the "best" teachers in first grade. He also perceives that it is his responsibility to try and place teachers in the grades that interest and motivate them. CP believes that healthy schools are places where students and teachers are put into positions to succeed.

In timing professional learning opportunities, CP understands that it is important to consider balancing professional learning with teachers' personal and professional obligations in mind. In the school board, many professional development days are close to other busy times in the year, and he mentions how sensitive he has to be towards the rhythm of the calendar. At this

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stage of his career as an elementary school principal, he believes that he recognizes the correct times to push his views so that the teachers are willing and engaged learners. One way he sees this happening is by creating a network of learning teams within the school. By embedding teams with teacher leaders who receive training from consultants and experts, CP believes expertise can be generated and sustained at a school level. Coordinating this element within professional learning involves foresight and patience. He also believes that a learning network's long-term sustainability is dependent on several factors that are beyond the expert's and teacher leader's control: commitment to attend team meetings, individual initiative and desire to learn, an understanding of how learning teams can enhance the students' learning environment, and the perspective or belief of some teachers that his direction in terms of professional learning is an imposition.

CES has its unique context among the schools in this case study: overcrowding, a transient nature generally comprising those who need stability in a nurturing environment, tensions and challenges in having two streams of instruction, and its role as the central community hub for students that attend a school in the urban heart of a mid-sized Canadian city but who do not live in the neighbourhood.

The contextual descriptions of the board and the case schools above provide a backdrop into the ensuing within-case narratives. Next, the within-case findings offer an in-depth portrayal of how teachers perceive their early reading teaching and learning environments.

Within-Case Findings

This section presents themes that represent a compilation of analyses answering two research questions designed to deepen an understanding of how professional learning influences teachers' reading instruction, and the role of context upon their teaching and learning process.

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The varying yet related notions in the within-case findings below reflect how much local conditions influence teaching and learning. In this scope, the within-case findings illuminate each of the cases' complexities and articulate varying themes, representing processes involved in developing reading instruction skills and designing a learning environment conducive to improving student reading success. The within-case narrative begins with Outer Elementary School, moves to Blending Elementary and finishes with Central Elementary School.

Outer Elementary School

Outer Elementary School is geographically isolated compared to the other two case schools in this research, and notions of isolation interweave throughout the perspectives of OT1 and OT2, both at the beginning of their careers. The three themes emerging in this within-case analysis highlight the role of community upon the OES teacher participants. These themes reflect how sensitivity to context extends to specific needs in their rural teaching and learning environment and how two new teachers who experience geographical isolation require empathy to their local situation for better addressing their specific professional.

Theme 1. Exclusion: Geographical, Cultural, and Personal-Professional Tension.

The first theme relates to perceptions regarding the role of exclusion on opportunities to participate in professional learning. Geographic isolation often hinders OT1's and OT2's opportunities for attending professional learning experiences at the board office. OT2 believes the board considers that OES and other small isolated schools are "on the edge of the earth." Both teachers desire formal and informal opportunities for sharing and socializing; however, OES's physical location and low teacher population impedes access to these kinds of opportunities. For example, OT2 perceives that there was not anything currently in place to bring in new reading resources: "there's no group sharing, there's no leader who is bringing us new

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material.” OT1 spoke about the two years she had spent as the school’s literacy representative. Though she appreciated learning new ways to integrate language arts competencies, she also recalls that when trying to share the experiences and resources with her OES colleagues, there was not very much interest.

No teachers share the same grade at OES, however, because schools in the province run on a cycle system (e.g., grades 1 and 2 equate to Cycle 1), this guarantees a degree of partnership between at least two teachers at OES. OP remarks that OES’ remoteness limits teachers’ opportunities to get professional learning that they need or want: “That’s the thing about the small school system. You’ve got one cycle, you work alone in isolation, same as my position, and that’s, that’s not healthy. You need to be talking to people.” Though OT1 and OT2 both teach in Cycle 1, OT1 yearns for a more substantial community presence and regrets the prevailing sense of isolation and limited collegiality. Though OT2 values opportunities to learn with others, she believes there are limits to teachers’ opportunities at schools like OES. OT1 values OT2’s presence as her cycle partner because she is an invaluable social and professional asset, and because before her arrival, her perception of isolation was greater. She emphasizes the importance of having a compatible peer and teaching partner: “It’s just so important to have someone to talk to you know ... it makes a difference having a co-worker that you can work well with.” Believing that structured times for meeting with peers from other rural schools would provide a fluid network for sharing that does not currently exist OT1 wishes the province or school board would mandate face to face professional learning for rural teachers. OP suggests OES has to be prepared to utilize webinars to counter the challenges of their isolation. However, both teachers disapprove of this professional learning platform with OT1 remarking “it’s so

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boring you know. They're like, 'pretend you're in a group discussion' ... video conference is brutal ... It's not the same as collaboration ... isolation is so hard."

At OES, most students' home language is French, whereas for most of the other schools across the board, the students' mother tongue is English. The emergent English learning needs of OT1's and OT2's students appear influential upon the desired directions of their professional learning. OP believes that some foundational language learning needs are absent in the board supported reading initiatives. For example, OT1 questions the effectiveness and relatability of current early reading professional learning opportunities for her students and would like more contextualized professional learning: "there needs to be an early literacy for ESL kids, does there need to be one for English natives? Most definitely. It is totally different and it's not fair." In terms of the curriculum, OT1 believes that essential and engaging aspects of reading instruction connected to her students' future needs are neglected. In her opinion, there should be more of a focus on nonfiction to concretely connect more holistically with the lives these students live: "the boys especially who are often more reluctant readers and writers, they love nonfiction."

Within the school board, there is one classroom with an expert early reading teacher for modelling one of the board early reading programs. OT1 has visited the model classroom, and she believes it does not reflect the reality she perceives is necessary for her teaching needs: "it was like watching a show ... I want to see the struggle, I want it to be real. Everyone knows when it's a staged performance." In this early phase of her career and alongside her students' specific needs, OT2 perceives one board supported reading program takes too long to figure out, and if she used it, she would have to adapt it to make it useful for her students. Affected by the perceived limits of the current reading initiative OT2 spends hours of out-of-school time learning to integrate contextually relevant reading instruction into her classroom reading program. For

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example, over the winter break, she created sets of guided reading books to connect with her students' interests, something the collections provided to the schools she perceives are lacking. She spends time after school, searching for online resources and tips to differentiate her early reading instruction. Both teachers exhibit a sense of cultural exclusion in terms of their perceptions that more professional learning and resources relatable to their teaching environment are needed for including their students in more meaningful opportunities for learning how to read.

Representing a further notion of exclusion are perceptions of professional learning being restrictive because of financial and timing constraints. When professional learning conflicts with other priorities, teachers are forced to make difficult choices. For example, OT1 explains that the scheduling of professional learning days is often on holidays, special days, evaluation, and reporting times. She believes that this timing creates barriers to her participation unless she is willing to sacrifice extra hours on weekends and evenings. She also believes that this creates a sense of discord between professional and personal priorities. Financial constraints related to attending professional learning brought up by OT1 and OT2 revolve around obtaining funding to cover their replacement teachers while they are away from the school. Broadly, OT2 believes that the board is not spending enough on professional development; and OT1 remarks that she pays in advance and waits too long for reimbursement after registering for professional development and paying for her lodging and food. To her, this inflexibility restrains her opportunities and her desire to travel to attend professional development: "You can only put up with that for so long before you say I'm not wasting anymore of my personal time or money on professional development no matter how awesome it would be to go ... Something needs to be done so that we feel like it's worth it." Emerging from these barriers are perceptions of

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negativity towards much current professional learning that appears to directly relate to the school's location, the specific needs that their students have, and the ensuing issues of accessibility.

Theme 2. Early Reading Practices Cobbled Together. In the early stages of their careers OT1 and OT2 reflect a developing sense of self-efficacy in relation to how they perceive their reading instruction as meeting their students' needs. Here self-efficacy comprises the participants' beliefs and confidence towards taking and transferring their prior knowledge and professional learning experiences into their early reading practice. In their first year with the board, OT1 and OT2 had to participate in the mandatory new teacher induction program. Both felt limitations concerning their professional learning choices. OP explained that though the induction program directs teacher learning through the lens of twelve teacher competencies, usually there are four specific competencies that most teachers focus on: classroom environment (designing a classroom), structuring teaching (e.g., pacing, delivery), planning (units, lessons), and evaluation (assessment and reporting). Over the short term, OT1 perceives that the program was restrictive because her mentor was chosen for her and because of the limited professional learning opportunities available. She spoke about not having specific help for her early reading instruction and that she had to rely on herself more than learning from her mentor to develop practical knowledge in this area. OP also remarked that the new teacher induction program concludes abruptly following the second year. She perceives that the lack of follow-up appears to leave teachers in a lull for structuring their professional growth: A lull that is beginning to be addressed by OP and other rural principals by using the competencies to help all of their teachers frame their personal professional growth goals.

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Reflecting upon her path-as-teacher OT1 acknowledges that “there’s still more that I can learn ... I’ve never discovered the perfect resource. I still have to take things from that book or things from this program or something online.” Her reading program combines skills and strategies from different experiences as she settles into developing a framework for structuring her early reading instruction. In terms of layering elements of different professional learning experiences, OT1 merges past learning experiences into the present; for example, her prior Smartboard certification helps her use technology to incorporate vocabulary strategy instruction into her teaching. Further, OT1 is adapting early reading professional learning to meet the reading needs of her students. Certain letter sounds not similarly represented between French and English require her flexibility in merging board-provided reading programs to fit her students’ language needs. Representing a growing sense of self-efficacy, OT1 is confident in adapting her reading instruction by distinguishing which elements in the board-provided sound and vocabulary program are lacking within her school’s context. Incorporating games, reinforcing newly covered materials and linking to her students’ early English reading needs are ways she believes technology can help her design fresh and relevant classroom literacy instruction.

OT2 appears to be in a stage of teaching defined by a more immediate reaction to her students' needs. She has taught in two different schools in the board, representing the reality of many beginning teachers, and has never taught the same grade twice. OT2's devotion to her students' needs surfaces throughout all of the interviews, yet her longer-term reading planning and design appear to be reactions to immediate situations: “I don’t plan for the year ... I don’t plan like a crazy big plan ahead of time ... No. It’s very like that morning.” Priorities for providing for students’ immediate needs intermingle with self-confidence in how she perceives she is meeting these needs. Speaking about planning phonics-based elements for her reading

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instruction: "I pull out pieces from there and I rewrite them ... So there's a little bit of planning there ... I can do that twenty minutes before class ... I don't put a lot of focus I just kind of know where I'm going." At this time, aspects of confidence, belief and understanding and willingness reflect the challenges of applying all of what she has observed and uses from the two board supported reading professional learning initiatives: "I've seen her [specialist] do all the lessons and how you do them, so I do use parts of it. There just seems to be so much to do."

OT2 speaks about watching instructional videos and visiting websites to see how educators create relevant resources: "It's sort of like my passion you know ... You're like 'What are my hobbies?' 'Looking at YouTube videos on how to teach.'" Her preference for observational learning translates to watching reading experts modelling instruction. Observing others regardless of the platform provides her technical teaching skills: "I like to mimic a lot of the things that I like from seeing other people teach." OT2 currently prefers learning through observation by situating herself in the background and watching other educators modelling reading instruction. She speaks about her guided reading practice being influenced by a range of educators: "teachers ... mentor teacher ... resource teacher ... many people on You Tube." OT1 welcomes personal visits for immediate feedback: "I'm very open, my door's always open, like I want your opinion ... I can only learn from that so I really do welcome a lot of input ... You know as soon as someone gives me a good idea it's on a post-it and the next time I can get it put together I give it a try."

Additionally, and alluded to in the first theme, the board-supported reading programs and associated professional learning have been met with varying degrees of acceptance by OT1 and OT2. At this early stage in their careers, whole-scale implementation of these initiatives in their classrooms is perceived by them to be unrealistic. Both admit that professional learning

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experiences centred in these reading programs positively influence some general aspects of their reading instruction. However, they did not address how these programs specifically improve their teaching or their students' reading achievement. Referencing one board literacy initiative, OT1 remarks, "It's not my favorite reading program, it's got some holes, some flaws, but they do teach you some really interesting techniques if you're going to do a read aloud." Though OT2 sprinkles ingredients of this balanced literacy program into her reading instruction, she remains resistant to its wholesale implementation: "I really wish we could do this ... but it's ... taking the month or two months ... or sometimes three months, to really train them [the students] to do it ... I feel I'm losing so much time." She perceives that it lacks relevance to her and her students' needs, and she finds it hard to fully buy in: "I feel like it's a bit of a waste of time in the younger grades. I don't think meaningful work is being done ... Like it doesn't have to be individual stations ... they're supposed to visit all centres, and like it's just I don't know ... I like the idea if the kids were actually going to get meaningful work out of it ... Yeah [sighing]."

She resigns to using elements of it but does not appear ready to implement it faithfully, nor has she received any formal training on it: "I haven't had any formal training on it ... I've seen it used. So I do use some of the concepts from it ... I sometimes do it from time to time [whispering]. I don't love it." Though she appears to be a touch cynical and anxious about the board reading initiatives, OT2 attributes the presence of a particular reading specialist to reigniting her passion for teaching reading. Observing SB3's expert teaching has convinced her that the program's elements are effective instructional strategies that she should use in her reading instruction. A writer's workshop led by a board reading consultant and based in poetry motivated OT1 to transfer new elements into her language arts instruction. Finally, both teachers are receptive to having reading experts visit their classrooms to help design their environments.

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If SB3 came into model and set up the early literacy stations for one week, OT1 believes that she would feel prepared to execute the program more reliably.

OT1 and OT2 perceive professional learning that provides early reading resources, and that models relevant instructional strategies as influential for transforming their reading practices. Currently, these experiences centre on learning specific aspects of how to provide early reading instruction rather than learning, understanding and implementing board supported reading programs. For example, an opportunity to act as a school literacy representative allowed OT1 to meet with representatives from other schools over two years. This experience introduced her to literacy instruction elements that she likely would not have encountered if she was not a literacy rep. Along with other grade one and two teachers from around the board, the representatives shared ideas and learned techniques to fuse poetry within language arts instruction. This experience inspired OT1 to bring fresh opportunities into her classroom: “new authors, new books, new styles that I’d never seen ... and you can see how even though I learned something very simple ... in PD how that can really change your instruction.” Recounting positive prior experiences with another board early reading initiative, OT2 expresses the benefits of being provided with concrete examples and resources to use in her instruction: “I would be interested in getting my hands on those mini-lessons ... Oh I liked it. Just getting into the school and seeing other classes and seeing other examples.”

Theme 3. Establishing a Community of Readers. OT1 and OT2 establish their classroom community of readers by empathizing with their students’ sociocultural situations and developing engaging classroom reading environments that are foundational to meeting their students’ unique learning needs. By creating positive relationships with their students, both teachers perceive that learning how to read is enhanced, and overall satisfaction in their

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classroom learning communities has improved. As described in the first theme, most OES students speak French as their first language. This context provides unique challenges for early reading teachers. Conversations with OT1 and OT2 indicate that establishing a positive classroom community is crucial to supporting their students' complex learning needs.

Creating this environment has been influenced by past learning experiences, and both teachers believe that creating environments suitable for their students' unique needs is crucial for establishing effective reading programs. These professional learning experiences reflect a need to motivate students, ease their anxiety, and help them settle into their English language reading environment. OT2 spoke about the importance of connecting with her students at the beginning of each week. She learned the value of creating connections by volunteering in a classroom that provided intensive language arts supports, and that began each week, ensuring each student shared experiences in English about something from their weekend. Recounting her students' fears and stresses over having to learn in English, OT1 recalled a professor's advice from a second language additional qualification course. Initially, OT1 had difficulty connecting socially with her students: "I had my students tell me I was mean cause I asked them to speak English ... I found if you want them to take on the risk of speaking another language and being laughed at or just making mistakes I need to do the same thing." By putting herself into her students' shoes, she could connect in a way she could not before. Allowing her students to use their first language in conjunction with English and challenging herself to use French at times in her teaching helped unify the class.

For OT1 and OT2, it appears that creating classrooms respectful of their students' particular language needs is believed to reduce the chance of failure by making learning more culturally relevant. Cognizant of their students' French language background, both participants

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recognize the importance of delivering high-quality vocabulary instruction. Most of their students read below average due to their emerging English language skills and socioeconomic background. Developing independent readers based on guiding students from their current levels of need and interest emerged in discussions with OT1: "If I have a group of students that are at kindergarten level I have to teach kindergarten, I can't move forward ... you can't be motivated unless you find whatever is going to click with them and it has to be something that's got a personal significance for them." Setting goals and adapting to changes in routines provides a safe environment for learning, according to OT1. OT2 also perceives that in order for her students to be motivated to learn, she has first to establish positive relationships with them. As trust develops, she sees her students' willingness to improve their reading abilities. OT2 takes time to introduce, highlight and discuss new vocabulary and spend time during a holiday to construct guided reading books based on students' interests and reading levels. OT2 regularly monitors her students' current reading levels and works with individual students when necessary. "I start with letter sounds first ... and then ... words and a writing sample that they can do on their own and obviously a BAS [Benchmark Assessment System] mark so I can start putting them into groups ... then I just do the little things that I think are missing ... as the year goes on I see what they need to work on." Both teachers perceive that generating personal connections with their students and as a class to be an intrinsic catalyst for improving reading achievement.

Stimulating passion and interest are central to OT1's and OT2's reading instruction. Partly this is represented by how both teachers model the pleasure and significance of reading in their lives. OT1 allots time to read silently with her students to model and share how reading is enjoyable. Additionally, she seeks to stoke her students' passion for reading by designing a classroom that accessibly displays an extensive range and quantity of popular children's

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literature: “I have a display for books ... Pete the Cat - I’m obsessed with him and I think I’ve created three generations of students that are now Pete obsessed because I get so excited ... So just finding those special books that make it really interesting.” OT1 seeks to motivate her students by fusing reading time with lessons on the importance of reading to provide safe opportunities for sharing their perspectives on what they are reading: “They need to know that reading can be pleasurable ... this is important too, just reading for fun ... we’ve had to talk about that as ... ‘Why do we read?’ ... you know you’ve failed if a kid doesn’t know why we’re learning to read.” For OT2, part of her reading program also supports explicit discussion of the importance of reading in students’ lives. Because most of her students do not have English as a first language, she ensures class discussions about reading: “We talk about reading a lot. And I talk about the importance of reading and I always say, ‘Do you want to drive.’ and they’re like, ‘yes,’ all of them, and I said ‘well you need to learn how to read so like let’s go’ [laughing].” Both teachers appear to strive to implement practices within their literacy programs that develop ways for their students to connect to literacy that is pleasurable, safe, and inclusive and are rooted in their students’ realities.

Blending Elementary School

Blending Elementary School’s location is quite different from the other two case schools. BES serves a suburban population. The two teacher participants have been working together in this school for quite a few years, and the participants, generally, did not relate to any particular needs within a community-minded context such as culture, language, or socioeconomic. The five themes emerging in the within-case analysis of Blending Elementary provide an interesting portrayal of community, reading instruction and professional learning in a mid-sized, suburban

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elementary school from the perspective of two teachers in the mid-stages of their teaching careers.

Theme 1. Foundations and Change. Tied into numerous past experiences, the notion of enhancing prior beliefs is represented by BT1's and BT2's developing perspectives towards the landscape of early reading instruction and the influential range of their past learning experiences on their early reading practice. This developing outlook reflects their teaching trajectories; in how instruction is guided within the multitudinous backdrop of students' needs, and with dependence upon professional learning to inform their practice and beliefs and improve student reading achievement. Layering knowledge and understanding from diverse professional learning experiences across time shapes BT1's and BT2's perceptions of the diverse teaching knowledge they need for providing an inclusive and effective reading program. BT2 remarks, "a lot of layering since I've started teaching," comprising professional learning on child development, classroom management, social responsibility, designing a whole class reading program, and phonics instruction. Remarking on the learning, change and teaching process, she notes, "it's an ongoing thing ... the layering approach," and perceiving that her learning experiences are fitting together "like a puzzle."

Both participants' professional growth develops by having the self-awareness, flexibility and willingness to seek change opportunities. Openness to accessing new tools and contemporary ways of providing reading instruction reflects BT2's commitment to applying her learning in her practice. Using these tools and updated strategies to make reading an engaging learning experience for her students, BT2 remarks that good reading instruction: "is the tools, the practice, the listening and discussing of great books." She has adapted more systematic instruction into her whole language belief system that underlies her reading instruction approach.

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For approximately her first ten years of teaching, she did not value code-based elements of reading instruction. It was not until experiencing its value through the board's code-based (word-study) reading initiative that she decided it was time to include it. She perceives that her most recent approach blends a rich reading environment with layers of "other different strategies or tools." Over time BT2 has committed to enhancing her foundations of reading instruction by integrating child development, attachment theory and organizational strategies and by working to integrate these professional learning experiences into her early reading environment and practices. For example, she remarked that "organizational strategies are to me a key to making the day successful ... it just eliminates a lot of conflict, which is not good for teaching, which is not good for learning and it gives a sense of security and we know where we're going, what we're supposed to do."

BT1 also underwent a shift in her teaching beliefs and changed her instruction to include more explicit code-based reading instruction. Speaking to this shift, BT1 recounts: "we sit down and we do actual phonetic instruction ... It's real explicit and that's changed a lot from the beginning of my career where I was like, 'Oh they'll get it through osmosis.'" BT1's ongoing search for effective ways to help struggling readers illustrates the influence of a commitment to guiding her learning and change concerning all of her students' success: "You just keep trying things until you find something that kind of works ... then it stops working and then you have to find something else." For BT1, professional learning was instrumental at the beginning of her career: "I didn't know how to do a guided reading lesson when I started teaching. No one told me how to do it in teacher's college. It was through PD and learning communities that I learned how to do that stuff." BT2 similarly expresses this sentiment. Not until she joined a particular professional learning network focused on the two board reading initiatives did she understand the

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effect that small group guided reading could have on her students' reading development: "[i]t's been huge [the] last three years." A strong element to this theme reflects an understanding of how these teachers' varied early reading experiences influence their perspectives of their instruction and how a range of experiences are appreciated as they were seeking to become better early reading teachers in their beginning years.

Six years ago, BT2 returned part-time to teaching after an extended parental leave. She attributes her participation in an early reading professional learning community to helping her design an effective and efficient classroom reading program since her return. Previously, she remarks, she would take thirty minutes to introduce a lesson, but now was providing more effective focus lessons in 10 minutes: "my first kind of experience seeing these little focus lessons ... was a bit of a mindset change ... that was an eye-opener for me." Professional learning explicitly influences areas of BT1's early reading practices as well. Initially, she believed students would, over time, become efficient decoders. Participating in a board supported reading initiative focusing on elements of phonemic awareness and phonics contributed to shifting this belief. BT1 believes she has become better at providing explicit instruction in teaching letter sound and recognition strategies, and that has helped her students who struggle to learn how to read. Generally speaking, BT1 and BT2's involvement in two early reading board initiatives over the last decade has helped them transform their practices. BT1 believes she has learned the importance of synthesizing and structuring oral language, writing, and reading within small group instruction. BT2 perceives she is developing a more comprehensive perspective that connects the dots for her by merging her whole language beliefs alongside an appreciation of the benefits of explicit reading instruction. The perspectives of BT1 and BT2 in this theme indicate the role of professional learning on their early reading instruction.

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Expressed in fairly positive perspectives, the role of professional learning on early reading learning trajectories and instruction reflects ways that professional learning alters teachers' perceptions of the processes and components of reading instruction across time.

Theme 2. Intrapersonal Responsibility. Accountability, obligations and perceptions of divided responsibilities are tensions BT1 and BT2 express in discussions about obstacles to meeting their professional learning needs. Along with a sense of refined learning responsibilities that develop as teaching experience and maturity accumulates is the notion of increasing personal responsibilities and the challenges that they present to participating in the professional learning that they would like to.

Alluded to above is a bumpiness resulting from trying to balance personal and professional responsibilities. BT1 and BT2 are mothers of young children. Balancing their personal responsibilities with their sense of professional obligation generates friction and often leads to limited involvement in professional learning for long periods. BT2 is not motivated to attend workshops that require her to be away from home. Further, following several years of involvement in ongoing early reading professional learning, she believes she has progressively developed an effective literacy program; but that "there's still more fine-tuning to do" and, therefore, doesn't want to "jump on too many ships at once." With her collected experience over time, BT2 values focused and concentrated learning opportunities. However, connected to this degree of appreciation for the more in-depth learning experiences are the barriers to her professional learning constrained by her current life situation. Unless notified about something interesting, she is satisfied with her current state of learning: "If I have things on my plate already that I feel I could continue to improve why would I go and take another chunk of stuff." BT1 wishes that available professional learning experiences are more considerate for mothers

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and teachers' family obligations. She believes that much of the professional learning that occurs after school is not accessible for many teachers; that too many teachers face obligations outside of the school, which often makes it difficult for teachers in the same school to connect after students leave for the day. BT1 revealed this was the first year she had "done the afterschool stuff [in many years] because my mom happened to move to the community so can help me out and pick my kids up from daycare."

For both teacher participants, professional learning experiences within their school and particularly in their classrooms are the ones that are most appealing to them. For BT2 having an expert visit after school limits the pressures that come from financing a supply teacher, the disruptions that come by leaving her students for a day or two, and the pressures of being away from her family. BT1 would like to use her prep time to explore reading practices and philosophy. She perceives that it is a rare space where she might be able to work around her personal and professional constraints. Ultimately though, she would like the consideration of teachers' learning needs to be more inclusive. She believes that professional learning in the school and during the day would positively address many of the accessibility issues and benefit a large population of teachers. Still, she questions the likelihood of this occurring bringing up the obligations she has during her teaching hours: "I would really love to have the time in my day ... to use that [prep] to sit down and read a couple chapters ... but I'm calling parents, emailing parents, cleaning up the mess that the last class made, trying to catch up on my math marking." Family and professional obligations are always at play and appear a burden upon teachers' sense of professional and personal responsibilities and barriers to participating in sustained and deep levels of professional learning. These barriers emerge over time as teachers have families and as they grapple with obligations to their students and their parents each school day.

Theme 3. Valued Relationships: Peers and Experts. Throughout the discussions with BT1 and BT2, both express that their relationships with other professionals influences their reading knowledge and beliefs. These shared perspectives of BT1 and BT2 represent the value they place on their learning community because of: (a) its diverse range of individuals within the social collective who embody varying roles and, (b) how new knowledge and early reading practices emerge. Learning a common language and recognizing roles and supports within their community through sustained professional relationships with their peers, mentors, and board-level experts is perceived by both teachers to be positively influencing their early reading instruction.

According to BT1 and BT2, one-day professional learning workshops located outside of their school board do not provide the sustained social connections they perceive are necessary to transform their instruction. For both of them, membership in a network of early reading teachers from BES and other schools in the board provides a universal language that nurture and sustain professional learning relationships. BT1 and BT2 perceive that these types of social learning experiences improve their reading instruction because the combination of active elements to their learning is effective. Listening to others, hearing about new practices, observing how others teach and dialoguing with colleagues and experts provide rich and intimate ways for BT1 and BT2 to learn: “Just having that inspiration of other teachers ... having that around you rather than nobody else trying it or nobody to balance ideas off of” (BT2). For BT1, the side conversations emerging in small learning communities are very influential to her guided reading knowledge and practice. Sustained opportunities for collaborative learning ensures that multiple voices are learning in shared spaces. Sustained learning experiences within her school and throughout the board have been influential to her teaching by providing a broad range of ideas to

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“modify” depending on her class and student needs. She credits ongoing reading professional learning initiatives for helping her connect the dots to early reading instruction and for creating valued learning communities: “for a few years, every couple of months, usually with people within your board or your school ... building a community of likeminded people so you’re not working in your school in isolation.”

For BT1 and BT2, their professional relationships are powerful vehicles for teacher and student change. At the school level, both participants express how a shared language around reading instruction emerged between teachers. It appears to represent an organic form of learning possible because of a collective sense of understanding generated. BT2 remarks how open the conversations are at BES because everyone is coming from a similar base of understanding: “we’re a lucky school ... we’re all talking the same language ... we’ve been in these workshops together ... we’re all implementing them in some form in our classroom ... it really gives us a spring board ... our kids in grade one they go to the next class ... [and] they’re doing it there and the next one.” This shared approach for learning opens up ongoing dialogue and BT2 attributes this for her “plugging into the reading in a bigger way.” BT1 noted that her cycle team holds impromptu meetings for sharing ideas on specific areas of early reading and make lists together that they try in their classes and discuss later. Speaking with a colleague in the hall or emailing the lead literacy consultant is an efficient way to get answers and resources. Learning with others across time appears to instill a sense of belongingness and community. However, BT1 perceives that consistent collaborative professional learning “even once a month you know would be fabulous” is difficult to sustain. Nevertheless, professional learning with peers from other schools and over time is valued and would “certainly [be] essential if you didn’t have like-minded people in your own school” (BT2).

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Speaking about the power of an effective mentoring presence on her teaching journey BT1 remarks: “[W]hat has really helped me to become a better teacher, and I like to think I am a fairly decent teacher ... it’s mentoring that is the most helpful.” SB3, a board reading consultant who visits schools and works with teachers in their classrooms, is responsible for promoting a “mindset change” for BT2 in framing her literacy classes. BT2 would rather turn to the resource teacher at BES or expert consultants from the board for specific information to help a struggling student rather than sign up for workshops. For her, these experts are usually available and provide valuable resources directly connected to her early reading professional learning and her students’ reading needs. BT1 emphasizes the influence of SB3 and another early reading consultant and mentor (M1) early in her career in shaping her early reading instruction: (a) “When SB3 comes in and shows you how to do it in your classroom ... that was really for me the most meaningful,” and (b) “M1 ... came in and she was ‘this is actually what you should be doing,’ showed us how to do it and I was like ‘great now I know what to do.’” Claiming, “my first year teaching I didn’t teach anyone to read, I had no idea what I was doing,” she believes that she learned the fundamentals for providing small group intensive reading instruction from M1’s expert guidance in her second year teaching. In fact, BT1’s early mentorship experiences reverberate almost 20 years later an interest in herself becoming a mentor to beginning teachers. She perceives that this kind of leadership experience would be an effective way to sharpen her early reading perspectives and help to make herself “a little more cautious of what [she’s] doing.” The opportunity to mentor is one way that she believes will offer her a sustainable learning experience and help her continue “to be in the know.”

Theme 4. Responding to Student Need. According to BP, current professional learning trends are moving towards making schooling inclusive for more students. She remarks that much

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professional learning has shifted to a focus on understanding the learner (e.g., “anxiety, or autism ... transgender ... exam conditions”). This shift is noticeable in BT2’s recent interest in understanding the nature of child attachment and development and how she perceives it influences her approach to early reading instruction. BT1 spoke of the board recently directing some focus towards teaching communication (conversation/expression) skills to help students learn how to express their emotions and communicate their specific learning needs effectively.

Expressing how vast and ever-changing the notion of the term *struggling* is, BT2 says: “you could have ten struggling readers and they’re all struggling in a different way.” BT1 notes that a significant challenge to teaching reading is finding consistent instructional reading strategies and programs for struggling readers. What works with one student often does not translate fluently to others. There is a sense of heaviness or burden that both teachers emit as they express the annual challenges trying to meet the unique needs of their struggling early readers. Bringing up a workshop on child development she has attended several times, BT2 mentioned the varying conditions students in grade 1 have. The range of students’ brain development varies greatly. She believes this contributes to much of the unsettled and impulsive behaviours occurring in the more traditional confines of a grade 1 curriculum compared to their prior play-based learning environments in daycare and kindergarten. Sequentially, she believes this makes learning to read a challenging exercise for too many of her students. This belief influences how BT2 considers how to structure and organize reading instruction within environments designed to be fun, relaxing, secure and safe: “some of those kids come in grade 1 and other parts of them still need time to develop ... only having the benchmarks and the instruction without the other is not happening. I don’t think you’re getting the best out of your

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kids if you do that ... you need both sides.” BT1 believes that her motivation for differentiating reading instruction and developing passionate readers is central for learning how to read:

I think if I'm so enthusiastic about it ... it rubs off on them. If I look like I don't care they're not going to care ... and it becomes a very personal relationship right ... Like you get very close to someone when you are teaching them how to read ... You become really emotionally attached to them as readers and they become very emotionally attached to you as the person who is helping them read.

Trusting relationships spark motivation according to both participants, and this generates strengthened relationships with and enjoyment towards reading: “You need time to know them, time to have some fun with them, and to relax with them and not just be geared towards an academic goal ... [W]hen you know the kids feel secure and safe ... and I can see the kids relaxing ... you can move forward” (BT2).

Though BT1 and BT2 believe that early reading professional learning helps them with their overall early reading instruction, they believe that board-provided professional learning opportunities for struggling readers are lacking. Remarking that board reading initiatives help to provide a broad range of strategies, BT1 believes that “we're not becoming trained in specific learning disabilities or difficulties.” Both participants desire more in-depth professional learning and perceive that they have a lot more to learn to help their struggling students. BP espouses a contrasting viewpoint on the nature of struggling readers. She believes that most struggling readers overcome their challenges by junior high school. Consulting with teachers when considering if a student might have a learning disability she admits that some kids aren't mature or “there's a reading readiness that's not there.” Taking a broader perspective on the nature of early literacy learning, BT2 spoke about the relationship between learning to read and reading

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readiness. Reading readiness reflects being in a regulated state, conducive to effective interaction and participation in one's learning. A presentation on child development and attachment influenced BT2's developing appreciation of the role of social and emotional factors at play in her students' learning. The developmental information was not too new to her, but relating developmental research findings within an attachment framework "helped validate or explain what was going on with kids and helps me have compassion for the kids as they are in class." Repeated visits to this presenter cemented her belief that you cannot separate your awareness of students' social and developmental stages and needs without considering how they work together to influence students' academic expectations and achievement.

Theme 5. Issues of Accessibility and Uptake. At BES, discussions regarding the accessibility of teacher learning opportunities reveal a sense of friction between levels of administration and teachers and a sense that access to learning often appears out of teachers' control. Reminiscing on returning to this school board some years back, BT1 says she received her learning opportunities in early reading instruction because she asked for it but believes that "if you didn't ask they wouldn't be giving it to you." On certain provincial professional learning days during the year, board personnel and principals attend and invite different teachers to join, but BT1 and BT2 speak to their limited opportunities to be a part of this. BT1 remarking on independently searching for professional learning: "you need to go, you need to seek out the collaboration, you need to ask for the help, you need to go see the people [otherwise] you could sit with no support."

BP's perspective as the school's principal provides another sense to the flow teachers navigate when accessing professional learning. Believing that there are few limitations and many supports for teachers, she sees "it more of like an internal thing, like teachers themselves who

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would be the roadblock not necessarily the system.” She spoke about the different committees and networks her teachers are a part of and that accessing board initiatives occurs by teachers reaching out to her and at times when the board asks her to suggest teachers for varying initiatives. Related to this, and appearing to underpin her instructional leadership, are perceptions on what student success is and how to prioritize students’ early reading needs. For example, each year, teacher teams meet to project which students will perform well or will struggle, and it appears that BP as the principal makes the final decisions on which groups will receive additional interventions. BP sees some students as having inherent reading difficulties but also believes that most students who are struggling in reading will settle into being proficient readers as they mature. This likely plays a part in decisions about who will receive intervention, and it could account for the professional learning goals BP is working on with her staff. Currently, she wants to broaden hers and the staff’s understanding and practical knowledge in helping students develop the metacognitive skills she believes will help them take ownership of their learning.

BT1 believes there has been an overall drop in the availability of early reading professional learning workshops at the board level and in general. A regular participant at annual workshops put on by a company called the Bureau of Educational Research, BT1 remarks that she has not heard of them visiting the area for several years. Currently, a perceived sudden reduction of prior early reading initiatives that were consistent and sustained across time appears to be jarring and disruptive to the fluidity of these participants’ ongoing professional learning journeys. For example, BT1’s general impression on the sustainability of different learning initiatives provided by the board: “It’s never consistent, no, it needs to be.” BT2 spoke more specifically: “the board tends to, I think, get highly focused on one area ... unfortunately some things get picked up ... then they get dropped and the next interesting thing gets picked up and

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dropped, picked up and dropped.” What appears to happen is that as the board drops favoured initiatives, a perceived lack of transparency transpires, and confusion, as well as negativity, is projected from teachers toward the board.

One experience that stands out for BT2 occurred a few years earlier when the board concluded an initiative related to instructional, organizational and classroom management strategy development. It ended abruptly, and she wishes that there had been more memorable in-house work to keep her connected to those prior professional learning experiences. There is a growing sense the current decline will lead to the end of the early reading networks. One early reading collaborative, in particular, appears to be meeting less consistently, and visits from one expert early reading consultant have ceased. The effect that this has on within school team meetings also appears negative as BT1 remarks that their “cycle meetings happen once in a blue moon.”

Finally, BT1 and BT2 attribute some blame for these disruptions to economic concerns. BT2 believes that operating costs are a big reason current sustained early reading professional learning is fading. BT1 relates how teachers shoulder the burden of financial pressures when registering for professional learning. For example, paying for professional learning external to what the board provides is first covered by the individual teacher. Reimbursement comes later. When there are bills to pay and Christmas gifts maxing out the credit card, the obligation to put personal needs first often appears to override down payments on professional learning.

Central Elementary School

Representing Central Elementary School are two teacher participants with a combined 99% of their professional teaching time in this highly populated inner urban elementary school. Emerging from the analysis are four themes relating the influence of contextual uniqueness

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interacting upon CT1's and CT2's early reading teaching and learning. Thrown into the reality of what early reading teaching appears to comprise and their accompanying unpreparedness to provide it, the value of undertaking a range of early reading learning opportunities, the kinds of transformational influences (in particular mentor relationships), the value in understanding students' particular social-emotional needs, and the fractures and barriers to obtaining professional learning interact to influence how CT1 and CT2 perceive their early reading learning and practice. Together these themes portray the essence of teaching and learning within CES' large urban, low-socioeconomic context.

Theme 1. Trial by Fire: Frenzy, Foundations and Commitment to Harnessing Momentum. Perceptions of being overwhelmed with the number of skills and understanding necessary for teaching early reading are associated with the foundational knowledge that early reading professional learning experiences provided CT1 and CT2. The importance of having a range of early reading professional learning experiences emerges from understanding the relationships between professional learning, teachers' early reading instruction, and their students' achievement. For CT1 and CT2, their early years are motivators for their change and growth into early reading teachers. Entry into the completely new learning environment that CT1 and CT2 confronted as beginning teachers prompted them to seek learning experiences that would improve their reading instruction and boost their self-efficacy. Professionally, the difference in years of teaching between CT1 and CT2 is nine, and yet their initial experiences upon entry into early reading teaching are noticeably similar: the perceived overwhelming nature of early reading professional teaching and learning. Looking back, CT2 perceives a lack of refinement in her first professional learning choices. She would often be in audiences of hundreds of other teachers viewing PowerPoints. It took her several years to realize how

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important it was to determine a sustained focus that reflected her classroom teaching needs. CT1 also spoke about how she would attend several large conferences each year in her first five years, going to as many workshops as possible. CT2, reflecting upon her professional readiness for teaching reading in her first year, remarks, "I wasn't a good teacher cause I didn't know what I was doing ... [I was] not prepared at all." CT1 comparably recounts that she: "spent those first two years figuring out how to teach reading." Abrupt, essential, and forced learning experiences appear to be catalysts for change in this early stage of teaching.

The cognitive dissonance arising from their transitions into teaching pushed CT1 and CT2 towards many early reading professional learning experiences. Confronted with the responsibility of teaching the fundamental skill of early reading, at first, the range of suggestions, ways to teach reading and the variety of resources to use in their reading programs were dizzying. CT2 provides a sense of the dizzying nature of these first years of her early reading professional learning journey: "I wasn't a good teacher cause I didn't know what I was doing and it was fresh ... You get so many resources and you get overwhelmed in resources ... and it's like you have to stop and just focus on one or two things not try to use everything." CT1 presents a parallel picture of the unsettling reality of professional learning in teachers' early years. Mentioning that beginning teachers are "just trying to stay afloat," CT1 spoke about how the early years are about figuring out how to implement elements of a reading program. Looking back on her early years, she shared her perspective on how critical it is to learn how to set up the framework for early reading and to provide a structured reading environment for students to learn to read. The sense of urgency to learn how to provide reading instruction (structure, skills and knowledge) reverberated with these teachers during the beginning years of their teaching as they confronted the complexity and challenges that comprise early reading instruction.

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Though overwhelming, both teachers attribute immersion into a range of workshops as experiences responsible for instilling their foundational understanding of the essential elements for providing effective early reading instruction. For CT1, this involve seeking out as much early reading professional learning as she could in her beginning years, learning about the value of different parts of a reading program, and the significance of setting up a program that provides her time to work with her students. She credits one professional learning group, the Bureau of Education and Research (BER), for providing her with resources and strategies to help her in her early years: “Their presenters were so good ... they gave you materials and such incredible teaching stuff ... that’s where I learned the bulk of my early literacy skills and experiences.” CT2 also attributes her learning to her school board and the BER in helping her understand the basics of early reading instruction and how to structure her program.

Workshops provided essential skills that helped CT1 and CT2 begin to implement necessary structures into their reading programs. Learning how to teach decoding, word work skills, shared reading, guided reading, and structure a balanced reading program were a few of the skills they learned and used in creating their instructional environments. CT2 perceives that she benefited greatly from two board-supported early reading learning initiatives in terms of structuring language arts and obtaining practical resources to facilitate her instruction. CT1 recounts the influence of early reading professional learning through a focus on structure, provision of resources and the variety of specific elements: “I went to them all ... Whenever one would come up I would go to it and learn and learn and apply it in my classroom ... I became quite focused on guided reading and becoming a good guided reading instructor and as soon as that happened you could really make your students progress.”

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CT1's early experiences and dedication to providing and improving upon her guided reading instruction has been ongoing for close to 20 years. CT2, with fewer years of experience, has taught grade one for 8 of her 11 years. Seeking new strategies or adapting pre-existing ones into their reading instruction emerges as new needs arise. Professional learning's role appears to be essential in these teachers' growth and their students' success. For CT2, this shows in how she adapts reading strategies discovered in professional learning to meet the diverse needs of her students:

When you become more experienced you realize what's working for your class and what you need to do to help that cohort of students in the classroom so you start picking workshops or PLs [professional learnings] according to what the needs are ... PD reinforces what you already know and allows you to assess the efficiency of learning strategies and then it makes it more relevant to students.

CT2, through her experiences with a school board reading consultant and her role in board reading initiatives, is now one of the board's model teachers for early reading instruction and literacy centres. She believes it took her four years to implement her reading program effectively and confidently. CT2 will still spend weeks to months (depending on her class' capacity for independence) at the beginning of each year, committed to introducing one element of the program at a time. CT1 believes that her early reading professional learning experiences across her 21 year career are directly responsible for improving her students' reading achievement: "It's taught me better ways to teach them so then they've achieved higher levels directly relative to the professional development that I've taken." For CT1, it is her commitment to implementing a guided reading program that leads her to perceive success in providing small group instruction while her other students work independently: "The whole mystery and

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challenge was ... being able to do that ... Honestly when I've had classes that have struggled ... I've had the most success moving them through small group instruction like that.”

Confronting the complexities of early reading professional learning occurred early in both teachers' entry into the teaching profession. Both perceive they were underprepared to teach early reading at the beginning of their careers and focused their professional learning upon its components and effective ways of providing it. These experiences ignited a passion for teaching early reading and were essential to their current practices. Both perceive that developing teaching practices for improving student outcomes depends on consistent participation in ongoing and related professional learning opportunities. The combination of experience blended with CT1's commitment to learning the intricacies of a program over time is integral to her students' reading achievement: “I feel like the PD, the training, the experience, I really feel like I've gotten better with age. Like I feel more confident in what I'm doing ... I think the onus is going to be on me to, through professional learning really, like through the internet, through reading, whatever I can attend.” CT2 initially introduced to one board reading initiative for designing a cohesive literacy structure in her first year of teaching grade one did not, until her fourth year of implementing it, feel capable of providing all components at once. At first, engulfed within a complexity of responsibilities, she believes that her commitment to learning and implementing this reading program provided her with the structure she required to support her students' early reading needs. CT1's drive to continue to strive and to “crack the code” or CT2's commitment to learn, experiment, and after four years, confidently implement all elements in her reading program reflects their passion for staying connected to their past learning experiences and their belief in the importance of seeking opportunities to extend their understanding of the reading process throughout their careers.

Theme 2. Engaged Mentor Relationships. Connecting to the role of professional learning throughout their teaching careers is the influence of mentors on both teachers. Though CT1's and CT2's mentoring experiences are markedly different, it does appear that their mentors have positively impacted these teachers' professional learning experiences, early reading instruction and, subsequently, their students' reading achievement. CT2 finds the relationship she has established with SB3, a former teacher and current reading consultant with the school board, a very fortunate influence upon her teaching. CT1 appreciates past involvement in small learning networks and is unequivocal about the power one memorable weeklong mentorship experience has had on her teaching career.

CT2 attributes her relationship with SB3 as central to her access to a range of early reading professional learning groups and her role as a classroom model teacher for the two board reading early reading initiatives. Until she had the support from SB3, CT2 believes she missed participating in different learning groups, having a mentoring relationship, and knowing how to access resources for professional learning. Appearing as an essential aspect of this relationship is that much of this professional learning appears to have happened in CT2's classroom. For CT2, resources to use for practicing and creating mini-lessons were helpful. The addition of a reading expert in leading lessons with conversations considering these lessons helped her see how things worked or why the expert provided particular aspects in their teaching. Learning with resources provided and an expert to model has also helped CT2 believe that she does not always need to "recreate the wheel."

Having someone to learn with and from has been transformative for CT1. Following an extremely rough stretch of teaching in her second year, she attributes a turnaround in her attitude and practice to her principal and a retired teacher her principal brought in to spend five straight

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and “non-threatening days observing and helping [her] in the classroom.” After school every day for a couple of hours, they would discuss short- and long-term planning and chart ideas on paper. The mentor helped CT1 use her strengths and to understand the areas where she was struggling. She claims it changed her by helping her understand and develop crucial skills at this critical juncture early in her teaching career. CT1 was positively affected by this one-week mentoring experience early in her career and suggests that there should be more opportunities for teachers who perceive they are struggling with a particular part of their teaching. Ongoing access to experts is something that CT1 would appreciate having more remarking that “in a perfect world every second Friday I would go to school and someone would teach me how to do things better in my classroom ... it would be more practice than reactive.” She believes that this would allow her to focus on classroom needs, and if it involved colleagues, this would be extra motivating. Learning by watching those you professionally admire is one form of professional learning she would like more opportunities to have. She also understands that though this transformed her teaching, it could be considered an obtrusion to other teachers.

Although different, both teachers perceive the positive impact more experienced teachers have had on their early reading instruction by helping them structure, organize and implement instruction that meets their students' early reading needs.

Theme 3. Student Well-being and Societal Shift. This theme points to the perceived importance that the three CES participants place on recognizing that a large proportion of their students arrive at school in emotional states that unfortunately set them up for negative academic, social and behavioural consequences; and that improving these circumstances appears to rely on a school-based approach. CT1, CT2 and CP believe that one of their primary responsibilities is to create positive learning environments that motivates all students to learn.

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The complex needs within and among students at CES are powerful influencers upon CT1's and CT2's teaching practices, their ability to connect with students, and their professional learning. They both recognize that each student brings diverse collections of experiences to school and that these experiences are responsible for influencing emotions, physical needs and, therefore, attitudes towards learning, peers and teachers.

CT2 spoke about the uniqueness of student cohorts each year. She relates how these yearly particularities mediate how sufficient her current instructional knowledge is. For her, this limits how predictable professional learning will be over time. Whereas in her early years CT2 would attend all the professional learning she could access, she now seeks opportunities associated with her current students' learning needs. For example, her most recent professional learning included integrating yoga and brain breaks into her literacy instruction. CP's interest in children's social, emotional and developmental attitudes appears to anchor CES's focus on helping students regulate and positively attach to school. He finds that compared to a generation before, many students are arriving at school unready to learn:

Why's the teachability changed? I'd say factors in society have changed, the business of parents have changed, the amount of care that our kids are in, away from the parents and grandparents, or aunts and uncles has changed. So context has changed ... Kids are not coming into school at the same emotional relational place that we assume they are... (CP)

On top of this societal shift is the bumpiness many students experience in their transition from their kindergarten, play-based environments, to the more traditional landscape of academic-accountability and expectation within the grade one curriculum. Expectations of learning in this grade one environment appear to reveal that too many students are not ready for this and have other needs that require attention before smoothening the shift into the grade one curriculum.

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CT1 shared how she perceives her failures in meeting the struggling early reading needs of particular students and that these perceived failures provoked her to incorporate play-based principles within her early reading instruction because of the many students she felt were not ready for learning to read in the more traditional setting.

CP believes that the board approaches professional learning from the perspective of what is most important to them in terms of overall academic successes. He related that the current system prioritizes standardized performances, compares students to averages and that this notion of success limits the opportunities for the emergence of improved social and emotional skills too many students need. CP also believes that many students (“in our school anyway for about 40% of the kids”) need teachers to do the work that used to be done at home. At CES, CP is explicit that societal shifts and changes to the family structure connect to a deceleration of many students’ social-emotional development, which subsequently impacts reading readiness. He believes that the curricular expectations for students in grade one are above their current capacities and that asking for independence from students contradicts what many need: “dependency on the safety of the relationship, a dependency on the trust and expectations and the structure.” CP notes, it is a crippling paradox when expecting children to be teachable through their transition into the more traditional curriculum and associated pedagogy. For CP, this paradox reveals some limits to current expectations for these students, within a current societal context, many whom he believes are not emotionally ready for learning in more traditional school structures.

CT1 and CT2 also relate their perceptions that an increasingly large population of students at CES lack sufficient confidence, independence and motivation to learn how to read. These elements restrict the formation of positive relationships between teachers and students;

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and consequentially chances for learning in school. CT2's own experiences of being an outsider and learning a new language after moving to Canada when she was eight helped shape her perspective that factors originating outside the school heavily influence student achievement. CT2 believes that students' academic struggles will be reduced by teachers who understand how to design inclusive classrooms and school communities: "you think about your struggles ... I don't want them to go through that ... If the kids don't have a positive attitude ... they'll shut down." Sustained learning experiences focusing on child development and attachment alongside her principal helps her bring social-emotional components into her teaching. She believes these are effectively helping her students connect to school, learning, and their academic development, and she believes it helps her students develop a positive outlook on life and in school: "I've done a lot of reading ... about Neufeld and attachment theory and that's helped because forming the attachment with the kid and feeling safe ... they start learning." CT1 echoes this belief in comments about how generating positive classroom environments and relationships are integral to her students' success:

If they're not at school at rest ready to learn then there's nothing you can do ... [if] they don't come to school with their basic needs met then I don't think there's anything you can do except work at that attachment, work at getting them to trust you and then when that happens you can move them ahead.

Both teachers agree that student success requires students to have self-confidence and self-belief, and they perceive that their roles as teachers extend beyond the reading curriculum to help students become successful readers. CP sees the challenging expectations that grade one teachers have teaching groups of emergent academic learners who will struggle in many facets of the classroom. He suggests a change of approach is required to help alleviate the pressures on

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students. To him, a healthy system is one where teachers would not have to fail students, where students would not confront failure from the beginning and where parents would not have anxiety because their children are floundering within a system in which their primary needs are not being met and are in turn inhibiting chances for present and future well-being. The current contextual environment for many students at CES demonstrates that teachers and the administration perceive that professional learning for early reading has to broaden and encompass social-emotional aspects.

Theme 4. Fractured access: Freedom, funds and time. The participants' perceptions at CES reveal how priorities reflecting from the student, school and board levels influence access to teachers' professional learning. For example, CP thinks that the overall direction for professional learning comes from the board. The teachers believe that the board pays attention to academic success, on which CT1 remarks: "the specific outcomes or successes of the students forces people to, forces us to learn in or to improve certain areas," and that at the school level the principal's interests drive current learning initiatives. CT1, speaking about a prior principal who "was very into developing professional learning," recalled weekly literacy instruction and assessment meetings. CT1 appreciates the directive and direction of CP's social and emotional professional development initiative, yet also indicates how other teachers feel forced to participate. CT1 believes that professional learning:

has to be driven by the teachers, by the people participating in it. If it's shoved down your throat by your principal because they want you to be learning that I don't think it's nearly as successful as if you're doing what people are interested in or what they can feel in your classroom.

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Speaking to the notion of availability and choice, CT2 wishes that she had more freedom to choose workshops “according to what your class clientele is.” Even when something is available, the choice reflects priorities at a provincial or board level that too often do not reflect her immediate needs. CT2 would like to suggest workshops and resources that would help her to meet specific classroom needs. CT1 suggests ongoing professional learning that provides follow-up on more specialized topics (e.g., dyslexia) and would allow her to develop a greater understanding of reading difficulties stepwise across time.

Access to funding and time are key factors that participants perceive are influencing the nature of and opportunity to engage with professional learning experiences. For example, CT1 appreciates the one thousand dollars for professional learning teachers receive for helping to finance professional learning every two years; however, both teachers find that their professional learning funds quickly dry up because of the costs for covering supply teachers and registration fees. According to CT2, there are additional opportunities to generate funding through a professional innovation grant. Still, CT1 did not discuss having accessed these funds, and CT2 remarked that she does not fully understand the application process and is reliant on others to coordinate a plan. Regardless of their perspectives on available choices and presumed needs, there is a comparable sense of their vulnerability to the quantity of readily available professional learning. In comparison to earlier in her career, CT1 remarked upon the reduced availability of professional learning over the past ten years, expressing that she has not experienced any memorable professional learning for over a year. Similarly, CT2 shared her confusion about how the early reading professional learning network had gone from meeting five times the year before to none in the current year.

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Issues of inclusion and sustainability appear to influence teachers' perspectives of their learning opportunities. CT2 remarks that many workshops she attends are funded through board grants and that her most recent involvement was an invitation by the board for herself and five other teachers. She suggests this is an exclusionary process for the many teachers not chosen. Related is a sense of expectation from the board to be a part of the board-supported reading initiatives. Prioritization of two early reading professional learning initiatives likely limits other beneficial learning opportunities. Further, those who do not choose to receive specific training cannot access specific reading resources to use in their classroom. Whereas CT2 expresses enthusiasm towards both initiatives, CT1 is more reluctant, considering her interests are elsewhere at this time in her career. For example, CT1 emphasized that she does not understand how to adapt her teaching to meet her students' most diverse early reading needs. She would prefer information on teaching students with ADHD, how to interpret results from psychoeducational testing, or understanding the nature of reading disabilities.

Summary of Within-case Analyses

Before presenting the next phase of findings, Table 4 below lays out the themes generated in the within-case analysis.

Table 4

Summary of Within-case Themes

Theme	OES	BES	CES
1	Exclusion: Geographical, Cultural, and Personal Professional	Foundations of Change	Trial by Fire: Foundations & Commitment to Harnessing Momentum
2	Early Reading Practices Cobbled Together	Intrapersonal Responsibility	Engaged Mentor Relationships

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Theme	OES	BES	CES
3	Establishing a Community of Learners	Valued Relationships: Peers and Experts	Student Well-being and Societal Shift
4		Responding to Student Need	Fractured Access: Freedom, Funds and Time
5		Issues of Accessibility and Uptake	

These themes represent the teacher participants' stories in their schools and express their connections to past and present experiences through their perspectives on their early reading professional learning and practice in their particular time and space. These stories tell how context influences their professional learning experiences, how it appears they have learned to teach early reading and how this influences their perceptions of meeting their students' early reading needs. The within-case narratives are deeply personal. Teaching is deeply personal, and moving from with-case findings to shared lived experiences is informed by displaying the contextual pathways influencing perspectives of effective early reading teaching and learning. The next section lays out the findings from the transition from within-case to cross-case themes in the form of contextual networks.

Emergences: A Transition towards the Cross-case

Described in the analysis section and Appendix U, this transitional step incorporates Miles and Huberman's causal network (Miles et al., 2014), adapting its stylistic visual flow of pathways. Whereas Miles and Huberman create causal networks to explain within-case qualitative cause and effect relationships, my adaptation is a contextual network that visually portrays how contextual variables are perceived influential to participants' professional learning experiences, early reading instruction and student reading outcomes. Two central reasons for

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creating these visual contextual displays are to have some clarity that might not be transparent in the unique case narratives, and second, the pathways to and from succinct and somewhat generalized terms help to situate the audience into a location for seeing patterns and abstractions across cases. There are no cut and dry causal explanations here, but rather a range of pathways reflecting how different processes and experiences appear to influence teachers in these case schools. Further, no weights are represented in these relationships, yet understanding the influence of specific contextual factors perceived by participants to be influential to their professional learning, practice, and students' reading success follows a linear directional flow represented by pathways of arrows.

In terms of organization of the flow of my research, the process of creating the networks draws heavily from the within-case themes, is inclusive to perspectives presented by all participants, and allows me to (re)calibrate my analyses to represent the dynamic nature of the interactions between collections of variables. Illustrating the jumping-off point from the within-case narratives towards contextual networks (which are the transitional links to cross-case analysis), the themes subsume from across the range of variables for each case school. This process involved mining the within-case narratives and crafting labels of contextual variables across one or all themes (see Figures 3, 4, and 5 below).

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Figure 3

OES Diffusion of Variables and Factors across Themes

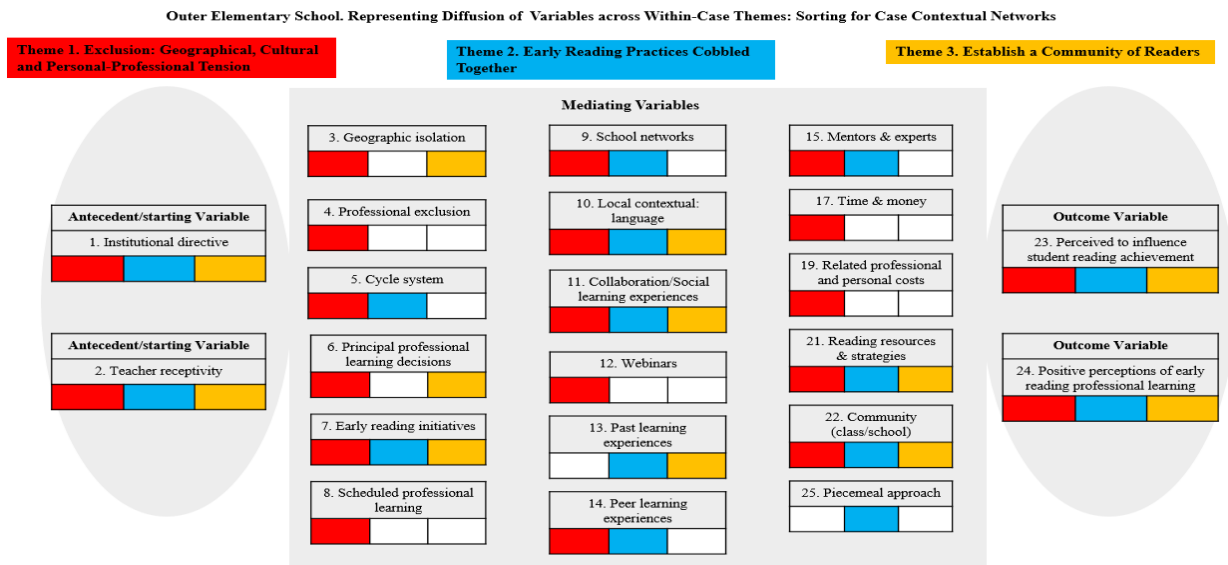


Figure 4

BES Diffusion of Variables and Factors across Themes

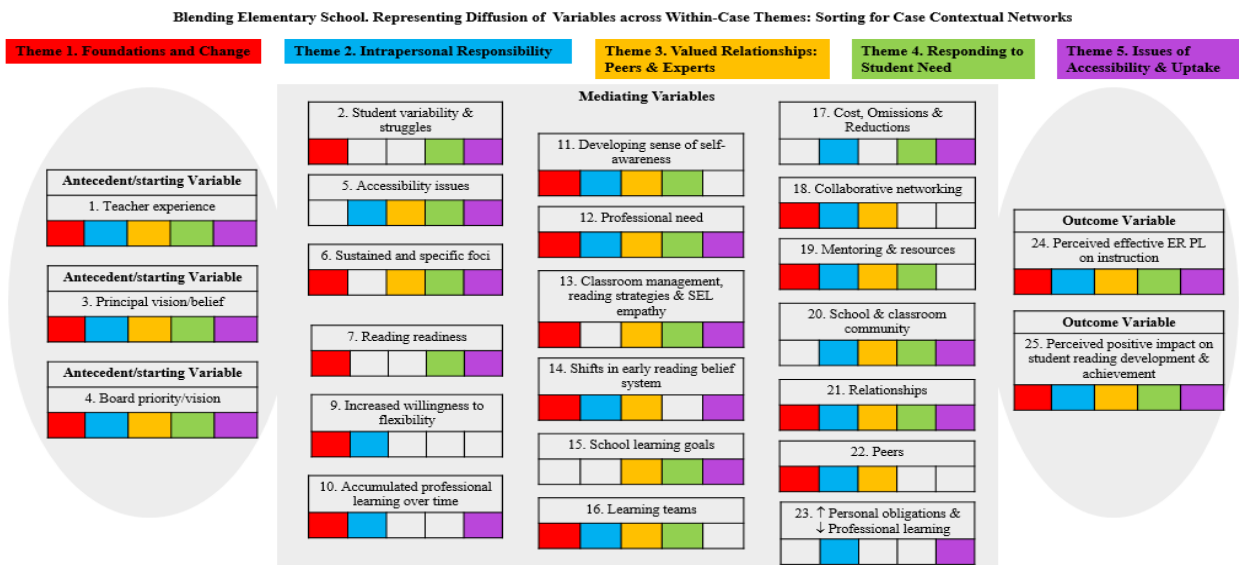
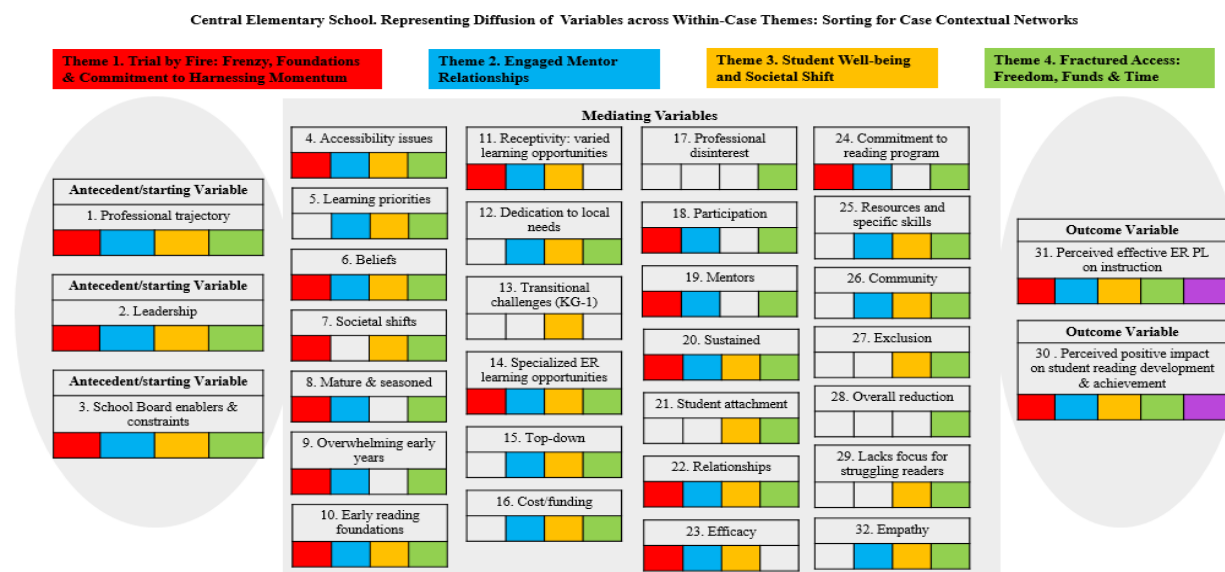


Figure 5

CES Diffusion of Variables and Factors across Themes



Each theme is colour-coded and many contextual variables represent elements in multiple themes, though how they are perceived may differ. The antecedent variables and outcomes comprise each theme because at minimum they represent elements influential upon and in professional learning and reading achievement.

Contextual narratives in Appendices V, X and Y, explain each pathway and are informative, enriching and highly recommended supplemental reading. These contextual networks portray how context is a collective activity and how then these collective activities or processes appear to influence and follow pathways that help to bring together the elements of the research questions: First, how teachers perceive contextual variables at the level of the school, board and beyond influence the planning, delivery and uptake of early reading professional learning; and second, the influence of their reading instruction on their students' early reading success (achievement, outcomes).

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Before the presentation of the short descriptions portraying the main ideas for each contextual network, I would again like to point out that there are narratives of each pathway for each school in Appendix V, W and X. They are not included here because of my consideration of the length of this dissertation and how this might tax the reader's concentration and synthesis of thought. However, I strongly encourage a reading of the short narratives for each path.

Specifically, the contextual network narratives show three possibilities: Two I consider affirming possibilities to effective early reading professional learning and contributing to improving students' early reading success, and the other more restrictive (negative) to teachers' learning, teaching and students' reading development. In all three network narratives, you will find more explicitly how each theme subsumes from each within-case analysis. In the two kinds of paths I consider affirming, these pathways represent flow through variables that in combination are, (a) perceived to lead to improved early reading instruction from professional learning, or (b) perceived to accumulate in a way that there is a positive impact on student reading development (and achievement). Both of these outcomes reflect in the pathways beginning with variables on the left-hand side of the contextual network. For example, see the pathways in Figure 6. Follow the path (1<5<11<14<21<24<23), ending on the right-hand side of the page. The restricted pathways represent the other side of this picture. At some point, before the two positive outcomes (positive perceptions of professional learning and positive perceptions of having an impact on student reading development), these streams end and do not result in positively perceived influences on teacher learning or student reading development. For example, again, look at Figure 6 below and follow paths 1<3<5<8 and 1<3<10<17<19. Both of these end without reaching outcomes representing positive perceptions of learning or culminating in a contextual pathway representative of factors perceived to be influential in influencing students' early

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reading development. These contextual networks are an accumulation of subsumption and a process of exhuming the within-case themes and data representing the cases into pathways that allow abstractions across the cases to begin materializing.

Proceeding the visual display of each school, a short synthesis of direction, flow and interaction is provided. Each visual display represents directionality influenced in a particular context. This type of display also produces patterns of shared abstractions, reflecting participants' perspectives. These abstractions generated in these displays anchor the cross-case findings. The direction of this stage of within-case findings begins with Outer Elementary, moves to Blending Elementary and finishes with Central Elementary School.

Outer Elementary School

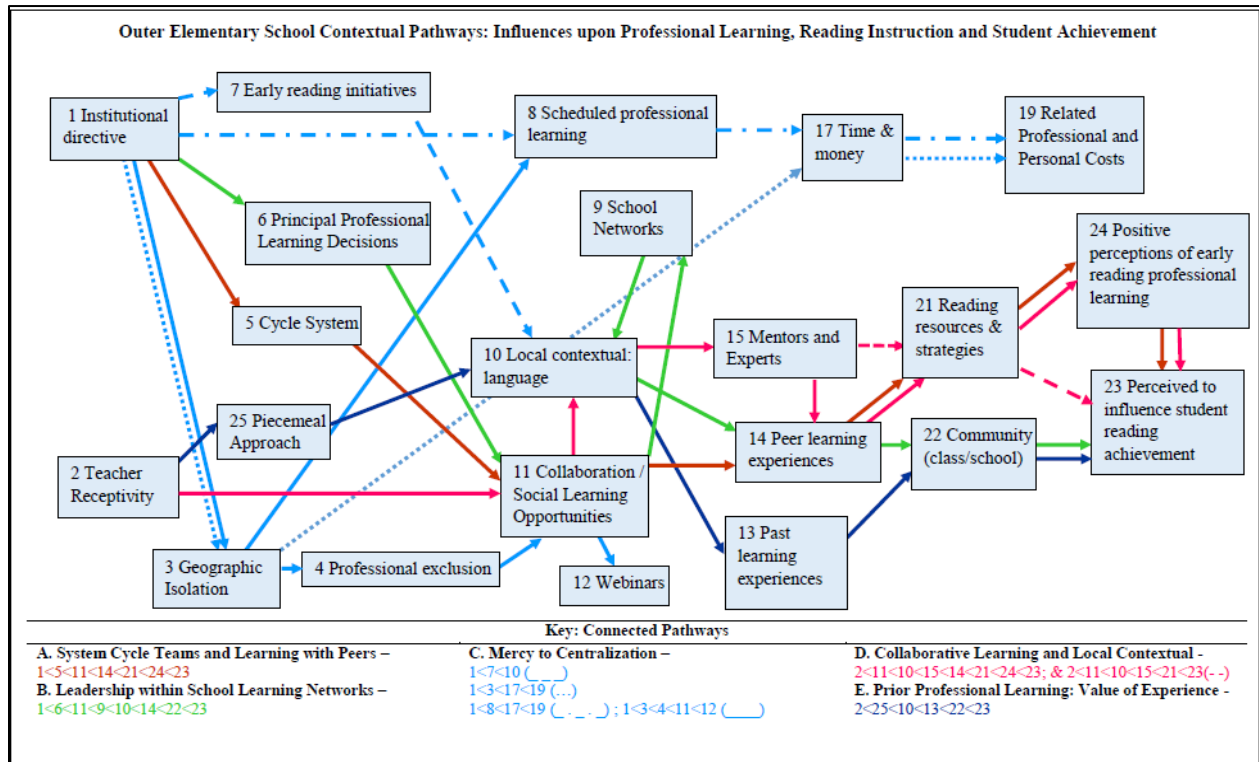
OES' rurality is a powerful influence upon how teacher participants at OES spoke about their teaching and learning experiences and Figure 6 below clearly represents this. Variables within pathways represented in Figure 6 help separate some of the local contextual variables and those that appear more related to influences from the system at the board level (board initiatives, style of professional learning). The structure of the contextual networks is bound in showing the direction towards answering the research questions. Though local, cultural and geographical factors are intertwined and interactive, the value placed on collaborative professional learning designs that include mentorship opportunities, are authentic and provide instruction on teaching struggling learners is highly visible (see Figure 6 below). For example, in Figure 6 look, at box 11 (Collaboration/Social Learning Opportunities) and box 14 (Peer Learning experiences). It is clear that social learning experiences are perceived to be important but also highly relate to specific local aspects. Figure 6 maps out the complexity of context at the local level showing how students' language ability is central to teachers' professional learning and teaching and how

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meeting this need is critical within other important aspects designed for collaborative learning between peers in schools across the board. For a more detailed description of each of the pathways, see Appendix V.

Figure 6

OES Contextual Network



Blending Elementary School

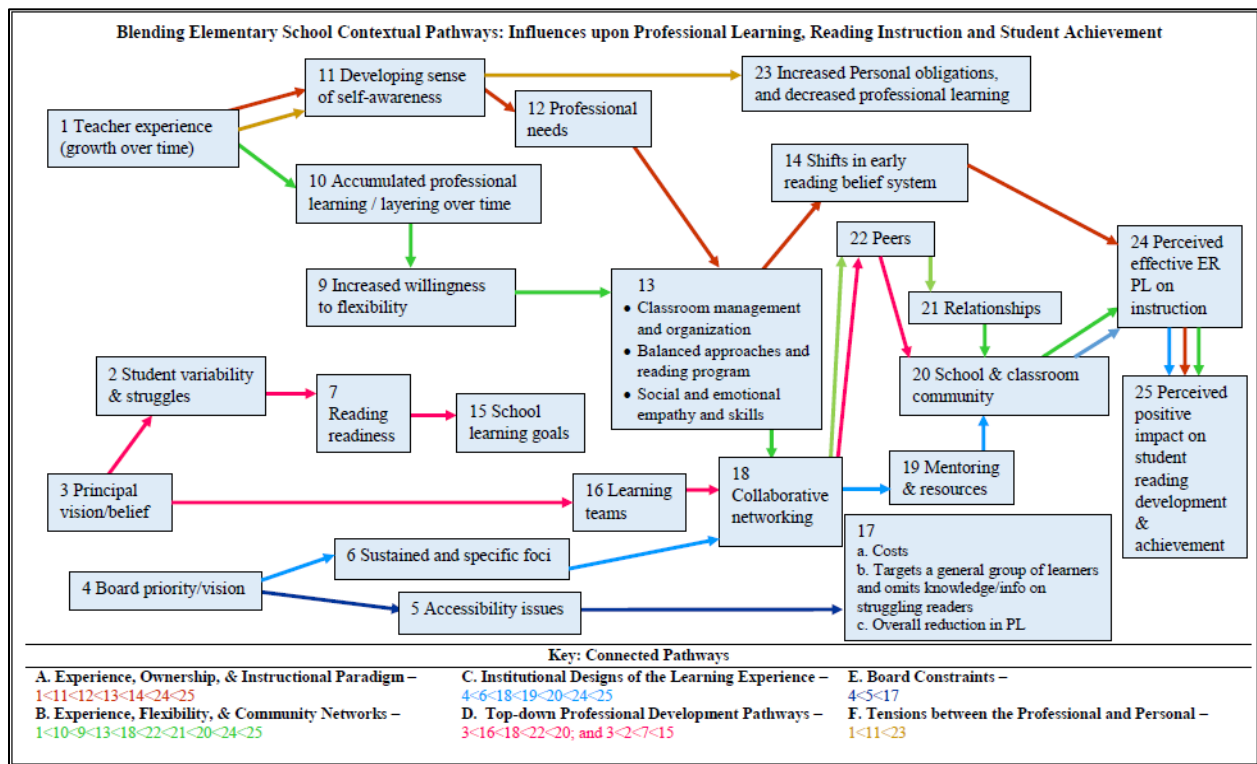
Blending Elementary school teacher participants are mid-career teachers and have been teaching at BES for quite a few years consecutively. Their perspectives provided a sense of their learning needs and their attitudes towards how they are met over time. Time-oriented aspects of learning are reflected in how BT1 and BT2 consider their philosophies on teaching early reading have expanded due to their accumulation of particular teaching and learning experiences. The value of learning communities upon teaching and learning is emphasized as a component of

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professional learning perceived as effective and sustaining and is represented by specific contextual variables in Figure 7 (boxes – 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22). School and classroom community is central in BT1's and BT2's perceptions towards meeting their students' early reading needs. Moreover, interacting with designs and topics of professional learning, when professional learning happens, and the degree of control for choosing what these teachers perceive they need, are pathways reflecting from the principal (school) and board levels (see Figure 7 below).

Figure 7

BES Contextual Network



The richness of this case study comes out in the depth of description on perspectives across time. It provides a uniquely complex, but specific contextual network displaying how these two early reading teachers have developed into the experienced teachers they are now and

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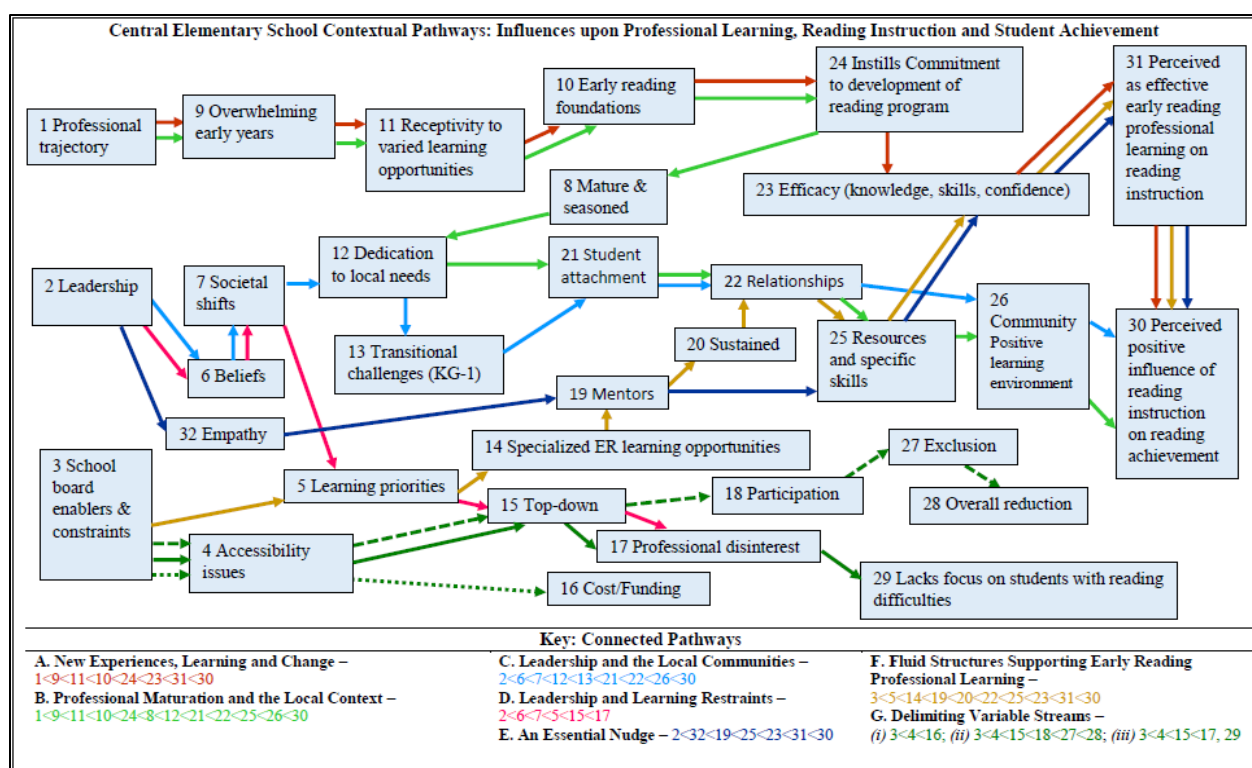
who need new learning opportunities to continue improving. See Appendix W for the more detailed description of each connected pathway.

Central Elementary School

CT1 and CT2 have spent nearly their entire careers at Central Elementary School. Figure 8 below represents the connected contextual networks derived from their perspectives.

Figure 8

CES Contextual Network



These teachers' perspectives relate to how across the trajectories of their careers, they have developed as reading teachers, learning to understand the particular needs of their students, committing to learning perceived-to-be effective reading programs, and immersing themselves into a range of professional learning early in their careers. The principal- and school board-provided professional learning experiences heavily influences these teachers' current reading

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instruction. Mentorship opportunities provided both teachers with the foundations for their professional development and practice. What is interesting with this case school is how commitment to provide an effective program persists, continuing to drive their teaching and perceived-expertise (e.g., boxes 10, 24, 23).

Students' particular contextual needs at CES underpin CP's social and emotional ideals on teaching (e.g. Boxes, 6, 7, 12). The pathways presented in Figure 8 break this down. Contextual influences emanate from self, leadership and board levels, flowing and interacting with the needs of this urban, low SES school. The stages of development of early reading teachers in this environment and the provided social structures to learning are integral to certain aspects of learning to teach reading. Box 26 in Figure 8 above emphasizes how the community needs of CES are a final stepping point in teachers' perceptions of how they consider their professional learning to influence their knowledge of teaching reading and how effective their teaching is upon their students' early reading needs (see pathways to and from Box 26). Importantly one pathway also reflects the limits to how professional learning has not provided enough ways to help them meet the needs of their students who have specific difficulties learning to read (Box, 29). See Appendix X for a more detailed description of each connected pathway.

The next section, the cross-case findings, brings the abstractions of cases together and represents the three diverse cases as representative of schools across the school board. In considering the board level, the cross-case findings demonstrates a further depth to thinking of professional learning and its influence on teachers' early reading professional learning and practice. The cross-case analysis and findings emerge from three within-case contextual networks, which derive from the within-case narratives. Whereas the within-case findings for each case school provide a narrative that is unique and deeply entrenched upon local context/s,

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the cross-case findings reveal abstractions and more general patterns reflecting the natures of the participants' perspectives on their learning and how they perceive that certain experiences appear to influence their instruction and consequently their students' reading outcomes. The within-case contextual networks above visually represent a refined, skeletal look at the streams (or pathways) that are richly elaborated upon in their own ways within the individual within-case narratives. Instead of relaying the themes, they utilize the interacting relationships influencing participants' perceptions of early reading instruction, early reading professional learning and the relatedness of these experiences to student achievement in reading; and in this next section are expressed more broadly as the cross-case findings.

Cross-Case Findings: Three Central Abstractions

Emerging in the cross-case analysis are several key themes that centre on three factors broadly influencing teacher participants' perceptions and perspectives of their professional learning: the teacher, the student and the learning community. *Emergence, notions of initial chaos and characteristics of experience* is the first theme. The developmental nature of becoming and being teacher is a variable representing a non-linear accumulation of learning experiences shaping the bumpy and temporally linear developmental process teachers follow through interactions that lead to a particular wealth of early reading knowledges and skills. The centrepiece of the cross-case findings, the second theme, is *Professional collaborative connections*. Learning with other professionals (peers, colleagues, and mentor experts) is an experience all teacher participants value and utilize in varying forms from different levels in the system. Collaboration appears as a catalyst within teachers' learning experiences that lead to in-depth knowledge, a developing sense of community, and in providing the kinds of teacher learning experiences that improve practice, and ultimately students' reading outcomes.

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Inclusive learning environments is the third cross-case theme. This theme reflects why learning and understanding how to teach within one's particular context is essential. The specific challenges that students in the case schools are perceived to face and how uniqueness influences the professional learning direction that teachers take encapsulates the notions of this theme. As the third theme, *Inclusive learning environments* represent the diversity of academic and social, emotional and cultural learning needs and how understanding a school's local context influences the ways teachers perceive their professional learning. Broadly and very importantly, this theme also comprises the consensus across teacher participants that they need more learning experiences to help them develop effective instruction to help their most struggling readers. Unfortunately, an aspect of this theme suggests that even with perceived-to-be effective structures in place such as collaborative learning experiences and opportunities to learn how to set up reading programs, these structures are not enough for them to help students with reading difficulties and disabilities. A description of each theme occurs below. Following the cross-case findings is the presentation of the conceptual framework, the culmination of this research study's in-depth stages of data analyses and the writing up of the findings.

Theme 1. Emergence, Notions of Initial Chaos and Characteristics of Experience

Participants in this research study embody professional teachers with experiences ranging between two to over 20 years of teaching in diversely situated elementary schools. CT1, BT1 and BT2 have the most experience, each teaching approximately 20 years and most of it at their current schools. At the time of the interview, CT2 was in her 11th year, all at CES; OT1 was in her third year of full-time teaching at OES (4th overall as a professional teacher), and OT2 was in her second full year of teaching in the school board (in her first full year at OES). The range of these participants provides unique perspectives of participants' relationships to their specific

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learning experiences and depicts an understanding of the trajectory of their development as professional teachers concerning their early reading instruction. These perspectives illuminate how the course of being a teacher is never stable and that with varying stages arise challenges that represent a need for considering teacher learning and practice as non-linear and difficult to predict but very important for considering when planning how to better meet teacher learning needs and evolving states of students' early reading needs. The responsibility and challenge of becoming a confident early reading teacher are not unique to any of the participants, and the sense of discomfort appears as a motif across all six participants' professional teaching and learning journeys.

OT1's and OT2's current perspectives on the nature of their early reading professional learning represent their belief that they should be participating in and implementing their school board's early reading initiatives. However, what appears to influence their current instruction is less systematic. Their current practices are reflective of learning via a piecemeal approach in the ways they borrow from a range of learning experiences and their acknowledgement of how much they still have to learn. At this early stage of their careers, both perceive that the whole-scale implementation of a particular board supported reading program is currently unrealistic. Partly this is because OES participants perceive the available board reading initiatives lack some core elements that their students require. Nevertheless, comparing their approaches to early reading instruction at this early stage with the other teacher participants, what emerges is how complex, scattered and overwhelming the beginning early stages of teaching and learning are.

CT1 spent her early years figuring out how to teach and took everything she could, "trying to stay afloat." Reflecting on the hectic learning and teaching experiences early in her career, she attributes the range of early reading professional learning to shaping her effectiveness

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as an early reading teacher and directly relative to her students' reading success. CT2's early years of teaching were overwhelming due to the range of suggestions, the number of workshops, and the challenge of incorporating many strategies into her reading instruction. She values the range of experiences, even though it took her a few years to realize she needed to regulate her professional learning choices. In her third year of teaching and first in grade 1, she was fortunate to connect with a reading consultant, and has slowly developed her expertise in setting up what she perceives is a reasonably effective reading program. Eight years later, CT2 continues to regulate the speed of implementation of literacy stations as this is dependent upon the composition and related needs of her current class. For both CES teachers, they attribute their immersion into a range of early reading workshops on guided reading and setting up a balanced approach using structured reading stations as foundational to their early reading instruction.

BT1 and BT2 both attribute specific professional learning to improving their early reading instruction. BT1 began her teaching career confused about how to provide effective reading classes. She explicitly references her commitment to board reading programs for helping her connect "all those little dots," as well as the range of experiences offered by the board for helping her layer these learning experiences into her teaching where she now provides a more systematic approach than she did early in her career. Moreover, for BT1 learning is an ongoing process in which she constantly searches for strategies to help her struggling readers. Her flexibility takes root in the awareness that the needs of her students change across time. She perceives that learning how to implement guided reading early in her career, as well as ongoing experiences learning about code-based instruction, as integral to her practice and her students' success. Originally supposing that learning to read comes naturally through exposure to good literature over time, it took her several years to value the importance of bringing different code-

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based components into her instruction. BT2 spoke about her commitment to providing an enriching whole language environment in her approach to reading instruction, but how opportunities that she had not previously considered now enhance her instruction. She perceives that through the range of her professional learning experiences, she continues to improve her teaching and students' experiences and success. Learning experiences on child development, classroom and organizational management, social responsibility, and board reading initiatives are layers of experience that she believes contribute to her providing successful early reading instruction.

It is apparent that the early stages of teaching are essential times for grounding oneself professionally, but for this to happen there needs to be a range of opportunities available for beginning teachers. OT1 and OT2 appear to be entering the profession when there has been a reduction in the quality and quantity of professional learning compared to the past. Whereas CT1, CT2, BT1 and BT2 speak to the abundance of reading-related professional learning early in their careers they all note that there has been a substantial reduction in the availability of professional learning over the past several years; and that only particular learning experiences have been available in terms of specific elements of the board supported reading programs. OT1 and OT2 have experienced aspects of the two board supported initiatives yet project that they need more to develop their confidence in providing all their students with practical learning experiences. All teachers expressed that learning to provide reading instruction is an ongoing endeavour. The four most experienced teachers in this study describe the reduction of professional learning as confusing and difficult. Whether it is a loss of networks they are accustomed to or an overall reduction in the variety of early reading learning opportunities, they perceive the current state of professional learning is limiting to their development.

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CT1, BT1 and BT2 have had children throughout their teaching careers. There is a perception that much of the professional learning that occurs after school is not accessible for many teachers; that too many teachers face obligations outside of the school, and this often makes it difficult for teachers in the same school to connect after the bell signals the end of the school day. It appears that in terms of learning and practice it is important to consider how the responsibilities and obligations that come with having a family can affect the trajectory of teachers' professional development and innovation to their practice. Currently, there is a sense of discord expressed and perceived by teachers when having to make choices between professional learning opportunities and family; if there is an opportunity to choose at all. The three teacher participants who are mothers echo a sense of being cut off or barred from professional learning. CT1 related being left out of the professional learning circles while raising her two children. Only in the past few years does she find she can devote some more time to joining organized professional learning. At BES, BT1 is just beginning to think about attending afterschool learning opportunities at the board because her mother has moved back to Blending and takes care of her children some days. BT2 remarks that she is happy with the pace of her job and that she is not trying too hard to find new learning opportunities because she has a young child.

Emergence as a professional is an ongoing state of being, development and becoming. It appears that particular stages of teaching are needing more significant consideration to help anchor effective early reading practices. The dizzying pace beginning teachers experience, as represented by the participants in this research study, suggests that (a) beginning career teachers will benefit from understanding what the transition into being a professional teacher is like and that (b) receiving a range of early reading professional learning helps anchor core early reading practices. As professional learning opportunities appear to be diminishing, less experienced

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teachers OT1 and OT2, who are in the early stages of their careers, appear to be taking what they can to establish some core reading instruction practices. As professional teachers such as CT1, CT2, BT1, and BT2 mature, they want to build upon their core early reading practices.

Recognition of the challenges that surface when balancing family and professional responsibilities, and having a way to support these challenges, will expand their practice, contribute to meeting their students' needs and provide a sense of being included in and controlling their professional development.

Theme 2. Professional Collaborative Connections

Presenting this theme in the middle of my cross-case findings flows from a conscious research and educational decision to represent professional collaboration as the centrepiece to learning as a professional. There are mediating factors that present differences in the nature of collaborative learning across cases, however, learning with others (another) is an undeniably valuable component of these participants' learning processes. This theme portrays how collaboration is viewed across cases and is streamlined within a range of variables that influence the nature and availability of collaborative learning possibilities.

Each new teacher to the board, regardless of experience, partners with a mentor teacher as part of a two-year teacher induction program. Participants hold mixed perspectives about this program. For example, BT1 considers that her mentor teacher was missing the particular skills that she needed to develop her early reading instruction. OT1 perceives that her first two years of professional development limited her growth as an early reading teacher because of what she had to focus on in her mentoring program and not on any specific early reading professional development. Still, it appears that this mentoring program offers new teachers some opportunities to receive guidance through relationships with more experienced teachers that the

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board deems qualified to mentor. However, none of the teachers perceive the program's influence as overly positive to their development as early reading teachers.

All teachers do mention their appreciation for experiences with expert early reading mentors for helping them understand and implement instructional strategies and practical resources. Having mentors who are early reading experts as a part of a learning initiative is deemed highly valuable to their learning. CT2, OT1, OT2, BT1 and BT2 described their favourable experiences with mentor teachers in the board. CT1 does not mention a particular early reading mentor though she attributes one mentor early in her career for transforming her teaching perspective and practice. Mainly, mentors who visit schools and classrooms provide the resources and skills they believe are effective in reaching their students' particular needs. OT1 and OT2 have mixed reviews of the two recent board initiatives, but they both stress how much they value their mentoring from the consultant leading the initiatives. BT1, BT2 and CT2 attribute the presence of this consultant for providing them a more transparent and relevant sense of how to incorporate aspects of the board-supported reading initiatives into their teaching and design of their early reading programs. BT1 and BT2 also find that sustained professional learning involving a mentor expert in early reading help shape a positive community at BES for teachers to converse, share and reflect on their early reading experiences.

Underscoring the value of collaborative learning are the experiences that OT1 and OT2 have had at OES. Their geographical isolation provides a backdrop for viewing the perceived significance of accessing collaborative learning experiences. OES's physical isolation makes it challenging to take part in face-to-face social learning experiences. The population of this rural school denotes the challenges in developing effective partnerships within and outside the school. Current technologies for connecting with peers who can access face-to-face learning in central

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locations such as the school board do not appear to provide the types of collaborative learning experiences both teachers value. Besides, the small teacher population does not provide stimulating collaborative learning experiences across the school. OP, the principal of OES, is aware of the restrictions to collaborative learning, and she is trying to administer school-based professional learning where teachers are observing each other, reflecting and sharing on their growth and goals in more structured afterschool staff meetings. However, in the teacher interviews with OT1 and OT2, this topic is not addressed.

Provincially, the ministry of education structures grades into cycles with grades paired consecutively (as a cycle) beginning in grade one. For example, grades 1 and 2 represent the first cycle. The cycle system ensures that at least two teachers will be within one cycle at most schools, and therefore teachers will have opportunities to at minimum dialogue about the directions their programs and students are moving in. BT1 and BT2 highly favour cycle teams and it appears that along with the presence of a mentor to move them along their knowledge, understanding and teaching improves because of the opportunities to collaborate with their grade and cycle colleagues. The benefits of cycle teams were not overtly mentioned by CT1 and CT2, though CT2 spoke about the importance of cohesion in early reading instruction at Central Elementary School. She admits some pessimism towards some colleagues' lack of buy-in to working together. It is possible that because there are many teachers within each cycle at CES, this could make it harder to organize and maintain cycle meetings or reduces the chance for the professionally intimate conversations like the ones that appear to happen more frequently at BES. Diametrical to CES is OES's small population of students and teachers. Peer collaboration is valued, and though OT1 is very appreciative of having OT2 as a cycle partner, both teachers

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project a yearning for increased collaborative opportunities with colleagues and peers teaching the same grade.

Across cases, it appears that when there is a mentor who is an expert in early reading and who visits schools, there is a profound sense of appreciation for how this connects to their local contexts and, in the case of BES, helps to stimulate reciprocal peer learning experiences amongst cycle teams. It appears that collaborative learning is how teachers want to learn and that an institutional nudge to structure this support is needed. Due to their isolation at OES, OT1 and OT2 express a need for assistance from a mentor. Though collaborative opportunities are available to them through online conferencing, these have not yet been positive experiences. At Blending Elementary, BP prefers that the teachers, for the most part, work in their cycle or grade teams to enhance their professional development and will often let the teachers self-direct their learning. BT1 and BT2 do not openly discuss these networks in terms of specific school-based professional learning. What they perceive to be stimulating and helpful to their early reading instruction is a mentor who is an expert and works with them and their peers to help create a shared language they find necessary to their development, and that works towards creating a cohesive school approach to reading instruction. At CES, CP desires to create learning networks with teachers mentoring each other, but a lack of stability in sustaining positive group learning and regular teacher changeover challenges the reality of making this happen. CT1 attributes one particular experience with a mentor teacher to keeping her in the profession and helping her structure her overall approach to teaching, and CT2 attributes her eight-year ongoing relationship with a reading expert to developing her early reading teaching skills.

Across all of the participants, it is apparent that collaborative professional learning is a preferred mode for learning, collaboration is instrumental to building community at the

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classroom, school and board levels, and that through various learning networks the participants in this study find collaborative learning the necessary median for supporting their early reading learning needs.

Theme 3. Inclusive Learning Environments

Inclusive education is anchored in and relates to aspects of interactions influencing how participants in this study perceive their students' needs connect to their learning and practice and, subsequently, their students' reading development. The concept of inclusive learning environments presented here moves from a leadership-teacher-board direction in considering the role of meeting students' particular needs by relating to students' readiness for reading success. To meet students' early reading needs, teachers have to be experts in providing reading instruction that supports the needs of struggling early readers.

Students' needs appear highly dependent upon the context they learn and relate to the places in which they grow up and live. Viewed differently depending on population differences and demographics or cultural backgrounds, the particular uniqueness of CES and OES especially appear to propel school-based professional learning approaches. Recognition of students' particular needs is quickly evident with OT1 and OT2 at OES and CT1 and CT2 at CES, noting how they are regularly working to finding ways to connect to these needs and how their principals organize professional learning to help their school communities embrace their students' particular needs. At Outer Elementary, OT1 and OT2 find the board early reading initiatives underwhelming with Principal OP recognizing that they presume a level of readiness beyond their students' emergent English language needs. Therefore OP collaborates with teachers to determine what programs they can learn together. At the time of our interviews, one of their school growth goals focused on developing student vocabulary skills and word banks.

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In terms of school populations, CES is one of the largest elementary schools in the board. Feeding into their particular urban location are students with transitory parents and guardians from single-family homes and low-income earning households, including a considerable population of First Nations students from northern communities whose caregiver/s cycle/s between staying for short periods and returning home. The school focuses on developing and integrating teacher understanding and practices to develop social-emotional relationship skills. In his seven years as CES' principal, CP has heavily invested in creating a community-minded school inclusive to his students' needs. He believes the school will best achieve this by creating reciprocal relationships between students, teachers and parents. His perspective is deliberately influencing the direction of professional learning at the school level. Though CT1 remarks that some teachers appear jaded or disinterested towards the professional learning CP offers, by focusing on developing attachment and relationships, she finds it to be a crucial part of her teaching and learning. Both CT1 and CT2 side with their principal's belief and CT2 is even looking to integrate aspects of social-emotional learning and regulation into her literacy instruction.

The influence of particular localized needs of students was not as prevalent in the interviews with BES participants. Principal BP, for the most part, prefers that cycle and grade teams develop on an as-needed basis and the trending issues they are noticing. BP inserts degrees of initiatives such as universal design for learning and works with teachers to understand evidence-based approaches to teaching (e.g., John Hattie's effect size work). However, the influence of some specific contextual needs at BES did not appear to stand out for any of the three participants in this school, especially in comparison to the influence of community and cultural context at CES and OES. This opens up questions and reflects how particular directions

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(or lack of directive) can influence the learning opportunities teachers will have and subsequently, how this influences their instruction and will impact student learning opportunities and reading achievement. However, across cases, all teachers shared their collective concerns about the lack of professional learning targeting intervention for students with specific reading difficulties.

All teachers mention that there just was not enough professional learning available to help them teach and improve their struggling students' reading outcomes. These struggling readers have a horrible time learning to read, more of an internal difficulty that relates to learning to read. In this situation, participants presume that they are missing something in their teaching repertoire, and professional learning is not providing the answer. At OES, teachers perceive that the early reading initiatives are not very effective for many of their students who need core English vocabulary development. OT1 and OT2 also believe that there has not been any specific training for them to help students with reading disabilities and difficulties. CT1, CT2, BT1, and BT2 also perceive that professional learning experiences neglect their struggling students' needs. Learning to better provide for the needs of students who have dyslexia or have other intense reading difficulties do not appear to be a part of any past professional learning. All participants express that they would welcome opportunities for learning more about reading difficulties. All teachers project a sense of guilt that they cannot provide effective instruction for their students with specific learning difficulties and disabilities. Teacher participants at OES and CES perceive that their schools' focus on their particular unique needs helps build community. However, these teachers, along with BT1 and BT2, believe they are not adequately meeting all of their students' needs in ways to include them in their learning more fully; that doing a better job of this would

connect to an increased community of learning and inclusively attach more students to their schooling experiences.

Emerging from within- and cross-case findings, a conceptual framework brings together the relationships between teachers (their learning and change) and students (their success and well-being). This framework considers the teacher and learning system as one that is at its core a system of human interactions, combinations of reactions within and across variables, and influenced through the interactions of contextual factors at play upon the individuals comprising the system.

A Conceptual Framework Contextualizing Teaching, Learning and Student Well-being

In outlining the process of data analysis in Chapter 4, the reasoning behind the multiple in-depth stages of analysis in this research is, ultimately, to create spaces for inductive analysis to guide the researcher toward findings in which concept and hypotheses emerge out of the teacher participants' stories of their lived experiences (Attinasi, Jr., 1991). This research concerns how teachers perceive their early reading instruction relating to professional learning and student reading success. It is also partly the product of the data from the three case school principals and three board-level participants who provide contextual information from semi-structured interviews and supplement the teacher participant data. Coming before a description of how the conceptual framework operates is a short section outlining the process leading up to its conception. Miles et al. (2015) express how a conceptual framework graphically explains "the main things to be studied – the key factors, variables, or constructs – and the presumed interrelationships among them ... and are the current version of the territory being investigated" (p. 20). The conceptual framework that evolves in this research visually depicts the relationships

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between contextual factors interacting upon the main variables that influence learning to read, professional learning and teachers' change processes.

This framework is the product of an iterative research process seeking to contextually conceptualize the process of early reading professional learning, teacher practices and student early reading development through a complexity theory lens for opening up and unpacking the system/s of early reading instruction within a province, school board, schools and classrooms. Construction of the framework began with a comprehensive review of the literature on early reading instruction, teacher early reading knowledge, professional learning, and teacher change to display how too many students continue to not learn to read. Emerging from an initial review of the literature are two open-ended research questions for inquiring into perceptions of the influence of contextual variables upon teachers' early reading learning experiences and the role of these experiences upon their teaching and their student' reading development. In turn, these research questions guide the creation of the in-depth three-series interviews with six teacher participants in three case schools in one school board in Québec, proceeds through multiple stages of data reduction and analysis (profiles, category construction, coding, ongoing memoing and iterative narratives), leads to within case findings, visual displays of data representing within-case pathways of perspectives influencing professional learning and student reading development and finally, comprises the collective abstractions that emerge in the cross-case findings (see Stages of Data Analysis, Figure 2, p 64). Following multiple, iterative drafts of the cross-case findings, the research process returns to the overarching problem, within a complexity theory mindset, to depict why reading failures prevail in schools for too many children and the associated negative societal implications.

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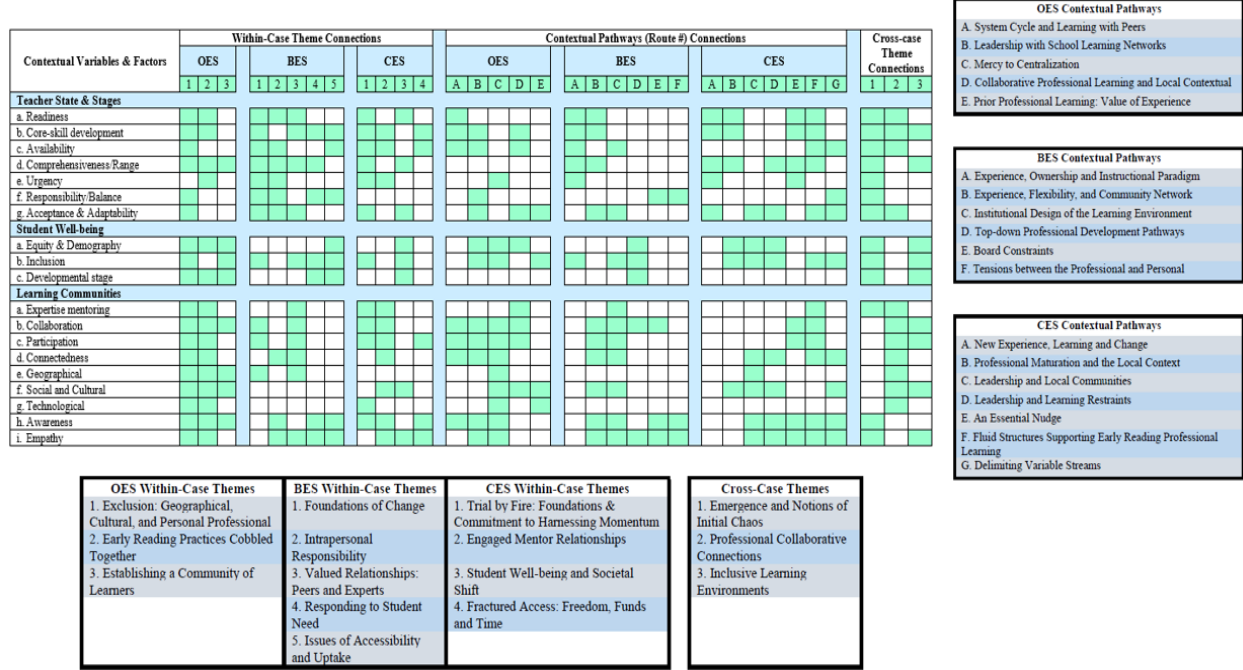
This mindset comprises a point of view focusing on the levels of variables interacting with teachers and how contextual factors influence teachers' learning processes within early reading. The variables, teacher state and stage, student well-being, and the learning community depict: how teacher learning and instruction emerge partly in teachers' histories and current circumstance; the influence of student well-being (academic and social-emotional) upon the teacher and learning process; the diverse ways a learning community influences teachers' professional learning and reading instruction; and how the structure of the learning system situates itself for reacting to students' early reading needs. Further, comprising the elements in the social system are individuals (or selves) comprising ties within and across each of the variables in this framework.

Figure 9 illustrates the interconnection of the within- and cross-case themes and contextual network labels and relates how varying modes of analysis and layering relate, comprising the process's totality in this version of the contextual framework. This figure provides an audit trail leading toward the conceptual framework, substantiating each step of analysis and corresponding findings. Consequently, these factors are not random or lightly thought out. They are notions that connect in varying degrees to the variables and interconnect with all elements influencing the system. A conceptual framework is a significant structure in theory building (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Miles et al., 2014). In the process of inductive analysis, theory does not drive the design. Instead, the design is driven by systematic attempts to generate theory. In this research, the data analysis representing the perspectives of the six teacher participants' lived experiences underpins the structure and interactivity of the learning, change, and achievement conceptual framework.

Figure 9

Substantiating the Data for the Conceptual Framework

An Emerging Conceptual Framework: Consolidating the Data by Substantiating Linkages Between Contextual Variables and the Within- & Cross-Case Themes and Contextual Pathways



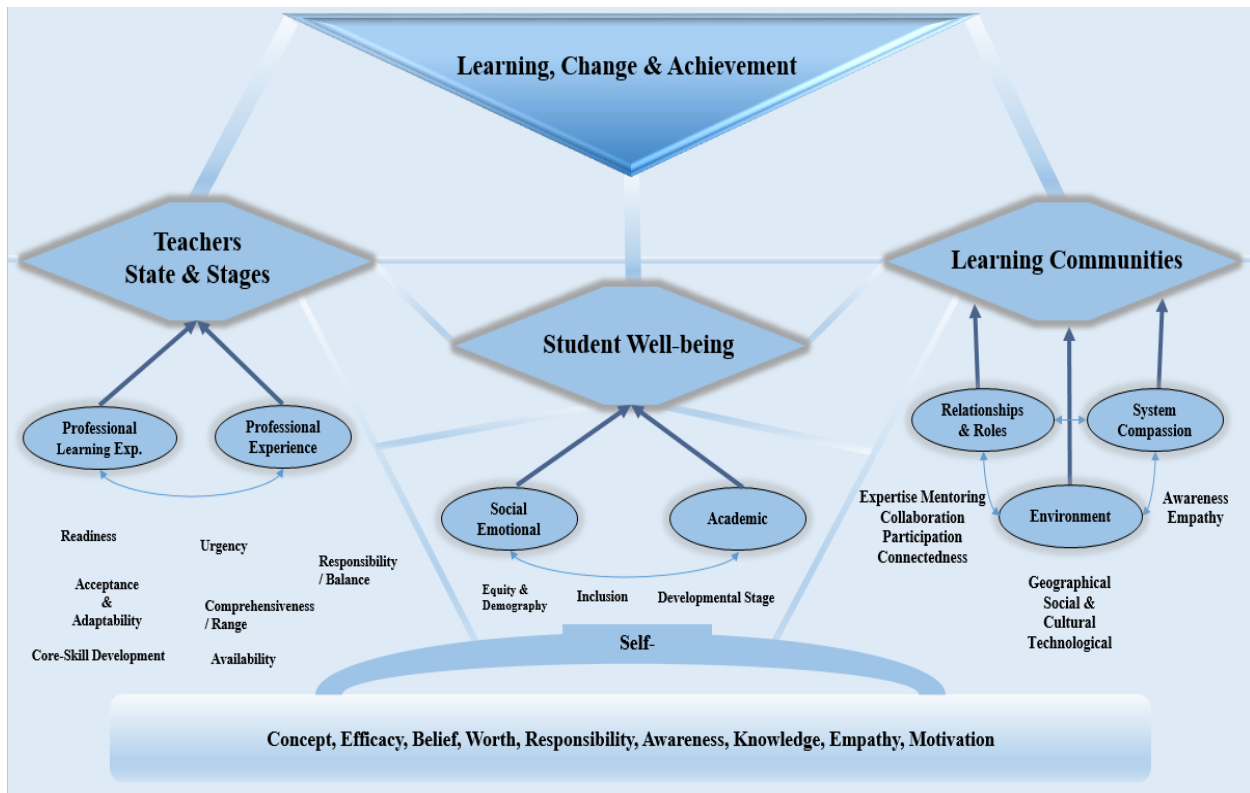
The learning, change, and achievement framework relates to how the self intertwines between and within human relationships. These interrelations reflect the tensions between awareness and considerations of more empathetically inclusive learning opportunities for students across the education system. This framework conceptualizes the complexities interacting upon this aspect of the teacher-learning system through a web of interacting and individual notions of self to the contextual factors that interplay within individuals and the systems with whom they are directly (and indirectly) linked. This interplay between self/selves (student/s and teacher/s) and the professional community that teachers and students learn within occurs between their relationships to/with the varying contextual factors brought into play in their particular teaching and learning environments. Together, these contextual combinations

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influence how teachers perceive to have experienced learning, how context influences change, how teachers' and students' learning needs, and the system's accessibility and culture influences teacher change (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

Conceptual Framework: Learning, Change and Achievement



In this framework, particular notions of self are reflected in teachers and students as independent components working and learning within their educational social-systems. Together these notions of self are interacting within and amongst categories of contextual variables categorized by how they emanate between and relate more closely within one of three interrelated levels; the professional teacher, the student, and the broader system level, the learning community, that comprises the nature of professional teaching and learning and which includes principals, board administration and how the greater context influences professional

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learning. These levels are at play and reflect a completely interconnected ecosystem represented by the variables and through the varying ways they can influence early reading learning and teaching and, subsequently, students' reading achievement. Considering integral aspects of teaching, learning, and the environment illuminates the importance of understanding systems as compilations of concepts of self and is a healthy way to consider notions related to professional learning designs.

The contextual variables are professional learning experience, professional experience, student social-emotional and academic well-being, roles and relationships within a learning community/system, a system's capacity for compassion, and the nature of the learning environment. These variables fall into three broad variables that reflect the notions of the self with selves as teacher/s, student/s and the broader professional learning system. Concerning learning, change and achievement, the three groups inextricably relate but opened up here in this two-dimensional platform they might appear distinct. They are not distinct, but still, each variable has its uniqueness. Figure 10 represents these unique factors for each variable. The conceptual framework provides a format that represents significant factors to consider in understanding the role of learning processes at play and influencing learning, change and student development.

Teachers State and Stages

Interacting with teachers' professional learning are teachers' states and professional learning stages, representing their professional learning experiences and overall professional teaching experiences. Teacher experience variables reflect the state of teachers' learning experiences and the stages of teachers' careers based on professional teaching and learning over time concerning their early reading practice and learning. Together, the factors interacting upon

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life as a professional teacher and directly connecting to the individual teacher are systematic labels and are fluid rather than fixed terms. More important is how meaning resonates through the names of the labels. Currently, seven factors represent ways to express the spectrums of interaction occurring within the teacher variables based on teacher participants' perceptions of early reading teaching and learning: (a) Readiness infers a sense of preparedness of the undertaking of teaching early reading. The spectrum of perceptions of being prepared (or not) to teach early reading effectively in different stages evolves through teachers' accumulated history and experience; (b) Core-skill development relates perceptions on the role of learning core teaching skills for teaching students foundational early reading skills that help students learn to read. Code-based instruction is a reading skill teachers believe needs to be taught to them and is a skill that develops over time from almost nothing early on; (c) Availability is critical to understand as specific experiences appear to be needed at different times in a teacher's career trajectory and reflects how much teachers value sustainability, which in essence is the meaning of availability; (d) Comprehensiveness/range is represented through the skills teachers need to have to teach all their students how to develop in their reading and so implies that to learn something the learning experiences have to be deep and comprise a range of learning experiences that different teachers need for developing the skills to teach reading; (e) Urgency is a separate factor included here because of how vital teachers consider it is to learn a range of teaching skills and knowledge early in their career and that this sense of urgency is embraced in perspectives relating a desire to learn a lot early on; (f) Responsibility/Balance comprises a dual nature of responsibility to the self-and-family and the self-and-professional, providing the right learning experiences for students reflective of the push and pull of balancing perceived personal and professional responsibilities; and (g) Acceptance and Adaptability infers degrees of flexibility to

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take on objectives in the learning system such as a board supported early reading initiative.

Though this list separates each factor, these seven factors should be considered holistically in how individual teachers vary based on their learning experiences and career stage.

Student Well-Being

The complexities of students' academic and social-emotional well-being are also central to the problem of learning, change, and achievement. Ideally, an education system's goal is to provide learning experiences conducive to developing core skills and strategies that help students become ethical, just, and critical consumers and contributors to society. In terms of student well-being, the contextual factors reflect values of equity and demography, inclusion and developmental awareness. Equity and Demography equate to shaping student learning experiences empathetic to students' history and current circumstances (e.g., addressing basic needs and rights to scaffold learning and positive development). These factors signify how the environment influences students individually and collectively, requiring particular teaching skills and empathy. Inclusion represents understanding how to shape specific learning experiences for students to include them as equals in the classroom. Developmental Stage implies the level/s of readiness students are at for learning specific skills in particular ways (e.g., appropriate instructional approaches or awareness of the stage groups and individual students are in).

Learning Communities

Interrelated within teacher and student variables are the complexities of learning communities. A Learning Community is considered here as a learning system and comprises three main variables: Relationships and Roles (expertise mentorship, collaboration, participation, and connectedness), Environment (geographical, social, cultural and technological) and System Compassion (openness, awareness, empathy, and learning-literate). Relationships and Roles refer

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to how a system organizes to form the learning relationships teachers respond to, informing their teaching. This variable relates to expertise, collaborative opportunities, options for participation and the connectedness in the learning experience. The variable, Environment, speaks to how the system or learning community reacts and adapts to needs in different environments to address and influence the learning and teaching process. Environmental factors are geographical, social and cultural, and technological. Geographical factors relate to proximal and situated space. Social spaces connect to physical and virtual places of learning and how social relationships influence teachers' learning experiences. Cultural factors closely connect to this but shift a focus to the influence of culture/s in the layers of the physical spaces within the learning community and how this influences teacher need. As a variable, System Compassion reflects the system's human nature and how it, as perceived as a range of interacting human intentions and tensions, influences the learning experience. Awareness connects to a system's openness and speaks to how a system provides and handles the varied needs teachers will have. Empathy connects to a system's awareness recognition, action, and capability to provide for the differences of all its learners (students and teachers) within its atmosphere.

This conceptual framework represents how the spectrums of such a range of factors influence teacher learning and student achievement. In the next chapter, along with briefly and sequentially answering the research questions, the conceptual framework shapes a discussion on teachers' state and stage, student well-being and the learning system. Following Chapter 5, the final chapter of this dissertation concludes with implications for theory, empirical research and professional practice for positively influencing students' reading achievement.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

This qualitative, complexity-situated research study of teachers' perceptions of learning, practice and student reading development fulfills a need for understanding how teacher learning processes can enact practices to enhance the learning of all students, particularly those not well-served in the current system (Cochran-Smith et al., 2014). The goal of this study is to understand (a) how contextual factors occurring at varying levels are perceived to influence the delivery and uptake of early reading professional learning opportunities, and (b) how teachers perceive their early reading professional learning influences their early reading instruction and subsequently their students' reading achievement. This section begins by situating how I consider the concept of *struggling readers* in this research. I then briefly answer the two research questions in a linear like fashion before moving into a discussion of the findings structured across three levels: teacher, student and learning system.

Notion of Struggling

This research seeks to understand how professional learning opportunities influence teaching within the confines of the 21st-century educational learning and teaching system. Chapter 2 indicates that the cognitive, psycholinguistic literacy paradigm is more influential in common conceptions of Western education's English Language Arts reading instruction. The focus of this research seeks to understand participants' perspectives regarding literacy instruction and early reading professional learning. For the teacher participants, this mostly relates to code-based instruction and setting up the learning-to-read environment. Underpinning this research is the notion of who a struggling reader is. Teachers at the rural and urban schools perceive that challenges in learning to read often centre on students' sociocultural context as inhibiting their opportunities to learn and how they and their school can help create atmospheres sensitive to

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their unique context. Teachers at all schools also consider that struggling readers have a disability or difficulty ingrained within that makes it hard for them to *crack the reading code*. Collectively, notions of struggling and at-risk imply that a student is not meeting the school system's measures of academic success. This research seeks to understand how teachers' learning context influences their learning, their teaching, and the success of all of their students. What is clear is that when someone does not fit into this system, they will be considered as unready or unequipped compared to those for whom the system is a better fit and easier to be successful in.

It is evident that the teacher participants care for their students and want nothing more than for them to learn how to read so that they have the foundations that set them up to have the freedom to contribute within a society that places so much value upon people's ability to read printed text. Further, the case schools in this research appear to be taking steps to shift and prepare their students to become more literate. I have the perception that this is scratching at the surface of inclusive early literacy practices but believe that the findings in this research illustrate how the professional learning system can adapt to be more inclusive so that notions of *failing, struggling, or at-risk* relate to a system's deficit and not a human being's deficit. In this way, varying literacies can be a part of how we celebrate success and consider learning to read beyond the traditional modes of reading achievement societal institutions use as passcodes for entry into positions of positive societal influence.

The Short Answer

This research seeks to understand the professional learning system's role upon early reading instruction and student reading success. It situates itself in literature demonstrating how a large proportion of beginning readers continue to confront immense struggles learning how to read even with a substantial body of research expressing (a) how students should learn to read,

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(b) what elements of early reading instruction effectively improve students' reading and (c) ways professional learning can improve teachers' early reading knowledge and practice. Considering that many students struggle to learn how to read in the critical early years (e.g., Allington, 2011; Schuck et al., 2018; Seidenberg, 2017; Torgesen, 2002; Wolf, 2018), my research, in utilizing a complexity theory qualitative case study approach, explores the relationships between teachers' professional learning systems, their teaching practices and their perceptions on how their teaching influences student reading development. By considering how the system influences teachers' and students' work and learning, this research addresses a gap between what the research suggests and what is happening for many students when they learn to read. It is an important topic because of the social inequities poor readers confront, and this research is needed to help inform and re-calibrate current professional learning systems to inform how education can better meet all of our students' early reading needs. To achieve these goals, the two research questions leading this research study are:

1. How do contextual variables at the school, board, and provincial level influence the planning, delivery and uptake of early reading professional learning opportunities?
2. How do teachers perceive the relationships between (a) their professional learning experiences, (b) their classroom early reading practices, and (c) student reading outcomes?

These questions have one overarching purpose; to develop an extensive sense of how context, teacher learning, teacher practice and student reading interrelate. Together these questions provided the entry point for delving into teachers' perspectives of their learning system/s and result in a framework for conceptualizing an equitable and inclusive system for early reading education and professional learning, or teacher learning and student achievement.

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Research Question One

The first research question asks, "How do contextual variables at the school, board, and provincial level influence the planning, delivery and uptake of early reading professional learning opportunities?" This question's answer will follow the chain of command structuring educational institutions: province, school board, and school (principal, teacher, students). Varying strengths of interacting factors emanate from each system to influence how the professional learning system interacts with teachers' early reading professional learning.

Province. Provincially, the Québec Ministry of Education is responsible for establishing the school system's curriculum and structure across the province. This research did not delve deep into the curriculum structure; however, Chapter 2 demonstrates there is not a clear description for teachers to follow for students' early reading instruction. Additionally the board-level participants in this research indicate the challenges teachers are having in terms of implementing it. In terms of structuring the system, the most considerable influence that the province has on teachers' uptake of professional learning appears to be the role of the cycle grades in engaging teachers with their cycle peers.

Having colleagues in the same cycle ensures degrees of professional conversations as students develop subject competencies over two years. Teacher participants from OES and BES value this structure for varying reasons. OES's isolating context limits the opportunities for OT1 and OT2 to go beyond their school community, and the cycle system affords them a form of colleague companionship. Both highly value this collaboration in their sparsely populated school. OT1 and OT2 crave collaborative learning experiences, and for them, the cycle system is one outlet that affords them opportunities to develop, accumulate, and share reading resources and instructional strategies. BT1 and BT2 also value the professional early reading conversations

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they have with their cycle partners. They appreciate how having cycle teams helps them incorporate board-supported reading initiatives into their professional conversations at school. Interestingly, the cycle system was not a part of the conversation with teachers from CES. One additional, minor, though still influential aspect to the province were concerns from participants on the timing of provincial professional learning days. Participants mention how these days often fall near holidays and reporting periods and that this does not make it desirable for them to attend.

School Board. The second level in the hierarchical chain of command within this education system is the school board. In this research, teacher participants highly value it when the school board designs professional learning opportunities that connect teachers from similar contexts and provides a reading expert to visit classrooms. Teacher participants prefer board supported early reading programs that sustain over time, provide opportunities to collaborate with peers, are led by mentors and include opportunities for teachers from different schools to connect and establish lasting professional relationships. Mentors and experts are highly valued. Teacher participants attribute their early reading knowledge, instructional strategies, career longevity, current role as a model teacher and their successful reading programs to their relationships with particular mentors.

However, when board-supported early reading programs do not connect with the school's local contextual needs (e.g., language at OES, social-emotional at CES), teachers do not overly value what the board offers. Additionally, school boards face challenges in providing isolated schools with practical, relevant and engaging technologically mediated professional learning. This research indicates how unfavourable and unstable OES participants perceive web

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conferencing is. For OES, the context of their isolation is a factor that their school board needs to address to improve professional learning.

Barriers to professional learning that teacher participants perceive in this research reflect cost, timing, topic and an overall sense of reduction in early reading professional learning. Specific to the two teachers at OES is their isolation, and the personal time and money they have to spend to attend centrally offered professional learning. Teachers who are mothers face exclusion from the learning communities they are accustomed to when they take a leave to have children and upon their return to teaching and have numerous obligations to their families after school hours.

Finally, one resounding belief expressed by all teachers is that there is no professional learning provided from their school board to help them learn how to help students who struggle to read. Specific difficulties generally revolve around general conceptions of students finding reading hard or students having learning difficulties. However, in these conversations, participants perceive that they do not have the skills to help students who struggle and that the board is not providing them with any opportunities to learn how to support their struggling readers.

One barrier influencing the delivery and uptake of early reading professional learning reflects the school board's role and includes the principal to varying degrees. Above, the role of physical exclusion in negatively influencing OES teachers' perceptions of professional learning expresses the importance of understanding how to connect with teachers and including them in an effective professional learning process. Participants are wary of how to access some learning opportunities and believe that the school board often controls who will attend. Further, participants are unsure how to obtain funds or access to professional learning opportunities and

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that the board consults principals' opinions and recommendations of specific individuals. The perceptions of the participants who voice this concern indicate that there needs to be a more transparent process for teachers in their professional learning aims, opportunities and directions. Otherwise, as teachers perceive, a sense of distrust and disengagement can materialize.

An interesting finding relates to teachers' perceptions of how influential the teacher induction program is that all new teachers to the board take part in. Notably, no teachers consider that this program is influential upon their reading instruction. Participants would like to see these mentor-mentee relationships more relatable to their early reading needs as beginning teachers. There are potentially significant benefits of a teacher induction program, yet this does not resonate with teacher participants in this research. Understanding the emotional experience of becoming a new teacher and combining it with research on teacher knowledge levels can shape possibilities for creating practical ways to structure new possibilities that connect with these teachers' emerging early reading needs.

School Level.

Principal. Principals influence the uptake of early reading professional learning in several ways. First, the school's sociocultural context appears to influence the choices principals make towards professional learning. CES' principal embeds school-led learning with workshops and discussions on attachment theory. CP believes that unless students in the school learn to view the school as a safe place, they will struggle in all facets of school life. At OES, OP organizes school-based professional learning around developing their predominantly French-speaking population's English language capacity. BES does not have a comparable population of students to the other two case schools. BP works with the staff on visible learning and developing students' metacognitive skills. Secondly, relating to the point above are the professional

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perspectives underpinning principals' beliefs about how students learn in their schools. For example, this appears to influence choices they make concerning who teaches specific grades and what type of teachers principals want to hire. CP considers grade 1 the most critical year of elementary school for students and so the teacher in that role is someone he believes will continue to seek ways to help their students learn to read and regulate: and this appears accurate when considering the path CT2 is on concerning her early reading development and role as a model early reading teacher within the board. OP is an experienced rural school teacher and principal, and part of her position goes to teaching. Along with a strong literacy instruction background, OP has her finger on the pulse of her students' day-to-day needs and is adamant that she will not be someone who leaves the classroom to be a full-time administrator. BP believes struggling readers remediate over time; that difficulties with reading relate to the speed of development and that by early high school, most students will grow out of this problem. The varying personalities of each principal influences the options for early reading professional learning at the school level.

Teachers. Teachers' level of experience profoundly influences their perceptions of their participation in early reading professional learning. Teacher knowledge develops over time, and setting the foundation through a range of experiences at the beginning of teachers' professional careers is essential in their early years. The four most experienced teachers in this research consider their early years overwhelming but upon reflection, acknowledge the importance of participating in professional learning that prepared them to provide core cognitively based principles of early reading instruction. Context strongly influences perceptions of teacher-learning needs, and though teachers are receptive to some elements of the school board's early reading professional learning, the board needs to align with teachers' specific sociocultural

situation. Four participants explicitly declare that they take pieces of the most recent reading programs supported by the board but will not fully commit to these programs or the associated professional learning because it is not contextually relevant to their students' needs. Preparing beginning teachers for the abrupt entry into their profession, along with information about the general developmental trajectory teachers traverse across their career, will help teachers realistically discover and broadly map out their learning paths. Further, understanding how layering professional learning overtime influences instruction, teachers will benefit from a system that differentiates to teachers' varying strengths, provides collaboration, offers mentoring, seeks teacher mentors, and creates social learning opportunities for teachers within and across schools. After briefly answering research question two, the discussion below expands upon these types of learning systems.

Research Question Two

The second research question asks, “How do teachers perceive the relationships between (a) their professional learning experiences, (b) their classroom early reading practices, and (c) student reading outcomes?”

Professional learning experiences that comprise multiple and varied learning experiences early in one’s teaching career involve collaborative learning opportunities with peers, reading experts and mentors and relate to the context of teachers’ work. These elements translate to perceived positive instruction and improved reading outcomes for students. Describing the notion of achievement and student reading outcomes at the onset of this dissertation, I make the point that this is not reading achievement per standard normative based assessments but rather, concerns how teachers perceive that their instruction helps their students become confident and fluent readers.

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Teachers who receive a range of early reading professional learning early in their careers use it to anchor their reading instruction and future professional learning. To beginning teachers, this does not appear to be a self-evident revelation when they are in the early and abrupt process of becoming a teacher, but it does appear to inform their reading instruction across the years when they have the time to reflect on this process of learning. An openness to a range of early reading professional learning also relates these teachers' receptivity towards shifting instructional ideologies. For example, in this research, three teachers who began their career teaching from a whole-language perspective speak about incorporating more code-based instruction after experiencing it in professional learning and improving their practice and their students' reading progress. These teacher participants are aware of how culture influences their students' readiness to learn to read. Specifically, teachers from CES and OES value professional learning that connects to their students' sociocultural characteristics. Professional learning that reflects their students' identities reverberates with these teachers, informs their practice, and engages their students. Mentorship is also integral to the development of teaching early reading instruction perceived to influence their students' reading success. A perfect mentor supports teachers' confidence, provides effective instructional strategies for early reading instruction, and demonstrates how to deliver effective instructional strategies and reading programs and is available on short notice via emails, phone, text, and personal visits to the classroom.

The above discussion is fairly surface level and communicates a succinct culmination of the extensive data analysis in a linear-like response to the two research questions. It is useful as a starting point for setting into motion some broad overarching elements and avoiding certain variables that act as barriers to teachers' early reading professional learning and student reading achievement. The next section provides a lengthier and contextually more significant discussion

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framed within the main variables interacting in the teacher learning, change and achievement process: the student in the centre supported by the teacher on one side and the learning community on the other.

Learning, Change and Achievement

This section answers the research questions using the conceptual framework presented at the end of Chapter 4. By focusing on the teachers' lived experience within early reading and professional learning, I have explored an under-considered aspect to early reading research by utilizing complexity theory to untangle how contextual factors influence the variables at the front and centre of reading instruction: teachers, students and the learning system. Framed within complexity theory, this section of the discussion connects the findings to relevant research on teaching, learning and early reading instruction, situating a way for conceptualizing early reading instruction as an emergent, self-organizing and nested process dependent on a learning system adaptive to the varying teaching and learning needs it comprises. Conceptualizing the interacting factors upon and within the variables of teacher state and stage of learning, student well-being and the learning community, an inclusive professional learning system for teachers and students emerges. The findings weave a complex web of how the contextual variables influence teachers' perceptions about meeting their students' early reading needs. Within this human social learning collective, the contextual factors at play and discussed here are highly influential upon each of the variables' ecosystems. Conceptualizing the learning, change and achievement process as a more elevated interconnected ecosystem than its parts provides an inclusive pathway towards a decentralized learning collective explicitly valuing diversity, compassion, and individual differences. Following this complexity situated discussion, Chapter 6 concludes this study suggesting theoretical, empirical and practical implications and the limitations of this research.

Teachers: State and Stages of Professional Learning and Experience

Results in this research indicate the receptivity teachers have towards undertaking a range of early reading professional learning and development opportunities in their beginning years. Over time, teachers' nested nature within a particular stage of their career represents different early reading professional needs and how developing comfort, confidence, and a philosophy of reading instruction emerges slowly and through a range of learning experiences. In line with sociocultural theory on teacher professional learning, effective collaborative learning experiences often, though not always, provide a type of community that nurtures teacher identity, knowledge and practice (Kelly, 2006). The data also presents how visible, and invisible forms of complexity reduce and redirect teacher learning opportunities and their practices and students' early reading experiences. Complexity reduction "refers to ways in which the complexity of social systems may be reduced" (Hetherington, 2013, p. 74). In terms of the teacher variables in this research (state and stage), complexity reduction is visible in how ideal conceptions of learning are perceived to be present (or not) and how these perceptions reflect the emotional sensitivity in terms of fitting in, self-confidence and beliefs around having needs provided. Complexity reduction occurs across all stages and nested levels of teachers (ages, schools, experiences, personal lives) by limiting teacher learning and practices in similar and varying ways throughout teachers' careers.

Teachers with varying levels of experience have different learning needs, and early career teachers need access to a range of opportunities for learning how to teach reading and to develop critical foundations to their professional practice (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2013; Hargreaves, 2005; Mahmoudi-Gahrouei et al., 2016). Emphasis on understanding the emergence of self-organizing systems needs to be better considered concerning teachers' experiences and needs and the new

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complex systems they enter as beginning teachers and while they progress along their professional trajectories (Cilliers, 2000; Morrison, 2008). The range of the career and life stages of the participants in this study provide data demonstrating a spectrum of teachers' professional needs. One constant finding this research highlights is the value that all participants place on their learning community. For example, in the context of the Québec system, the cycle partner is invaluable to most teachers. Though she is critical of the learning opportunities in isolated OES, OT1 finds her cycle colleague an invaluable professional companion. BT1 and BT2, along with other teachers at BES, communicate via a shared, rich professional language throughout the hallways, via impromptu meetings in each other's classes after school and during lunch in the staffroom. The power and desire for collaboration with school colleagues emerged in conversations with BES and OES participants in various strengths and with varying effects and regulating the development of a shared school language. Collaborative forms of learning are an essential part of gaining access to a community and developing a professional identity.

Teachers' professional identities jolt into action in their early years (Hargreaves, 2005; Hetherington, 2013). Individually, within their new system/s of learning, beginning teachers seek to self-organize in ways for teaching practices to emerge, which helps them understand basic constructs for teaching early reading and meeting their students' needs. It is an initial developmental process that the teachers in this research undergo, and that appears to occur intensely in their first few years while they adjust to a dizzying and overwhelming professional environment. The two beginning teachers from OES share a current snapshot of this experience as they discuss their uneven processes of cobbling together their early reading practices. For example, OT2, in her second full year of teaching, embodies the hectic life of the beginning teacher. She reacts to immediate needs instead of longer-term unit and lesson planning and

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admits to planning twenty minutes before the school day begins because she just knows where she is going. Overall, the four most experienced teachers in this research (11-21 years) relate how meaningful their variety of early reading professional learning experiences in their early years are on their teaching. For them, these are critical times to experiment and learn about different elements of reading instruction. Upon reflection, BT2 views her professional learning experiences fitting together like a puzzle even though this was not the case in her beginning years during the scramble to develop an identity as a professional teacher. Interestingly, OT1, in her third year of teaching, also alludes to the notion of layering past professional learning to enhance her reading instruction.

These teachers perceive that their early professional learning experiences are foundational to their current core early reading practices (e.g., being introduced to the elements of guided reading instruction, setting up their classroom environment for reading, and adapting their instructional beliefs). Their experiences have been catalysts to their existing knowledge and reading instruction by helping them become flexible in their approaches and providing practical tools such as technology (e.g., Smartboard) and program structures (e.g., guided reading). Likewise, Hargreaves (2005) finds that experienced teachers consider that their early years are crucial in their development, where an eclectic range of professional learning opportunities is welcome. His research demonstrates teachers awash in strong emotions (fitting in, striving to be good teachers) while they often, and abruptly, transition into their new roles and responsibilities. In this kind of frenzied atmosphere, it can be difficult for new teachers to make professional learning choices instrumental to their early reading instruction. CT1's and CT2's acknowledgement of making some ineffective choices in their first few years of teaching exemplifies this. However, they admit that some learning opportunities, such as the Bureau of

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Educational Research, influence their current reading instruction, and larger populated one-off professional development productions do not leverage their professional capital.

Importantly the findings indicate that the rural teacher participants, though appreciating elements of their professional learning, perceive that much of the early reading professional learning available to them are void of instruction on more core individual teaching strategies. This finding does not necessarily represent negative perceptions of the professional learning the two teachers from OES receive but indicates that both teachers believe more opportunities to learn how to teach the early reading skills that their curriculum requires will help them develop upon the basic skills they perceive they possess. As it stands, OT1 and OT2 represent teachers in their early stages of developing a sense of self-efficacy to meeting their students' early reading needs. Research supports how this appears to be the most critical stage to learn focused and wide-ranging skills. Hargreaves' (2005) findings on teacher change throughout a career reflect similar notions to the two beginning teachers from the OES, the rural case school. Teachers early in their careers value and need a range of learning experiences that will ground some of the core components of teaching reading. Concerning the self-organization of beginning teachers, practices emerge and develop across time. Therefore, these first few years of teaching are the ideal stage of their careers for teachers to learn a range of methods and skills to provide reading instruction and put things into play (practice). However, it also appears that beginning teachers have trouble understanding how to synthesize experiences, and only years later, when reflecting on their early years, do they see how early reading professional learning imprints upon their knowledge. Along with developing a core knowledge base, the beginning years are also a time for new teachers to find their places as professional teachers.

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All teacher participants in this study perceive the influence and value of early reading professional learning upon their practice and students' reading development and success. Teachers' early professional learning experiences equally influence their sense of initial grounding towards a more in-depth perspective of their professional sense of self. The early years stand out as a junction in a teacher's career when they need professional learning sensitive to their readiness and potential. It is also a time to help anchor their understanding of early reading instruction; a time and place when foundational beliefs and practices are emerging and malleable and when the introduction of specific practical skills are necessary (Day & Gu, 2006; Mahmoudi-Gahrouei et al., 2016; Pillen et al., 2013; Schuck et al., 2018; Van der Klink et al., 2017). Participants often noted the influence of and desire for learning with early reading experts. One existing learning opportunity for all teachers beginning in the board is the teacher induction program. Research reflects how challenges new teachers face are often not worked out during their induction and mentorship experiences (Schuck et al., 2018). Even when beginning teachers have mentors and smaller classes in their first years, the problem areas not resolved persist years later, emphatically acknowledging the importance of considering new teachers' needs in ways that teaching development priorities match theirs and their students' learning needs. Interestingly, teacher participants' do not perceive their induction experience influenced their early reading instruction. School boards with a better understanding of their beginning teachers' early reading knowledge will have some critical information to design learning opportunities early in these teachers' careers to help them develop a solid foundation for teaching reading to all of their students.

Pillen et al. (2013) identify the importance of fitting in as a beginning teacher and the value of professional learning in these early years to help decrease professional self-doubts by

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increasing perceptions of professional and personal self-efficacy. Kelly (2006), viewing teacher education through a sociocultural lens, stresses how critical it is to understand social learning processes and experiences beginning teachers need so they believe that they are part of the professional community they are entering. New teachers are on the periphery of their profession and require collaborative experiences to help learn content and develop their identities as teachers. The diverse environments of participants in this study (rural, suburban, urban) represent the role sociocultural factors have on developing a teacher's professional identity in different teaching environments. In this research and reflected in Hargreaves (2005) and Pillen et al. (2013), it is clear that a strong focus on developing core skills can develop practical and core teaching strategies and improve teachers' self-efficacy and self-perceptions in their teaching community; and that this contributes to a sense of belonging.

Further, and concerning complexity theory, the nature of connectivity and openness in systems is enhanced by professional learning that empowers many new teachers' core skills to develop and positively affect their professional self-efficacy and sense of professional community (Cilliers, 2000). Here, the notion of adaptiveness of complex systems is central for empathizing with the developmental process of new teachers' identities within nested systems (Davis & Sumara, 2005; Morrison, 2008). For the most part, the findings on the nature of being a beginning teacher relate the sense of urgency and excitability that new teachers experience, longing to carve out a breadth and depth of professional knowledge. However, mediating these perspectives, particularly for the rural school teachers at OES, is exclusion and how being nested in a rural school can shape attitudes towards their professional learning system. The three participants from OES share the challenges that their geographical and professional social isolation has on their learning, perspectives towards learning communities and overall sense of

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connection with other less isolated teachers and schools. For example, OT2 relates their school's physical and social location akin to being on the edge of the earth, and OT1 and OT2 worry that their isolation invariably impedes them from leaving to obtain professional learning beyond their school. Their particular situation represents educators on the outside looking in, while simultaneously, their peers in less excluding environments can seamlessly integrate into diverse and active collaborative learning communities. This sense of exclusion to collaboration extends into virtual spaces as well. Internet connectivity is not reliable, and currently, OT1 and OT2 perceive web conferencing severely lacks the personal connection they believe face-to-face collaboration provides. Teachers at BES similarly discuss the value of collaboration. However, unlike their rural counterparts, they have access to more teachers in their school and are more centrally located. The value teachers at BES place on learning with their peers accentuates the importance for teachers to have access to environments that nurture a shared professional language and use the diverse knowledge and experiences larger collectives of teachers offer each other and, therefore, a place for emergence of knowledge and sound reading practices.

BT1, BT2, CT1 and CT2 consider specific professional relationships highly influential in their transformations in becoming fully-fledged members of the teaching community. For example, CT1, who nearly quit teaching in her second year, experiences a perspective-shifting metamorphosis following a rigorous one week in-situ reflective, collaborative experience with a highly experienced educator. For CT2, her relationship with SB3 beginning in her first year teaching grade one is the impetus to her participation in the school board's early reading professional learning program, and in which she is now a model teacher. BT1 considers two very early mentors prominent influences upon her early reading instruction. Along with developing core early reading skills, this experience was responsible for diminishing negative self-

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perceptions and increasing her professional self-efficacy. It is apparent that when teachers can work alongside knowledgeable and dedicated professionals, there is a synergy that ignites positive change, practice and beliefs. OT1 and OT2 unfortunately, do not mention similarly profound, influential experiences, but because they are in the early stages of their careers, they will hopefully have similar experiences.

Understanding the nature of nestedness is an integral component to conceptualize teacher identity, early reading belief system, and emergence and self-organization as a professional. Davis and Simmt's (2006) discussion and depiction of nested complex phenomena present a timescale for considering the relationships and transformations teachers move through developing varying orders of knowledge. Their findings connect to a perspective on how novice teachers transition over time to become experts (Kelly, 2006). Citing social theorists Shon, Lave and Wenger, Kelly (2006) iterates how becoming an expert teacher requires opportunities for engagement with other professionals to help transition novices from a peripheral position of learning towards full participation: "In their movement from novice to expert, people adopt different stances towards the task in which they are engaged ... Facets of such constructions include how teachers interpret their role, the meanings and understandings which they bring to their role, their beliefs and intentions" (p. 513). Understanding beginning teachers as on a periphery underscores an urgency for others with more experience and knowledge in the community of professional teachers to help bring them into circles to share, learn and develop their teacher identities.

The personal nature of a teacher's life nests within the personal and professional influences encompassing them, interacting to influence their access to professional learning and development (Avalos, 2011; Hargreaves, 2005). Whereas at the beginning of their careers, all

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teachers are entering a community for the first time, life situations such as family obligations and responsibility are also interacting and disrupting how teachers access their professional communities. These varying needs comprise an element interplaying with the professional learning experience. BT1, BT2, CT1, and OT1 report how economic interests conflict with their professional learning and diminishes their likelihood of seeking professional learning. OT1 perceives it is often too expensive to pay upfront for professional learning when the returns on knowledge gained are minimal. For the three teachers with children (BT1, BT2, and CT1), priorities for spending belong to their families. The commitment to raising a family places a firm boundary on most primary school teachers' professional growth for sustained periods in their careers. Considering that 84% of the elementary teaching population is female, too many teachers at varying points in their careers relinquish the learning communities they depend on to change practice and influence perspective (Statistics Canada, 2017). It is also very likely that teachers who have to step out of their professional community to raise their infant children never quite regain entry for various reasons. For example, BT2, whose child is school-age, does not consider professional learning that will take her away from her family. However she does attribute early reading professional learning occurring in her school to be instrumental for learning effective strategies to manage her instruction. BT1 and her husband (who works nights) are raising several children. Only very recently has she more time to attend some professional learning because her mother moved back to Blending. However, this is likely not the same scenario for many teachers who are mothers and struggle to balance their personal and professional responsibilities.

Davis and Simmt (2006) depict subjective understanding nested in classroom connectivity, nested in curriculum structures, nested in mathematical objects as categories of

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nested knowledge. Subjective understanding and knowledge can happen over a matter of seconds, while conceptual knowledge of mathematical objects develops across decades of intentional participation. Their breakdown of learning timelines relates to identity and connects to the findings in this research regarding the epistemological assumptions teachers hold as they enter their profession. Important, though lightly touched on in this research, is the role of shifting foundations and emerging instructional beliefs teachers go through. For example, beginning their teaching careers with a preference for providing a whole reading environment for reading instruction, BT1, BT2 and CT1 undergo a shift in their approach to reading instruction following professional learning on code-based instruction early in their careers. Interestingly, a range of support for whole-reading, code-based and balanced reading exists (see literature review in Chapter 2). However, literature over the last two decades primarily promotes how necessary it is for teachers to implement scientific cognitively-based early reading instruction to teach students to crack the reading code (Torgesen, 2002; Wolf, 2016). Thus, it is not overly surprising that participants mention their shift to code-based and nearly no emphasis concerning other forms of reading and literacy. At the time of this research, OT1 and OT2 are searching for ways to help their students crack the code. Understanding their entry into their profession as a process of forming an identity from the periphery into full membership indicates that providing a range of more code-based learning experiences will help speed up this integration, but also recognizes that including more contextualized notions of literacy will make learning to read more inclusive (Kelly, 2006). The emergence of a teaching belief system, or teachers' philosophical and ideological approach for conceptualizing early reading instruction, is a factor that requires nurturing over time; and included in this is expanding ways for including more students to incorporate more naturally culturally relevant literacies.

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In terms of literacy paradigms, teacher self-belief is also a critical factor in the teaching-learning process. A brief overview of literacy paradigms in Chapter 2 presents two main and varying views on literacy and their relationship to reading instruction. A cognitive, psycholinguistic paradigm on reading privileges reading instruction that provides code-based instruction where students learn letter-sound relationships, moving stepwise to becoming fluent readers of longer text and developing reading comprehension of printed material (Beach & O'Brien, 2017; O'Brien & Rogers, 2015). This view prevails in most elementary schools and teacher education programs (Beach & O'Brien, 2017). Very broadly speaking, sociocultural literacy paradigms focus on situated and contextual natures of literacy through considering the value-based implications of literacy (meaning from print, meaning from and across multimodalities and meaning from reading the word and the world) and how the mainstream society and institutions do not leverage the literacies oppressed and less advantaged individuals and cultures value (Perry, 2012). Connecting code-based strategies to student reading improvements is a traditional way to consider reading instruction but largely omits sociocultural considerations for why too many students struggle to read (Dillon & O'Brien, 2019; Perry, 2012).

Most participants commented that their bachelor of education program did not effectively help them learn to provide code-based instruction, instead preparing them to provide engaging literacy-rich whole language atmospheres. This foundation of this preservice learning environment raises a critical point. English language arts preservice education does not appear to provoke, at minimum, memories of a critical sociocultural aspect to the nature of literacies in these programs. In turn, this influences the ways teachers consider how to deliver reading instruction and prioritize their professional learning. Together this symbolizes how current structures privilege a cognitive (code-based) approach. For example, no teachers overtly mention

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this beyond an attempt to connect schooling to meet second language and attachment needs (OES and CES). Ultimately this perpetuates a perspective that the many students who struggle to read have a deficit within them that needs repairing rather than a system in need of reform (see Perry, 2012). However, a ray of optimism exists as the four most experienced teachers experienced shifts in integrating code-based and whole language approaches, and CT1 and CT2 place a priority on adapting instruction to their students' contextual uniqueness. Together, this suggests that the participants in this research can likely expand their literacy conception as more inclusive to students with rich and strong literacies (Beach & O'Brien, 2017; Perry, 2012).

This section above presents a cluster of interrelated contextual factors influencing professional learning and teaching experience. Interacting and interrelated factors within teachers' early reading learning and practice reflect degrees of teachers' readiness, range and quantity of experience, learning hoped for, an intrinsic ability to shift philosophical beliefs and expand knowledge over time, and the influence of collaborative experiences in transforming teaching. This research study vocalizes teachers' desires to have professional learning inclusive towards a school's cultural context that provides diverse topics that relate to literacy and learning to read, and includes regular opportunities to collaborate with experienced peers. Says Kelly (2006), these kinds of

explorations would be specific to particular groups or individuals and the context of their practice ... [I]t is the constant and iterative engagement in constructing and reconstructing professional knowledge using various perspectives including teacher research with the aim of conceptualizing and addressing problems. Here teachers have an active and productive relationship with their professional knowledge base. They construct their own knowledge base for teaching, in their own particular circumstances... (p. 509)

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Teasing out the contextual factors interacting upon teachers in this research demonstrates that teachers want to collaborate, value mentoring, seek knowledge, need to have their personal lives considered, and importantly, are flexible in shifting beliefs when some aspects for learning are available to help them learn, practice and change. All teacher participants value learning with others, but for beginning teachers, this also offers an opportunity to be included in their new community. At the centre of the teacher-learning experience, and discussed next, is student well-being.

Student Well-being: The Academic and Social-Emotional Combination

In part, the previous section discusses the importance of addressing teachers' core reading needs in their early years to help provide a foundation from which to develop and scaffold teachers into their professional teaching communities; both critical elements in the construction of a teacher's identity and self-efficacy (Hargreaves, 2005; Kelly, 2006; Mahmoudi-Gahrouei et al., 2016). Beyond the notion of the developing professional self, it is essential to understand how teaching knowledge and skill influence students' reading experiences and successes (Allington, 2011; Castles et al., 2018; Fletcher, 2013; O'Brien & Rogers, 2015). The act of teaching and learning is a social process between and amongst students and teachers and requires a combination of empathy and knowledge from teachers towards their students (Kelly, 2006; O'Brien & Rogers, 2015; Perry, 2012). Findings in this research indicate how crucial teachers perceive it is for them to meet their students' social needs and how social skills have to be in place to be academically ready for learning. Complexity theory frameworks denote the importance placed on understanding nestedness, self-organization and emergence of effects influenced in layers and tensions of interacting expectations, responsibility, diversity and beliefs (Morrison, 2008; Davis & Sumara, 2005; Osberg et al., 2008). For example, consider how a

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struggling reader is nested within a class who has a teacher unable to provide instruction to leverage students' strengths and abilities. This could be a teacher unable to offer code-based instruction due to faulty learning experiences, or a teacher who cannot provide an engaging and safe atmosphere for students to take risks. It could be a teacher who is not culturally cognizant and socially aware of how their teaching does not connect to their students' diverse backgrounds. The ways this might compound into a crisis with the wrong combination of teacher/s and student/s is troubling and very possible.

This multiple case study of a rural, urban and suburban school's contextual uniqueness provides a panoramic of how local natures and students' needs are often top of mind when teachers relate to their professional learning perspectives and needs. For example, teachers at OES work incredibly hard to connect to their students' French language backgrounds. At Blending Elementary, BT2 attends attachment workshops to help her create a restful and safe learning environment. All CES participants are mindful of the many students' in the school who have challenging home experiences, and they take steps through professional learning to incorporate this awareness into their school and classroom practices. Catalano et al. 's (2006) research on school connectedness (school bonding [attached relationships to school] and commitment [investment to doing well in school]) reveals the importance of establishing close student-with-teacher and student-with-school relationships because low connected students are more likely to abuse drugs, be delinquent, commit a crime, and drop out of school. Other research indicates the relationship between students' school connectedness and academic success and environmental factors related to the home, such as socioeconomic status, attitudes to learning, and cultural priorities (Forget-Dubois et al., 2009; Noble et al., 2006). In turn, and over the long term, these attitudes are a factor in student learning across time and are already

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developing when children enter school. Detached attitudes from students towards school are a disposition more urban and rural school teachers will face, and the learning system organizing professional learning needs to consider this (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; Grudnoff et al., 2016).

This line of thinking relates to my research in how relationships (teachers and students) influence the professional self but also in the ways that contextual factors shape the needs of students and create the emergent needs unique to particular locations. In this research, struggling readers are perceived to be students who have a learning difficulty (OT1, BT1, CT1, CT2), whose first language is not English (OT1, OT2, CT1, CT2), who are low socio-economically (CT1, CT2), or who are First Nations (CT1, CT2). It appears that these students, unfortunately, struggle more than others, and these struggling readers represent a substantial portion nested in the grades in their schools and across our society (Allington, 2011; Frontier College, 2017, 2018; Government of Canada, 2015). Because the principal of Central Elementary perceives how challenging academic expectations are for many students, he strives to provide teachers at CES professional learning to create safe and motivating classrooms and prioritize learning, which puts the notion of whole student well-being in front of the formal academic benchmarks teachers are responsible for reporting. CT1 and CT2 respect CP's outlook on connecting to the student body, taking part in the related school-based professional learning, and seeking learning opportunities beyond board-supported early reading professional learning; though not all CES teachers follow CP's community-based approach to schooling. Relatedly, all participants at OES admit to shifting their more traditional elements of teaching English Language Arts to connect to their students' sociocultural differences in the predominantly French-speaking lower SES community of Extère. In general terms, emergence materializes through patterns of self-organization (for example, what teachers learn and board or provincial guidelines for what is acceptable numbers

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of properly achieving students) and reflects how teachers might or might not transform their teaching in systems that expect specific indicators of achievement. Whereas teacher participants from CES and OES self-organize their learning and teaching by incorporating social-emotional and cultural aspects into their teaching, this same belief in changing practice is not as urgently explicit in the mostly middle-class Blending.

The findings on perceptions of teachers towards struggling readers indicates that students continue to face challenges learning to read because professional learning opportunities generally do not exist to prepare teachers to help these students learn how to read academically. Though this troubling state of affairs opens up questions about how particular literacies are privileged, all participants in my study acknowledge the low number of professional learning experiences they have had to prepare them to teach students struggling to read printed text. This recognition represents how complexity for learning to teach reduces teacher learning experiences by tilting towards reading instruction catering to the needs of an exclusive group of students who are often not experiencing the same kinds of difficulties as peers who are less advantaged than they are. This negative form of self-organization influences repeated exclusion for students that fit into one or more of the categories listed above. Likely, the inexistence of learning opportunities to understand how to better meet these students' needs is unintentional. However, the problem is that as this continues to go unrecognized at this level, a gap between obtaining learning opportunities for teachers to develop efficacy, knowledge and skills for recognizing and leveraging the literacies of their students increases or, generally, stays the same.

In terms of social and emotional well-being, aspects of influence relating to the cultural and demographic relationships are apparent at the school levels where professional learning emerges from the collective self-organization of principal perspectives, teacher perspectives and

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student needs. For example, OES is undertaking a collective focus on vocabulary development, and educators in the urban school have had repeated opportunities to learn about integrating principals of attachment theory in their classrooms and their school. These foci reflect the recognition of uniquenesses on teacher learning at local levels emerging from students' needs nested in their particular systems. This research does not deeply explore the role of the principal in comparison to how it seeks to unpack and interpret the perspectives of teachers; yet a body of related empirical literature reflects how a sense of place influences principals' perspectives on local schooling needs (Abbate-Vaughn, 2004; Budge, 2006; Sider et al., 2017). The principal's role requires a more in-depth exploration of the range of factors influencing teachers' professional learning opportunities connected to social and emotional learning amongst early reading professional development.

Broadly, participants from all schools stress how social and emotional factors influence student learning. These factors relate to how children are affected by the changing pace and demands within society and the high number of students today who need help from their teachers and schools to nourish their social and emotional well-being. Without balancing social and emotional well-being, learning to read is an even more significant challenge. However, what is also apparent is that unfortunately, along with an overall sense of living in a rapid and disconnected society in comparison to prior generations, the local complexities at play are under-considered at times when thinking about student readiness within the confines of a curriculum privileging the school readiness of white upper middle class students (Perry, 2012). Students who go to school in urban centres and rural settings face sustaining and inequitably discordant opportunities to fail than peers where home life is considered more stable and literacy-enriched (Abbate-Vaughn, 2004; Barley & Beesley, 2007).

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The power of complexity reduction flows from the social, emotional and behavioural diversities that students possess, and that appears to hinder their willingness or engagement with traditional academic expectations of learning to read. By considering how contextual factors at the student level are entrenched in social and emotional connections with the learning experience, reflects how local needs have to be responsibly and empathetically recognized and balanced within expectations for academic, and social and emotional development. Further, understanding the influential role of contextual factors indicates how important it is to create learning environments that are equitable and inclusive to students' social and emotional realities. Student needs vary, reflect their local contextual particularities and factors, and relate to the students' various connections, which need understanding and empathy from teachers to help make learning how to read a more meaningful and engaging event. A professional learning system that encompasses this kind of empathy shapes teachers' learning experiences based on their students' wide-ranging needs and provides learning experiences meaningfully engaging for their teachers.

The Learning Community

Priestley (2011) remarks how we live in a world of change and reform activity but that “the core of schooling has remained the same” (p. 2) and that this outdated mode of thinking is going to be detrimental to teaching and learning when it does not compassionately shift more towards the contextual elements influencing and representing students' and teachers' needs. Self-organized systems survive through changes experienced within and across the collectives of systems nested within systems (e.g., Morrison, 2008). Educational systems are human systems comprising a range of interacting collectives. In places, the findings in this research study articulate negativity from participants around reductions to professional learning and other

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accessibility issues limiting experiences they yearn for or perceive as positive. For these teachers, their needs mostly relate to their teaching context and teaching experiences, but their learning experiences are dependent on assistance from learning systems able to ensure generating and sustaining environments adaptive to teachers' and their students' learning needs.

Davis et al. (2012), in their complexity guided research with three school boards in Western Canada, represent how a board (learning system) with strict centralized authority and established hierarchies selected professional learning opportunities based on their value and ability to have learning accountabilities measured. They demonstrate how a centralized learning system reduces change opportunities by defining the structures of work and learning and how teachers' roles and responsibilities are pre-established. This is not to imply that this kind of system has ill intentions to those within but represents how the structures comprising the learning system can constrict and limit learning experiences, how relationships form and the environments where learning happens. In this type of relationship, teachers' perceptions of decisions made higher up resemble, at times, confusion (e.g., questioning of motives and directions) and a sense of being powerless to learn and change directions; a perception that BT1 and BT2 strongly embrace regarding the lack of control they perceive teachers generally have in accessing professional learning. Permeating throughout the teacher-participant interviews with CT1, CT2, BT1, and BT2 are their perceptions that professional learning opportunities have steadily declined over the past few years, diminishing their opportunity to develop professionally. OT1, OT2 and OP believe more needs to happen to plug rural teachers into face-to-face professional learning networks. In terms of the relationship between systems nested within systems Zellermyer & Margolin's (2005) complexity theory research relates how individual identities develop through community participation and that communities are not

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equal nor symmetrical. Learning communities have to be led by an empathetic leadership core group

who organizes events and connects members of the community, as well as others who take on other leadership roles. These individuals form the core group of participants and actively take part in discussions in the public community forum. They often take on community projects, identify topics for the community to address, and move the community along its learning agenda. (p. 1277)

Zellermayer and Margolin indicate the importance of organizational capacity to make the learning experience an engaging and effective transition towards changes in understanding and practice when considering roles within a learning collaborative. In my research, participants appeared confused and surprised about the decline in their learning networks. Interestingly it is mainly the suburban and rural teachers who reflect perspectives of need, appreciation, and wistfulness towards teacher learning communities in their schools. BT1's and BT2's disappointment revolves around the loss of peer collaborative learning networks and opportunities to learn with expert early reading leaders. OT1's experience as a literacy rep for her school is a transformative experience for her, and she strongly wishes for more opportunities to learn with peers from other schools in the board. OT2's isolation is mostly in part to not having experiences for learning with other teachers who teach the same grade and does not feel this opportunity is on the horizon. When discussing changes to or severing of learning networks, perceptions of abandonment and loss of learning ensue. These perceptions indicate the influence of a learning system's capacity to have compassion for teachers' desires for learning and change. Opportunities for learning with peers from other schools is vital for these rural school teachers. For the suburban school, the two teacher participants gave fairly glowing opinions of their school

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(cycle) learning team. There is a perception of receiving professional nourishment through regularly sustained social learning experiences, with OT1, OT2, BT1 and BT2 sharing how they professionally benefit from these opportunities to meet their specific contextual needs.

Per the discussion at the start of this section was the notion that redundant human systems are by design organized in a harmful way to those closely connected within their learning system (Morrison, 2008; Priestly, 2011). This kind of learning system closes off the social nature of learning, restricting knowledge-on and knowledge-of-practice opportunities and projecting a position that knowledge resides within individuals and not across (Kelly, 2006). One case school board in Davis et al. (2012) crafted professional learning designs that severed collaboration opportunities beyond the school. This is a cognitivist, mechanistic approach to teacher learning and creates a barrier for extending experiences beyond present circumstances (Kelly, 2006). In Davis et al.'s research, this particular school board illustrates how a learning system organized to use special funds from the province to generate board and in-school experts for providing professional learning experiences based solely on school need limits collaboration and creates isolation, relating to the perceptions of exclusion OT1 and OT2 share. Though this approach ensures equality in opportunities for professional learning funding driven by local interests, it results in little within- and across-board school learning community (Davis et al., 2012).

A fragmented learning system represents an impersonal connection to schools and prevents fruitful and diverse learning relationships by operating through a model of efficiency: limiting the messiness of collaboration and keeping messages local and clear (Davis et al. 2012). In this kind of learning system, the learning collective represents a lost opportunity, and with it, the change opportunities that teachers, such as the participants in this research value, appreciate and crave. The teacher participants from OES illustrate teachers in a similar condition where

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they are at the mercy of learning primarily at their location and with a very restricted number of teachers. Collaboration provides one medium to overcome redundancy by welcoming and inquiring into differences in understanding, connecting through and to diversity, and allowing for new knowledge and practices to emerge.

All teachers in this research value their place in their learning communities, and though needs differ depending on teaching context, there are structural elements to the learning process that teachers from the three case schools identify as ways for meeting their professional early reading needs. Interestingly, though the two rural participants value their cycle partnership, because their school is isolated and has a small core group of teachers, they perceive that their school learning community's power to contribute to their professional learning is minimal. Often isolated rural schools create challenges for connecting teachers into learning communities, and it is harder to retain good teachers. These variables diminish opportunities for positive and sustaining initiatives (Budge, 2006; Hargreaves et al., 2015). OT1's and OT2's participation in across-board reading initiatives, when they do occur, appear to meet teachers' perceived early reading needs broadly. Participation in learning experiences focusing on setting up the reading environment and implementing some decoding and phonics-based instructional approaches has helped hone skills. Still, this does not appear to meet the sociocultural language-based needs these rural school teachers have. They suggest structuring professional learning authentic to the sociocultural, and relatedly (and subsequently) students' particular academic needs. For OT1 and OT2, when they have access to the broader professional community, they are appreciative, be it a mentor or time learning with groups of teachers from other schools. The three rural school participants remark that current modes of technological collaboration are not benefitting their professional learning. Research confirms the challenges of using technology as a useful

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professional learning tool for rural teachers, even though technology continues to emerge and make learning more accessible (Hunt-Barron et al., 2015). Teachers in rural schools appear to crave professional relationships that will motivate and influence their early reading instruction. It is essential to find more effective ways to utilize techno-collaborative tools in rural, isolated communities. Improving techno-collaborative learning experiences for rural teachers will provide the types of learning environments that Hargreaves et al. (2015) suggest is important when rural schools design professional learning.

Exemplifying an ideal learning system, Davis et al. describe how a school board that is a decentralized learning system conceptualizes its work as learning, learning involving risk-taking, change emerging in collaboration and articulates hierarchies in terms of responsibility rather than power and authority. In this system, collaboration encourages diverse knowledge and experiences and is a powerful way to develop learners and learn. While fragmented systems run the risk of having segregated learning communities and beliefs, and centralized systems can create learning opportunities that neglect diversity and contextual differences, decentralized systems embrace a collaborative learning environment where change is unpredictable to the degree that openness is valued. In my research, the case schools appear to be learning in a school board reflecting elements of all three kinds of learning systems Davis et al. (2012) discuss; inferring that positive learning experiences are happening but that at the same time, crucial forms of learning involving modes of collaboration are not.

Abbate-Vaughn (2005) describes how school demographics shape teacher perspectives on learning communities relating that teachers of mainly suburban middle-class children are more likely to view collaboration as something teachers design and implement as a team. It appears that this is the case for both BES teacher participants who find that school collaboration

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creates the space for a rich dialogue to emerge and influences their school's overall approach to reading instruction. For example, BT1 and BT2 perceive that board supported early reading professional learning acts as a catalyst to their reading instruction and is mostly responsible for shaping the rich communal conversations and shared language throughout the school. Their early reading professional learning sparks the development of practical learning opportunities within their school community. In contrast to suburban school teachers, Abbate-Vaughn finds that teachers in urban lower SES schools view their contribution to the school community as one part of the whole (learning in their silo is their way to more immediately connect and contribute to their students' success and relatedly their whole school's improvement). Neither of the urban school teacher participants in this study spoke about their teaching colleagues in too much detail, unlike participants from the two other case schools. Still, they share some positive perspectives of the two most recent early reading initiatives, but to different degrees. For example, at CES, CT2 is an expert mentor teacher of the reading programs and is frustrated with some of her colleagues' low levels of buy-in to these reading approaches. CT1 borrows elements of one reading program but does not dedicate too much time to its full-scale implementation. Further, though CES's principal mentions that networks are an ideal way to structure professional learning, it is not a structure that either teacher participant describes in detail. It will be interesting to explore this more deeply and understand how a large population of teachers in the same school teaching the same grades perceive their in-school collaborative learning experiences and how this influences and informs their reading instruction to leverage their students' literacy strengths.

A learning system that can question the constraints its style imposes upon those that are a part of it will be empathetic to enhancing teachers' and students' learning opportunities. The

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contextual variables representing the professional learning system display the learning system through its distribution of roles and responsibilities, the compassion and empathy to the needs of the individual and collective learners in the system and the environment in which learning is and should be occurring. Resonating in and out of this system discussion is the effect of learning structures on the individuals responsible for producing learning: teachers and students.

Comprising a panoramic view of the learning, change and achievement process from the perspectives of the participants in three case schools within the school board illuminates how systems can generate learning opportunities that are locally and globally relevant with learning practices that emerge that are contextually considerate to the people at the core of the learning system.

Discussion Summary

Cilliers (2000) notes how emergence is not a random or statistical phenomenon, and that complexity thinking and research requires an exploration of the notions of the emergence of complex systems for an in-depth understanding of how natures emerge within particular systems. This understanding derives an intricate and personal contemplation of how systems interact and why it is necessary to unpack difference and diversity within systems. The depths and complexity of the within-case and cross-case analysis and findings are integral in understanding how the uniqueness of time and space influences individuals. Demographics, professional and personal experiences and circumstance, ease of opportunity and aspects of the teaching community, and a realm of other factors shape the opportunities, emotions and beliefs the six teacher participants hold towards early reading professional learning and practice. Pathways leading towards how teachers perceive the influence of elements of their professional learning on their practice and how it shapes their instruction for improving the early reading and literacy

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learning opportunities for their students situate the complexities of early reading professional learning and practice into a global snapshot within one school board. The cross-case analysis required a process of looking at these pathways in a holistic sense by weaving common findings together to portray a sense of how diverse schools within one school board share similarities in professional learning needs and interests. Together the school (within-case) and the board (cross-case) findings provide an inclusive interpretation of how context influences and shapes teachers' perspectives on their learning and practice. Via complex and interrelated variables and factors, a sense of challenges, needs, appreciations, inhibitors and influencers arise. Understanding perspectives in such a fashion provides the depth and richness that though unique to a specific board within a specific region of a specific province, can reverberate to alternative environments. By illuminating a way to conceptualize professional learning that considers teachers' readiness and needs, this research helps in clarifying challenges and complexities that exist within boards and also shines a light on the similarities to consider in conceptions of teachers' early reading professional learning that will positively influence students' reading achievement.

Without digging too deeply, it is probably easier to ascribe why too many students are not learning to read. For example, too many teachers have not developed a good knowledge and skill base for teaching students how to read. The solution to this could then be quickly answered by looking at the reading research and surveying early reading teachers to understand that they need to provide better code-based instruction and provide more learning opportunities for them to learn. However, taking a step back, there are so many interacting variables at play within teaching and learning systems that such a cut-and-dried solution is impractical. The solution presented very generally at the top of this paragraph reflects an impersonal and straightforward account of a human learning collective responsible for helping children learn and contribute to

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society. Though broad in scope and possibility, my research brings into this conversation on learning, practice and student reading achievement a conceptualization of a learning system that can connect more intimately with students' and teachers' needs. Very broadly, the contribution this research makes encompasses an understanding of the teachers' learning systems as empathetic and compassionate systems that influence the development of sensitive, adaptive and non-redundant learning environments. Chapter 6 concludes this study by suggesting theoretical, empirical and practical implications of this research for improving teachers' early reading professional learning and, subsequently, all students' early reading development.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion: Contributions and Implications

This complexity-guided research represents teachers' perceptions of their learning and teaching and the influences of these processes upon student reading development. Unpacked in this study are the influences of interactions within systems nested within systems and the psychological influences of contextual factors interacting to create tensions in and across teacher learning. A learning system such as a school board that is inclusively aware of the influences of varying contextual factors exudes a (pre)sense of being current and keeping current and includes an attachment to its past. Redundancy reduces opportunities for change, and systems aware of this can counter norms and stagnancies by honouring how individuals independently and collectively learn.

What emerges from this line of research and thinking is a conceptual framework that encourages school boards and provincial ministries of education to shift attention to how professional learning for their teachers can be more relatable to local and less-local needs. Briefly, this implies a research agenda that considers individual stages of teacher development, thoughtfully represents the local and universal needs of students in designs of professional learning, and by ensuring the learning system unites teachers within a school board in ways that relate to teachers' preferences for relevant, sustained, collaborative learning activities. Conceptualizing teachers' professional learning in this way represents inclusive and equitable education because it will connect teachers and students on the geographical, social, cultural and academic fringes.

It is important to iterate that this research does not discount the extensive research and conjecture about reading instruction and reading failure. On the contrary, I embrace the range of research on practical approaches to reading instruction, teacher learning, and knowledge, which

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influences student reading achievement. This body of research set my study in motion by helping illustrate a gap in early reading educational theory and informing how urgent it is to consider the influence of interactions in systems upon the teaching and learning processes. These findings add to early reading research in showing how teachers believe that their professional learning does not help them meet students' needs with reading difficulties. Therefore, this indicates that professional learning has to change to reverse this perspective. The following sections indicate new starting points for conceptualizing teacher learning and the empirical, theoretical, and practical implications of an emerging research program.

Theoretical Contribution

Theoretically, my research contributes to the complexity theory-based educational literature. The theoretical contribution adds to understanding the role of context on teachers' early reading professional learning and practice. A complexity theory lens has been applied to the fields of preservice teacher education (e.g., Cochran-Smith et al., 2014; Davis & Sumara 2012, Zellermayer & Margolin, 2005) and in considering characteristics of learning systems (Davis & Simmt, 2005; Davis et al., 2012), but complexity theory-guided research is lacking in the exploration of how a professional learning system influences teachers' early reading instruction as well as the depths of interrelating contextual factors upon teachers' early reading learning. This research has provided a lens to explore a significant problem too many children face and a problem that, for most who suffer it endure adverse consequences for the rest of their lives. Therefore, this research offers a way to theorize the nature of teachers' learning systems by putting students' and teachers' contextual influences under a comprehensive investigation to understand how the learning system can be reconsidered and regenerated to provide teachers better opportunities for meeting their students' early reading needs. The primary theoretical tool

that my research contributes is the conceptual framework for considering teacher learning, change and student early reading achievement.

This framework lays out the importance of deeply considering the role of context upon teachers' learning and how students and the context of the learning community interact in the teaching and learning process. The research undertaken in this doctoral dissertation is highly personal. With teachers as the main participants, Seidman's (2006) in-depth interview process draws out teachers' lived experiences concerning their early reading instruction and learning. Within the interviews, I sought perceptions of context upon their teaching. Distilling the teacher participants' perspectives, the human nature of their teaching and learning results in the current conceptual framework depicted in Figure 9. This framework provides a roadmap for future research into teaching, student learning and the role of the learning system in making learning opportunities contextually sensitive for teachers and their students. Education systems are spaces and places of human interaction and development. By considering education systems to be based on equity and inclusion, this form of research will work towards a deeper understanding of how to address the contextual factors that need more recognition in professional learning designs.

Empirical Contribution to Research

My research study offers a broad lens to understand an ongoing problem and essential question: Why do so many students struggle to learn how to read? This research conceptualizes this issue as beyond one of teachers' lack of ability, knowledge and practical skills to teach students to read in the early years of schooling. Conducted through a complexity theory framework for designing research my study provides an in-depth demonstration of not only how teachers perceive their professional learning influences their instruction and subsequently their students' reading achievement, but it goes further to explore the contextual variables and factors

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at play in teaching, learning and practice and these relationships to students' reading development. My research seeks to go beyond the quantitative data showing how little teachers know about early reading or about how well pre-ordinate early reading professional learning designs in controlled settings can improve teacher practice and student reading achievement. Seeking to open up these bodies of literature and focus on an in-depth exploration of teachers' perceptions of how their learning experiences have influenced their instruction this research provides a sense of the complex interactions of variables and factors (self, school, board and beyond) at play in the life of the teacher and influencing theirs and their students' learning. The findings in my research are derived from multiple stages of data analysis and demonstrate themes particular to teachers in specific locations. For teachers in unique, non-suburban communities, their students' demographic uniqueness heavily influences how they perceive their learning opportunities influence their teaching.

However, after broadening the exploration towards the cross-case, my research demonstrates how professional learning systems can conceptualize the general foundational needs of their teachers (present and future). This need speaks to universal approaches to teaching reading by demonstrating how teachers across the board do not perceive they can meet many of their students who struggle to learn (e.g., identified learning disability, varying language and literacy differences). Out of these similarities and differences emerges a new way to conceptualize a teaching-learning system. In my research, I transition from within- to cross-case analysis by adapting a method for representing causal networks. Borrowing from Miles et al. (2014), I created contextual networks representing paths (and dead ends) of teachers from each case school towards what they perceive as effective early reading professional learning and effective in mediating reading development for students. This methodological borrowing

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underpins the cross-case findings and illuminates how three different schools in one board compare and contrast and that a deep understanding of this context can be derived by such a research method for drawing out highly contextualized details of participants that saturates a phenomenon under study and that creates meaningful ways for understanding and encouraging learning relationships.

In relation to an emerging research program, this study contributes to a methodological presence that will build upon the current conceptual framework. Setting the stage for future research on the factors at play and how they appear to influence the teaching and learning process requires more leg work to refine an understanding of how context (de)stabilizes learning. Expanding this style of research and qualitative case study approach to look across contextually diverse boards will help me refine this framework to better understand learning and change from varying perspectives. I envision a deeper understanding of systems thinking (school board and province) that considers the contextual variables and the contextual factors that can influence positive change by understanding what makes the relationships with learning more meaningful for teachers and consequently improves the opportunities for all students' early reading success. This information will generate a type of in-action-reaction early reading systems research with a range of schools in school boards and different provincial contexts. It will be by incorporating early-reading research, utilizing effective ways for developing teaching-learning collaboratives inclusive to different learning needs, and being guided in the different environmental and personal landscapes that situate teaching and learning, that a research program will emerge from the conceptual framework I have developed in this study. From the deep descriptive data collection, I believe that a contribution from forms of quantitative analyses will help expand current understandings about relationships between contextual factors and contextual variables

that will inform designs of qualitative data collection and analyses in research to improve teacher-learning and student reading achievement.

Implications for Practice: Preservice and Inservice

In this section, I briefly present implications for practice that inform tentative guiding principles for nudging changes to teacher knowledge and practice of early reading within schools' current learning systems. These implications for practice connect to three levels: preservice, inservice and at the provincial ministries and departments of education.

The preservice level. Incorporating a range of instructional strategies into practices reflecting the rich and ethical tenets of whole reading and empathetic to the core code-based reading evidence should be a part of pre-service teacher education. Connected to my research are findings that indicate widespread low levels of teacher knowledge about code-based reading (see, Joshi et al., 2009; Mathers et al., 2011; Stark et al., 2016.) At the preservice level, this means enhancing content in courses that improve beginning teachers' knowledge in ways that relate to effective practices. Along with ensuring code-based and whole language learning opportunities pre-service literacy learning should also include opportunities to learn about the different types of literacies students have and how to leverage diverse strengths in their future classrooms.

The importance of learning a variety of early reading strategies in the beginning teaching years reflects how influential this time is for long-lasting foundational skill development to take root. Increase the focus on developing knowledge about learning to read and teaching practices associated with including and teaching all students how to learn to read in bachelor of education programs and providing preservice teachers practical experiences to develop knowledge and practice, will yield more teachers who are prepared to effectively teach reading in their

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beginning years. Not meeting teachers' learning needs in their beginning years will exacerbate problem areas across time (Shuck et al., 2018).

The inservice level. At the inservice level, and in the context of the school board in this research study, ensuring there are opportunities for early reading and language development within the new teacher induction program is one way for new teachers to develop lifelong core reading practices and social-literacy skills to help them empathetically meet their early readers' varying literacy needs. Seeking to develop ways to ensure responsive board learning structures for teachers to develop their current understanding of literacies and levels of early reading knowledge and practice is a reasonable way to increase board-wide reading achievement and decrease the reading achievement gap. A new teacher induction program attuned to the diversity of its teachers and students should pair teachers with whom they need, and in all likelihood, be considerate to teachers' readiness to provide effective early reading instruction. Shuck et al. (2018), and Butler and Schnellert (2012) emphasize how critical the right kind of mentorship program is in providing a teaching base to help teachers transition towards confidence and security in their self-efficacy. Research from Oliveira et al. (2019) extends this, highlighting how teacher coaches and mentors positively influence teacher reading knowledge and practice.

A valuable part of teachers' learning experience is developing relationships with peers in their professional learning communities. A system's empathy and compassion are catalysts to collaborative learning and represent components of a system that is sensitive to the particular needs of schools and relevant to its teachers (Hargreaves et al., 2015). The large body of research on school-based professional learning communities appears undeniably positive, relating teachers' positive perspectives of their learning communities upon their learning and in improving student achievement; and suggests that contemplating more contextually thoughtful

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professional learning designs will improve theirs and their students' learning (Abbate-Vaughn, 2004; Ford & Youngs, 2018; Kooy, 2015; Levine & Marcus, 2010; Vescio et al., 2008).

Ensuring opportunities for teachers also to have ways for their local needs to be met as parts of these networks could anchor teacher early reading instruction more closely to their classroom and community contexts. Levine and Marcus (2010) indicate the need for intentionally designing collaborative learning communities and activities that can influence teacher change and student achievement. Teachers appreciate working with their peers in learning networks, and finding ways to sustain these kinds of programs appear to be essential for linking teachers across schools with less teacher diversity.

Rural schools can suffer from being self-isolated learning hubs. Isolation characterizes a fragmented learning system with tendencies for stifling opportunities for engaged learning and teacher development (Davis et al., 2012). Yuan et al. (2018) demonstrate how isolation inhibits growth, increases resentment and draws individuals inward. Technology's role is an important consideration when thinking about increasing community learning experiences and decreasing the perspective of being isolated. However, challenges in implementing technology intelligently for professional learning requires careful consideration (Clarke et al., 2017; Hunt-Barron et al., 2015). It is important to emphasize how much the rural participants in the current research study value face to face learning opportunities and that while increasing the capacity of technology to improve access to rural teachers' professional learning, technology should complement face-to-face learning. Web conferencing is something that rural teachers experience to be disengaging and unproductive. Better amalgamating technologically-based learning opportunities into teachers' distance, and online learning is a challenge that requires ongoing exploration. More

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consideration of the influence of technology upon professional learning will create fluid and conducive learning connections isolated teachers crave.

Influencing close relationships between school boards, schools, and the communities feeding into them are the school leaders' coordinated ability to connect schools into the community and set high expectations for student success (Barley & Beesley, 2007). Often this appears to involve fusing general and specific social, emotional and cultural characteristics of the community into the academic skill development of professional learning. Wright Jr. and Harris (2010) demonstrate the influence of board superintendents who recognized and were willing to find ways for their schools to adjust to students' cultural needs and, in doing so, demonstrated reductions in district achievement gaps. Schools inclusively responsive to their students' needs are likely associated with a board leadership empathetic to the central, unique needs students present, meeting these needs by helping teachers develop their knowledge and skills in these crucial areas. It makes sense to lay out the importance of establishing mutually positive relationships between teachers, schools and board. Ensuring transparency and committing to becoming aware of teachers' and students' specific needs is part of establishing a professional learning experience relevant to teachers and students (Wright Jr. & Harris, 2010).

School boards that ensure transparency will provide an essential personalized connection that some teachers want and are not getting. Considering teacher needs in terms of being led to professional learning opportunities or being informed of the directions for professional learning is also necessary for school boards to consider. For example, participants perceive that the school board was not transparent in helping teachers gain entry into the board's professional learning arc. Tones of isolation and animosity reflect these teachers' perceptions around being denied access to professional learning experiences they desire. Increased awareness of how teachers'

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social and emotional relations are affected by a system teachers perceive to be opaque would help to ease the tensions (e.g., confusion, animosity) about professional learning initiatives. In my research, teacher participants note that the professional learning communities they appreciate and have grown accustomed are diminishing. Suppose the board reduces opportunities for collaborative early reading professional learning. In that case, it also has to try to counter-balance itself so that new learning elements are equitably put into place to help teachers continue to develop a progressive range of early reading skills and knowledge, and that includes connections to their students with challenging social, emotional and academic needs (Abbate-Vaughn, 2004; Catalano et al., 2004; Chan, 2012; Forget-Dubois et al., 2009).

The provincial level. An inclusive, compassionate provincial ministry of education is another element that helps teachers obtain their professional learning needs. The importance of learning to read well is undeniable. Awareness of the need to have early reading instruction relate to the context and provide specific teaching skills to establish students' reading foundations needs more consideration at the provincial level. Clear guidelines will help provide direction and ensure teachers receive the experiences and the training they need along their career trajectories. For example, teachers coming out of their teacher education programs often carry with them the current attitudes and perspectives prevalent in their programs (Joshi et al., 2009; Moats & Lyons, 1989; Oliveira et al., 2019). These beginning teachers lack critical knowledge shown to influence student reading development, and these levels of knowledge often remain low even when teacher self-efficacy is high (Joshi et al., 2009; Stark et al., 2016; Wolf, 2018). Partly knowing what to teach, and what skills students should develop in the core areas of learning to read is a province's responsibility. For example, participants in my research shared their discomfort with a perceived lack of clarity about what their early reading instruction should

entail in their curriculum. The overview of the reading instruction context in Québec presented in Chapter 2, notes the practical challenges to enacting the plan's ideological underpinnings. In Chapter 5, comments from teacher and school board participants express perceptions of imbalance between provincial accountability measures and how the curriculum expresses students will learn to read. Research exists to help teachers meet their students' early reading needs (code-based, positive and rich literacy-based environment). A curriculum that puts more explicit emphasis on what these skills are and how these stages develop will provide an environment conducive to early reading instruction for teachers and their students. Doing this should clear some confusion for beginning teachers and ensure consistency by helping all teachers frame their early reading instruction and allow new knowledge to emerge relating to students' localized needs.

A province can help make changes by bridging current research findings on early reading instruction with practical suggestions that open more learning opportunities for their early reading teachers. A transparent relationship between the province, board and schools will provide a chance for voices to be heard, needs to be voiced, and professional relationships established that are in the interest of all students regardless of the diversity and needs that schools across a province possess.

Limitations of this Study

This research was conducted with three schools in one school board and a particular province and is thus uniquely situated. English is one of two languages learned by students in their English Language School Board along with French. Language Arts comprises similar expectations to other provinces in terms of the number of hours across a school year, and so the students would be receiving the same official number of hours as peers across Canada. However,

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students in Québec English schools might not have the same amount of time to read in English in other subjects, which might influence reading experience and teachers' perceptions in ways that might not happen in other provinces. The perceptions provided in the three lengthy interviews with teachers provides a strong base of qualitative data to explore the phenomenon under study. However, there are going to be more contextual considerations that do not apply to teachers in this board and conducting similar research in another location will likely uncover important contextual factors when considering early reading professional learning designs.

I am interested in how the curriculum shapes teachers' perspectives or is perceived to influence how teachers approach and understand early reading in terms of their responsibility laid out in provincial curricula. The curriculum's role was alluded to in this research but was not explored too deeply regarding perspectives on professional learning and early reading instruction. It will be informative to understand how policy structures are perceived to influence learning opportunities and teaching change in providing more inclusive teaching practices to students who struggle to read. Research across provinces will yield a greater understanding of contextual factors in this level of the system and illuminate upon provincial structures empathetic in improving the learning environment.

Conclusion

This research provides fodder for future research in teachers' early reading professional learning by bringing context to the forefront of a research program. Looking at systems as a complex web of human relationships, the power of context upon teacher and student need is apparent. The implications for practice generated from these research findings provide some leading questions for future research. The conceptual framework provides a roadmap for empirical research that adapts early reading professional learning and makes it more contextually

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sensitive for teachers and creates more effective learning opportunities for their students. This research opens up the importance of understanding teachers' states and stages of their careers and adapting professional learning to this context and their students' specific contextual uniquenesses. The power of collaboration is undeniable, but for rural teachers, this is challenging, so one question is, "How can technology be utilized to create collaborative early reading learning opportunities rural teachers need and value?" It appears that in this case study, the school board collaborative learning opportunities in early reading are decreasing, so a question to ask is, "How can we create sustained professional learning communities in the times that these opportunities are diminishing?" Students' social, cultural, and emotional needs have to be understood and met as indicated primarily by urban and rural teachers. A question related to this is, "How can social and emotional skill development be merged with early reading professional learning so that students academically and socially connect to their classrooms, schools, and learning needs?" From the conversations with all participants and acknowledged in the literature, beginning teachers are not prepared to teach early reading, so a question to preservice teacher education programs is, "How can programs be better designed to prepare teacher candidates to meet the social and academic needs of their future students? Furthermore, how is literacy and language arts coursework going to prepare these students to be professionally ready to teach students who struggle to read?" These are just a few of the questions that arise out of my doctoral research study, and there are many more that have arisen out of this deep qualitative case study design. I believe that contextual considerations need to be at the forefront of systemic changes to create better and more equitable early reading learning opportunities for teachers and students.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval



2016 – 09 28

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

To whom it may concern:

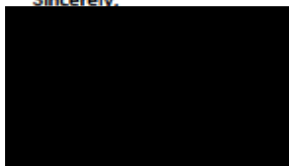


This is to confirm that the Western Quebec School Board grants permission to Michael Fairbrother to approach schools and teaching staff in the board for participation in his research project entitled: **“Early reading teachers’ perceptions of the influence of their early reading professional learning experiences on their classroom instruction”**.

While the letter grants permission to approach schools and staff, our schools and staff reserve the right to decline involvement.

Please contact me should you require further information or clarification.

Sincerely,



File Number: 06-16-39

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 09/30/2016



Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Ethics Approval Notice
Social Sciences and Humanities REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Jessica	Whitley	Education / Education	Supervisor
Michael	Fairbrother	Education / Education	Student Researcher

File Number: 06-16-39

Type of Project: PhD Thesis

Title: Early reading teacher's perceptions of the influence of their early reading professional learning experiences on their classroom instruction

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
09/30/2016	09/29/2017	Approved

Special Conditions / Comments:
N/A

File Number: 06-16-39

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 09/30/2016



Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2010) and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above named research project. Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the project, the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the project (e.g., change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, including consent and recruitment documentation, should be submitted to the Ethics Office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>

Please submit an annual report to the Ethics Office four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval. To close the file, a final report must be submitted. These documents can be found at: <http://www.research.uottawa.ca/ethics/forms.html>

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Signature:

Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB

Appendix B: Recruitment Letters

Université d'Ottawa | University of Ottawa

Early Reading Teachers' Perceptions of the Influences of Their Early Reading Professional Learning Experiences on Their Classroom Instruction

Good day. My name is Michael Fairbrother. I am a doctoral student at the University of Ottawa, working under the supervision of Dr. Jess Whitley. I am conducting research into how teachers feel the early reading professional development they have undertaken throughout their careers has influenced their instruction and their students' own learning to read.

From this research I am hopeful that I can add to our understanding of the factors at play within teachers' early reading professional learning and how these factors appear to impact teachers' learning and subsequently their instruction. In order to accomplish these research goals I would greatly appreciate your involvement in being part of this research study.

Over the course of the 2016/17 school year I plan to conduct interviews with teachers, principals and board consultants from schools in the WQSB. I have obtained ethical approval from the University of Ottawa and the Western Québec School Board to conduct this research. Participants will be kept anonymous in all aspects of the project and all identifying information will be confidential.

Based on your role as school principal I would be grateful for approximately 60 minutes of your time to learn about your perspective on the professional learning approaches within your school as well as concurrent activities at the board.

Without your involvement this research cannot be conducted in a way that draws out the essential influence of your school's context upon teachers' professional learning activities at your school and within the WQSB. I truly believe that with your involvement in this study a greater understanding of how professional learning (in early reading and in general) can be extended and used to improve teacher learning and development practices in our public schools.

If you have any questions or concerns, or would like further information on the research project, please contact me.

Thank you for taking the time to consider being a part of this important research project.

Michael Fairbrother, Principal Researcher

[Redacted]

Jess Whitley, Thesis Supervisor

[Redacted]

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Early Reading Teachers' Perceptions of the Influences of Their Early Reading Professional Learning Experiences on Their Classroom Instruction

Good day. My name is Michael Fairbrother. I am a doctoral student at the University of Ottawa, working under the supervision of Dr. Jess Whitley. I am conducting research into how teachers feel the early reading professional development they have undertaken throughout their careers has influenced their instruction and their students' own learning to read.

From this research I am hopeful that I can add to our understanding of the factors at play within teachers' early reading professional learning and how these factors appear to impact teachers' learning and subsequently their instruction. In order to accomplish these research goals I would greatly appreciate your involvement in being part of this research study.

Optimally I am seeking grade 1 teachers to interview because grade 1 is considered the crucial grade in students' early reading learning but if I am unable to recruit enough teachers at this grade level, I welcome the participation of primary teachers more broadly.

Over the course of the 2016/17 school year I plan to conduct interviews with teachers, principals and board consultants from schools in the WQSB. I have obtained ethical approval from the University of Ottawa and the Western Québec School Board to conduct this research. Participants will be kept anonymous in all aspects of the project and all identifying information will be confidential.

For teachers, the research process consists of three 60-90 minute interviews, which can take place at a time and location of your choosing:

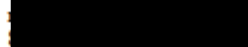
- *Interview one* focuses on putting your experiences into context by drawing out your interpretations of your past experiences as a learner: both student and professional.
- *Interview two* works towards establishing the concrete details of your early reading professional learning experiences and the influence of this professional learning on your early reading practices.
- *Interview three* is for you as a teacher to reflect on the meaning of your experiences based upon a synthesis of the first two interviews.

Without teacher involvement this research cannot be conducted in a way that draws out the essential voices of teachers that are needed to impact their professional learning activities at the school and board levels. I truly believe that with your involvement in this study a greater understanding of how professional learning (in early reading and in general) can be extended and used to improve teacher learning and development practices in our public schools.

If you have any questions or concerns, or would like further information on the research project, please contact me.

Thank you for taking the time to consider being a part of this important research project.

Michael Fairbrother, Principal Researcher



Jess Whitley, Thesis Supervisor



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From this research I am hopeful that I can add to our understanding of the factors at play within teachers' early reading professional learning and how these factors appear to impact teachers' learning and subsequently their instruction. In order to accomplish these research goals I would greatly appreciate your involvement in being part of this research study.

Over the course of the 2016/17 school year I plan to conduct interviews with teachers, principals and board consultants from schools in the WQSB. I have obtained ethical approval from the University of Ottawa and the Western Québec School Board to conduct this research. Participants will be kept anonymous in all aspects of the project and all identifying information will be confidential.

I seek your participation in this study because you have important insight into the types of early reading professional learning that are provided at the school board level. This interview will help establish how professional learning opportunities for addressing early reading instruction in the WQSB is considered and impacted by board considerations. I would be grateful for approximately 30 minutes of your time to learn about your perspectives on the early reading professional learning approaches within the WQSB.

Without board level involvement this research cannot be conducted in a way that draws out the essential influence of context upon teachers' professional learning activities within the WQSB. I truly believe that with your involvement in this study a greater understanding of how professional learning (in early reading and in general) can be extended and used to improve teacher learning and development practices in our public schools.

If you have any questions or concerns, or would like further information on the research project, please contact me.

Thank you for taking the time to consider being a part of this important research project!

Michael Fairbrother, Principal Researcher



Jess Whitley, Thesis Supervisor



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Appendix C: Consent Forms

Université d'Ottawa | University of Ottawa

Consent Form for Principal Interviews

Title of Study: Early Reading Teachers' Perceptions of the Influences of Their Early Reading Professional Learning Experiences on Their Classroom Instruction

Project Description: Good day. My name is Michael Fairbrother. I am a doctoral student at the University of Ottawa. I am conducting research into how teachers perceive the early reading professional learning they have undertaken is influencing their instruction; and in particular their students who are learning how to read. Through my research I hope to increase our understanding of the various factors interacting within teachers' early reading professional learning and how teachers perceive that these factors are influencing their early reading professional learning and instruction.

This is my doctoral research project and I will be conducting the research myself under the supervision of my thesis supervisor Dr. Jessica Whitley of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

Purpose of Your Participation: Based on your role as school principal I would be grateful for approximately 60 minutes of your time to learn about your perspective on the professional learning approaches within your school as well as concurrent activities at the board. This interview will be conducted by me on site or at a place that is convenient for you, and with your permission will be recorded to ensure accuracy.

Contribution to Research and Practice: There are many benefits to this study. This is an opportunity to have your voice and experiences heard, and to engage in reflective practice. Your perspectives will play an important part in potential changes to educational policy and pedagogy as well as future professional learning and development.

Rights of Participants:

- Your participation in this research is completely voluntary.
- Upon completion of the data analysis you will also have an opportunity to review the results of the study summarized in draft form.
- Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any point. You can ask questions at any time, including during the research. You can refuse to answer any questions.
- There are no risks associated with involvement in this project from those experienced in everyday life. The information that you provide will be strictly confidential, and will be protected to the extent permitted by law.
- All digital interview data and transcripts will be coded with a number. My thesis supervisor Dr. Jessica Whitley and I will have sole access to the data. The data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and password-protected electronic files. The data and transcripts will be kept for five years and then deleted and/or shredded.

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Consent Form for Teacher Interviews

Title of Study: Early Reading Teachers' Perceptions of the Influences of Their Early Reading Professional Learning Experiences on Their Classroom Instruction

Project Description: Good day. My name is Michael Fairbrother. I am a doctoral student at the University of Ottawa. I am conducting research into how teachers perceive the early reading professional learning they have undertaken is influencing their instruction; and in particular their students who are learning how to read. Through my research I hope to increase our understanding of the various factors interacting within teachers' early reading professional learning and how teachers perceive that these factors are influencing their early reading professional learning and instruction.

This is my doctoral research project and I will be conducting the research myself under the supervision of my thesis supervisor Dr. Jessica Whitley of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

Purpose of Your Participation: I am contacting you because of your experience as a primary early reading teacher. Optimally I would like to interview grade 1 teachers. Grade 1 is considered the crucial grade in students' early reading learning and students at this age who are struggling learning to read have the best chances for their reading difficulties to be remediated. Following this and based on my reasons for selecting grade 1 as my first choice I would select kindergarten and grade 2 teachers and then grade 3. I would be grateful if you would be willing to provide me some of your time to conduct three 90 minute interviews over the course of three weeks sometime between September and December 2016. These interviews will be conducted by me on site or at a place that is convenient for you, and with your permission will be recorded to ensure accuracy. Also, to direct the scope of the second interview it is my hope that you will bring with you documents representing your early reading instruction, planning or practices. I hope to photograph these documents for aiding my data analyses and will ensure confidentiality of the source by removing names or identifying features. Finally, I am conducting three interviews in order to develop a rich synthesis based in and from your early reading professional learning experiences and your perceptions of these experiences.

- Interview one focuses on putting your experiences into context by drawing out your interpretations of your past experiences as a learner: both student and professional.
- Interview two works towards establishing the concrete details of your early reading professional learning experiences and the influence of this professional learning on your early reading practices.
- Interview three is for you as a teacher to reflect on the meaning of your experiences based upon a synthesis of the first two interviews.

Contribution to Research and Practice: There are many benefits to this study. This is an opportunity to have your voice and experiences heard, and to engage in reflective practice. Your perspectives will play an important part in potential changes to educational policy and pedagogy as well as future professional learning and development.

Rights of Participants:

- With your permission the interviews will be audio-recorded;

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Consent Form for Board Level Interview

Title of Study: Early Reading Teachers' Perceptions of the Influences of Their Early Reading Professional Learning Experiences on Their Classroom Instruction

Project Description: Good day. My name is Michael Fairbrother. I am a doctoral student at the University of Ottawa. I am conducting research into how teachers perceive the early reading professional learning they have undertaken is influencing their instruction; and in particular their students who are learning how to read. Through my research I hope to increase our understanding of the various factors interacting within teachers' early reading professional learning and how teachers perceive these factors are influencing their early reading professional learning and instruction.

This is my doctoral research project and I will be conducting the research myself under the supervision of my thesis supervisor Dr. Jessica Whitley of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

Purpose of Your Participation: I am contacting you because you have important insight into the types of professional learning that are provided at the school board level. This interview will help establish how professional learning opportunities for addressing early reading instruction in the WQSB is considered and impacted by board considerations. I would be grateful for approximately 30 minutes of your time to learn about your perspectives on the early reading professional learning approaches within the WQSB. This structured interview will be conducted by me on site or at a place that is convenient for you, and with your permission will be recorded to ensure accuracy.

Contribution to Research and Practice: There are many benefits to this study. This is an opportunity to have your voice and experiences heard, and to engage in reflective practice. Your perspectives will play an important part in potential changes to educational policy and pedagogy as well as future professional learning and development.

Rights of Participants:

- With your permission the interviews will be audio-recorded;
- Upon completion of the data analysis you will also have an opportunity to review the results of the study summarized in draft form;
- Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any point. You can ask questions at any time, including during the research. You can refuse to answer any questions;
- There are no risks associated with involvement in this project other than those experienced in everyday life. The information that you provide will be strictly confidential, and will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Due to the fact that there are limited board-level staff with similar expertise in the WQSB there is the chance that anonymity cannot be guaranteed. However your title will not be used in any reports or publications and the perspectives of board-level staff will be compiled and shared as a group, rather than individually.
- All digital interview data and transcripts will be coded with a number. My thesis supervisor Dr. Jessica Whitley and I will have sole access to the data. The data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and password-protected electronic files.

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Appendix D: Participant Profiles

Profile Blended Elementary Teacher 1 (Bt1)

My Early Years and the Influence of Reading in My Early Life

My parents read to me a lot. My dad was an educator. He was a principal of the elementary school and high school when I was in Val d'Or ... We moved to Wakefield when I was in grade 2. [T]hey read a lot to us and we listened to it in the car, we would listen to stories on tape, on the 8 track in the car and stuff. So we had a lot of exposure to books as a kid. It was valued. Reading and books were part of our lives. As I said my dad was an educator so he read a lot. He was definitely more of a math person than a literature person but he did read a lot. My mom actually had a lot of reading problems when she was growing up. Like she had, I think she was diagnosed later on in life with dyslexia, dyspraxia ... when she was in grade 4, they put her back in kindergarten. So she didn't learn how to read until she was much much much older. [I]f we showed any aptitude for literacy at all we were really encouraged to do it. But she didn't teach me how to read because she, and it was interesting, because her learning disability affects her speech and her pronunciation of words and so I still pronounce words incorrectly because I learned them from her and so she would read to us ... she was a little anxious about it but she would still do it every day. She was very excited about how easy it came to my brother and I.

I had an older brother, so he had a lot of comic books, so I used to read his comic books a lot when I was a kid ... I didn't read them I read the pictures so I had a lot of exposure ... I also had this old plastic record player and I had a few records, they were books with records and I remember that really vividly too. Putting the record on and sitting in my room by myself with the story going through the book by myself and they were big ones, they weren't the little ones, they were the big long playing LPs and I loved those. I really wanted to read. I really loved reading. I

EXPLORING THE COMPLEXITIES OF TEACHERS' EARLY READING LEARNING

was fascinated by Archie comics ... Some guy who worked with my dad used to give us grocery bags full of them and I was very motivated to learn how to read the stories in them. So I was very motivated to learn how to read.

I learned how to read in grade one ... [I]t just happened. I remember we had this old vintage Sally, Dick, like it was literally a Sally, Dick and Jane book, and sitting there with it and suddenly realizing I could read the words and being look 'Oh I can read now!' I remember sitting in our living room in Val d'Or on this flowery chair in grade 1 and realizing that I could read this book. And as soon as that happened I could read anything ... Yeah it was really amazing. I was so lucky! ... I remember ... when I was in grade three ... I really enjoyed books about adversity and people who overcame adversity ... [M]y first chapter book was about Helen Keller ... I got really into Helen Keller for a while. And then there ... was this novel in my grade three classroom called *The Family that Nobody Wanted*, and it was this dog eared book and I think I stole it from the school because I loved it so much. Anything about adversity and overcoming adversity I loved it. ... *Rebels*, anything about rebels and, yeah ... *Laura the Little House on the Prairie* books I read in grade 3. I loved those.

I was very imaginative and so reading was a very quiet thing that I could do and it just allowed me to use my imagination and I find it very comforting ... [I]t became a soothing relaxing activity very quickly ... [M]y favorite week, do you remember Drop Everything and Read week, when the bell would go off and you were allowed to just sit and read quietly? That was my favorite time, like we do silent reading in school now. I don't remember doing silent reading in school where you could choose any book you wanted and just sit and read quietly. I would have loved that so much if that had been part of our school routine. It was one week a year I remember where the bell would go and you would have to quietly read And I was like "This

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is the best week of the year! It's my favourite week ever! Thank god I just have to sit here and read" ... It was a really fun time and it was super relaxing. You know I found elementary school very challenging socially. I found all of those politics and all that stuff really hard and all the social structures real hard but when I was reading it was great ... I didn't have to worry about anything else. I just had to sit there and read. Hugely relaxing.

I don't have the attention span to read as much as I used too. I think because I have kids and I have work and all that stuff but I still really enjoy it ... [T]ruly reading has been one of my greatest joys in my life and so it's so wonderful to figure that out, to give them that. That's one of the reasons I like teaching early reading so much is because watching those puzzle pieces fall into place and the gears start to turn is just such a joyful experiences ... You know, I still get excited. I've been doing it for years and I get all [oii-ahh] when someone starts to read.

Preservice/Teacher Education

I wanted to work in film ... Then I moved to Toronto to do that and I didn't actually end up working in film ... I just kinda floated around a little bit and kind of fell into teaching English as a Second Language for adults in Toronto ... And you know I found it really rewarding. My dad had just passed away so I had a bit of cash. So I did CELTA, realized that I really loved teaching and that I got a lot of satisfaction from it ... so I decided to go to Glasgow to do my teacher training ... I loved being in Glasgow, I didn't love being in teacher's college. I found some parts of it really hard but then when I started teaching I really did love it ... it was something I never thought I would end up in. Never, because I just wanted to be something different. I wanted to be special. I wasn't going to be a teacher. I was going to be an artist or a writer or a novelist right? I was such a creative writer all through school and that's what I was

EXPLORING THE COMPLEXITIES OF TEACHERS' EARLY READING LEARNING

going to be in ... So I didn't go to teacher's college until I was 26 and then I didn't start teaching until I was 27.

I had planned when I went to teacher's college my original plan was to go for it's a PGCE program. I wanted to do secondary ... I only had grade 11 math. ... You needed a teachable or you needed a higher level of math. So college or university math and there was no, I wasn't going to do that ... [T]he woman after ... my phone interview said, "well I can't offer you a place in the secondary program because you don't have the math but I will offer you a place in the elementary program," and I was like, "okay I'll do that then, no problem."

I barely remember what we did to learn how to teach kids how to read ... I mean I got ... some ideas when I was in the actual classrooms. I don't remember our instruction in the university classrooms, in the lecture halls doing anything for me at all. So I learned from the teachers I was with. I was lucky I had a good teacher in my last stage and she was, I was with her for six or seven weeks and it was grade one. And that was when I realized that I wanted to do early education because I really liked them ... I did a grade four and that was pretty good. I did a grade six who [the associate teacher] I'm pretty sure drank in the bathroom and told me I'd never be a teacher because I couldn't discipline. Which is really interesting now. I'd like to invite her in now and have her sit down. And then I did, we had to do nursery ... I could not believe how bored I was. [T]hen I did this grade one and I just fell in love with it and realized this is where I was supposed to be ... They're fun at that age, they have just this open-heartedness and they are, they are sweet, they're still really sweet but they are also ready to learn ... I mean it fulfills kind of your emotional, I don't know, like you can be nurturing with them but you can also teach them at the same time you know ... I just thought this is where I fit.

Beginning Teaching

EXPLORING THE COMPLEXITIES OF TEACHERS' EARLY READING LEARNING

Well I had been originally been planning to go back to Toronto ... I had originally done an interview with the Toronto District School Board. I was on their list ... I came back here to be with my mom for the summer [and] kind of realized that she needed me to stick around. There was a garbage strike in Toronto at that time. It was a super-hot summer and I was living on the river in Wakefield and so I was like 'maybe I will just go up to Wakefield school and talk to [the principal] and see if I can supply ... So I spoke to her and the next day I got a phone call from ... the principal in Kaz and he said, "Do you want to come for an interview tomorrow at the board. I have a kindergarten/grade one position available, maybe you want it." So I did ... Yeah, it was all just luck and circumstance and had the garbage strike not happened I might not even had ended up here. You know? It was all a lot of 'like I'll do that' ... It was 2002 ... Yeah. So I was lucky, I was real lucky.

So that's where I learned how to be a teacher. In Kazubazua ... I mean it was interesting we had a family up there who the kids that were in our classes were the first generation of their family that could read ... It was a pretty intense experience. I don't know if it is still like [that] there in Kaz I mean this was a few years ago ... I used to say it was like driving 30 minutes and 30 years back in time. It was pretty cool. I went and bought the four blocks literacy system [book] where they did site words, guided reading, independent reading and writing ... And that was how I learned how to teach reading ... I see kids who I taught in K5 and grade one in my first years and I would like to apologize to them because I didn't teach them anything. My second year I was better but my first year I didn't teach them anything cause I had no idea ... I was learning on the job. I had no idea what to do. Absolutely none.

I've done from K4 to grade 4 ... and everything in between. [T]eaching grade three and four was a good experience for me because I saw what was coming more ... It gave be a broader

EXPLORING THE COMPLEXITIES OF TEACHERS' EARLY READING LEARNING

picture a little bit ... I knew what they needed. I knew that they really needed more phonetics, they really needed a solid foundation in word recognition but they also really needed to be able to talk about what they were reading. Because even if they couldn't decode, if they were able to talk about what they were reading, and have comprehension then they were going to do better in the upper grades. So I realized it was not just about decoding and being able to read those little books but they really had to be able to discuss things in a bigger picture way because that's what happens in grade 3 and 4.

When I first started I only taught Power Words. And it was really through working with [a board reading specialist] ... [I]n my second year of teaching I became her literacy liaison for our school. ... [O]ne thing that we did that was really good was go through all of the Reading Recovery resources and disseminate them into the classroom so that all of the classrooms had actual levelled reading books in them and guided reading texts which we hadn't had before that. So suddenly we were doing guided reading with the kids and it was just like [sound of wssh] completely different world and I realized very quickly that that's what they need. That small group instruction that I had never really been taught how to do ... I mean I have to say if I'm thinking back to what has really helped me to become a better teacher ... I really think it's mentoring that is the most helpful ... [A]s I told you my first year teaching I didn't teach anyone how to read, I had no idea what I was doing ... and then the next year [the board reading specialist] came in and she started talking about ... all these Reading Recovery strategies ... that we should really be doing those with everyone in small groups ... and so she kind of taught us a few of the Reading Recovery dialogues and strategies.

Teaching (and) Early Reading

EXPLORING THE COMPLEXITIES OF TEACHERS' EARLY READING LEARNING

I think before, I think I thought [reading] was just going to happen more intuitively for them ... I feel like if you asked me I think then I would have been like, “[Y]ou teach the power words, you do morning messages you show them how you read, and then they’re just going to learn how to read,” and now if you ask me how do you teach a kid how to read I would say, “I have absolutely no idea. I actually couldn’t tell you how you teach a kid how to read because there are so many pieces to it,” and then that’s what I understand now, is how many pieces there are to it and I couldn’t tell you that that works for Lucy and that works for Jack, but I could tell you that if we keep doing these things eventually Lucy’s going to get and eventually Jack’s going to get it but ... they’re probably not coming to it in the same way, right, and that’s why you have to do it all the time because they have to they are making the meaning, they are doing all of the hard work. I think they see progress and I think that’s what motivates them ... I think they start to see themselves becoming readers and they become motivated in that way. I think a kid that’s really struggling I mean you just kind of, it’s with the bond you know you kind of sit with them and you do it with them and you’re bonding with them and then they’re a bit motivated because they feel like well I might not be able to read but I have a lot of love in my life or whatever, right. So that’s okay. So I think it’s a lot about, it’s either them seeing themselves progress or them feeling connected to you and I think that’s what makes them be motivated to do it and to try, you know.

I feel like January, February, March are the most important months for getting that stuff done. ... [S]o really you know in elementary schools you ... only have five productive months of the ten really ... September, October and November are brutal and then Christmas is Christmas so you’re like write off and then yeah you have January, February, March, April into May a little bit and then they’re gone. Half way through May you’re like and now you’re gone. Yeah so it’s

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not very much time to actually really get them going but ... you wouldn't be able to do anything if you didn't put that time in beforehand.

We do the BAS's the benchmark assessments and really that's how you figure out where exactly they are is by doing the benchmarks. So yeah so I do the benchmark assessments and then I look at their writing and from there I kind of figure out what I need to do to move them along. I assess three times a year... I assess them in the fall, I assess them again in February, and then I assess them at the end of the year.

[M]y block is two fifty minute blocks in the morning ... I keep those blocks sacred for that ... [M]y actual direct instruction I would say I only do about twenty minutes a day of kid to kid instruction. The rest of it is ... during guided reading, and the rest of it I do like little lessons, I do a couple mini lessons; but mostly I'll read a book, I'll talk about comprehension strategies, if we're writing I'll model writing and talk about my thought process or we'll talk about Power Words in one of these texts but that's all within the two fifty minute blocks ... But the direct one on one happens during Daily Five and it's usually about twenty minutes ... That's when I'm at this table and I'll have four kids, two to four kids with me ... I try to see a different group every day ... I have six groups this year ... Depending on the group, last year because the maturity level was so high, I could see two groups a day so I could see a group during buddy reading and I could see a group during Daily Five. This year they need me to be more available to them during buddy reading because the maturity level isn't very high so I need to direct them a lot. I make sure to do Daily 5 every day because ... then I know that I am doing at least two guided reading lessons that day. Because I really truly believe that guided reading is the only way to really teach kids how to read ... So the other stuff is just practice for the kids and the real meat of learning how to read happens on those small group exercises in my opinion ... I do Soundprints with the

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kids and I do that once a week where we sit down and we do actual phonetic instruction. [I]t's real explicit and that's changed a lot from the beginning of my career where I was like, "Oh they'll just kinda get it through osmosis."

I do [the] units that I do because they're easy for me to find material to go with them and I have early reading material to go with them or there's Soundprints science text to go with them ... [T]he Soundprints science text really lends themselves to the writing for the kids and so your more reluctant writers are going to be more willing usually to write about science than they are to write a story about the tooth fairy getting lost ... So I kind of go in knowing that I want to do that and I also do it a little bit though based on their interest.

Challenges in meeting students' early reading needs

It's not a perfect world at all. It's a really really imperfect world, the world of teaching. People don't realize that.

[T]he [provincial education plan/program] is really nice because we can be super fluid in what we teach ... But the thing is that what we don't have a lot of guidance on and what I'm actually working on a project right now ... is setting up a curriculum that shows us what we're teaching [to] kind of help focus the teachers a little bit more on the actual skills that the kids need to know. The only thing that kids in Québec need to know when they leave grade one, crazy, is that you put spaces between words. That is the only thing that they absolutely need to have concretely at the end of grade one The only thing they need to know is you put spaces between words when they finish grade one ... It's there only solid skill that they need. Whereas but you have to introduce them to everything ... Yes and they leave kindergarten having to know most of their letters. They don't even need to know their sounds. They need to know most of their letters.

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I feel like we are preparing for kids for the grade six exam in grade one and it really bothers me and I feel like there's so much influence placed on those end of year assessments, especially the upper grades, that we're using a lot of priority in the lower grades for early reading instruction ... I mean we use the BAS the benchmark assessments ... and I do find those really useful ... but I feel like we have these, and even last year we did curriculum mapping as a school, to be like "this is what we teach in grade one, this what we teach in grade two, blah blah blah," and in the end as we're putting it all together you feel like, "okay but we're all, it's all going to this end of the year assessment in grade six," like I feel like everything we're doing is leading up to that. I feel like those assessments have become this "aww [making the god/angel heaven's gate sound]," you know and we're not we're not going back and being like "okay so we need to actually make sure that these kids have their tools in their box," and ... I feel like we're taking the joy out of it right and that's what I like so much about the Daily Five is it's a time when the kids actually experience the joy of reading and I feel like they don't have that as much as they used to, you know ... Daily Five was also not developed for [the particular context of this province] ... [I]t was developed for a school where the kids had like three hours to do English ... I mean you know ... so they were moving through the Daily Five coming together over the course of three hours essentially coming together every half hour ... We don't have that time and we have so much to do and so little time to do it in, so ... It's been talked about and what we talk about is how we've adapted it. So instead of having the kids because I think the idea of the Daily Five is that they do all five everyday right and we don't do that so we kind of think of it more at the WQSB [school board] as the Weekly Five so you do one a day and you move through them over the week.

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I don't find it hard teaching to average readers. I think what find hard is getting the time to see them, to make sure that I'm keeping them on track and making sure I'm moving them when they're supposed to be moving, so it really depends on how well the class can manage itself unfortunately. So I find that a bit of a challenge. For the struggling readers I guess sometimes I feel like, sometimes it feels like you haven't unlocked the mystery yet. Like what is it that is keeping you from reading and what is that is going to move you forward, and so you just keep trying things until you find something that kind of works and then you keep going with that for a while and then it stops working and then you have find something else that kind of works. So that's what I find challenging. I think I've got one person who has short term memory issues and so he seems to be not remembering the sounds for anything ... he is not retaining anything so you can show him a word a Power Word list with *the, a, in, at* and he can read it with you at one point but he won't be able to read it with you again, he won't remember ... I have one who's really strong but emotionally not ... I have one girl whose reading like an E, D/E in grade two but she's got such speech issues that I think the sounds aren't happening for cause her speech is so bad.

Yeah time. Time for sure. You know we have a little bit of time after school but if somebody is going through divorce or something for example they're not going to be here very much because they're off dealing with things so yeah like it's there's so much personal stuff that comes up that stops you from being able to do that when you're depending on a professional learning community that can only meet after school. So really in an ideal world we should have a period a week where we're not teaching this during our teaching time when we can get together and collaborate ... that's just pie in the sky, it's just a dream, I dare to dream ... I would really love to have the time in my day to maybe have like I have 50 minute preps a few times a week so

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I would really it would be great if I could use that to sit down and read a couple chapters of *Beyond Retelling* for example but I'm calling parents, emailing parents, cleaning up the mess that the last class made, trying to catch up on my math marking. So I think time would really help, I think if we had a bit more flexibility of time. I understand the tax payers don't want to pay us for an extra hour to sit down and read but I think that that would be a real good use of their time. I think there are some schools or districts where they used to end early on Wednesdays or something. Like one day a week all the kids would go home at one. I mean that's completely unrealistic in our board but more time I think. You know? ... [S]chool is a little bit of a baby sitting service here in North America, I would say, for sure, and money, like we can't be covered so much for doing that. I think there's a culture that teachers give of their own time all the time, you know, so there's a bit of that also.

You know those after school learning communities they're not accessible to everyone. Like I'm not a single mom but I'm essentially a single mom during the week and that's that doesn't work for me to go off to the school board office and ... [w]ell it's a pretty female heavy profession and I imagine there's a fair number of single moms who are teachers ... these things are not accessible to them and I think we need to recognize that it is a female driven profession and make it be a little more forgiving to parents and people. I mean I know that we are only a parent of young child for a short time of your life if you know but ... like everyone has some kind of limitation and I think if we can have these things happening during school hours it would be kind of helpful. I mean they have MTMs [Management Team Meetings] for the administrators all the time where they pull them out for three or four days at a shot ... You know so why can't we have something for us as teachers where they'll pull us out maybe five times a

year let us get together and, and, and grow as teachers. Book club together. It doesn't have to be all day it can be an afternoon once a month. I think that would really help, you know.

Involvement in Professional Learning

[I]f I hadn't done as much PD as I did as I was going through my career I would not know anything cause honestly Teachers College did not prepare me at all ... [H]ow I seek it out is talking to colleagues and going through people because I think people can make things look flashy and wonderful on a webpage or something but unless you have really have spoken to someone and you know ... you know, that's unless they know it works it's not really worth doing it. I like to be, well I like to be in the know. So that's why if an opportunity like a book club or something comes up I'm always like I guess I will do that. Any PD that comes up I'm always like yes I'll do that. [PD] has to be related to my grade level ... It has to be something that I can actually bring into the classroom. It has to make my life easier. Does that make sense? It has to be practical. It needs to make life more easier not complicated ... And you have to go in with that goal even if, even if this is stuff I've seen before I'm going to find one thing that I can bring back with me, right? So, yeah, there's always something. Even if it is a conversation that you've had with someone at your table where you're like "How do you do blah blah blah"... And then they tell you. We have good colleagues here and ... I would say doing PD has influenced [reading instruction] more than my experience with colleagues. But I would say that talking, at this school it is nice because people are, it's a learning environment, it's a learning community, people are open to changing how they do things. So being able to share with colleagues does help for sure but I would say professional development through the board is what shapes [reading teaching] more than actually talking to my colleagues here.

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There used to be ... BER the Bureau of Educational Research. And they used to come to Ottawa and do seminars. They don't do them as much anymore, I don't know what happened. But those were really good. So they were full day seminars in a hotel in Ottawa and it would be a professional from the States who would come up and would do like a whole day and you would get all these amazing ideas on teaching literacy and you would get this lovely booklet at the end and those were great ... They're not around like they used to be so now I find you really have to kind of push a little bit to make sure you're the person from your school who goes to the PD. I don't know I mean I feel like it has to be offered too and it's not always offered these days. Like with the BER's gone and yeah there's not loads being offered at our board the way there used to be. There used to be a lot more I find when I first started teaching at the board ... There used to be more PD but I don't know, it's funny, I hadn't really thought about it but it seems to be going away and they're doing more like the projects where the teachers are working on projects and less of the "let's get our teachers learning how to do this thing" ... Don't know why.

Well [a board reading consultant] through the school board ... [S]he's come and done not even official PD like not even days away from the school but just a bit of after school PD and she's the one who introduced me to Soundprints and taught me how to do Soundprints and taught a bunch of different teachers how to do Soundprints; and that has definitely influenced me for sure. She came into my classroom and did it with my class. That's how she did it ... and that is extremely effective. Having somebody come in and do something with your own class is really effective because in a way the kids are being trained at the same time you're being trained so you don't have to then train the kids which is really nice. And then you get so good at it that then you can train the kids ... She came in a couple times in one year and then she came into some after school check-ins. I found that real useful, the most useful.

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I find it effective when they give me like a couple lessons to take away with me. So they give me a lesson, we work through the lesson as a group in the PD with my colleagues and then they give us that lesson to take home with us and then we get to try it in the classroom. I find that effective PD. So it's not like here's some big ideas but it's, "here's some really concrete little things that you can try to do now, take them back and try them." I find that to be the most concrete and effective PD. I work on projects and so I'm working on the math project and I'm working on the ELA project and so when you're together in those situations, there are your side conversations and that's when you figure a lot of stuff out. So I feel like I'm not doing a lot of professional development right now; I'm doing projects that are kind of leading to a bit of professional development on the side. I would say collaborative learning communities have informed that more. So being able to talk to other teachers, having formed that more than professional development, you know ... Yeah so that's it, it's collaboration with your colleagues, sharing with your colleagues and mentorship with other teachers like master ELA teachers. That's to me what it is more so than sitting in a workshop. I think that there's not a lot of money to have people come in or to get us all out because often the most effective way to learn is to talk to your colleagues too because somebody will have an idea for something of what they can do and I feel like there's not a lot of money to get everyone together like that ... Yeah and I don't think it's the board's fault I think they're not getting money from wherever... [W]e have these cycle meetings very once in a blue moon like they don't really happen often. Yeah they really don't happen often. Um I wish they happened more. I always find with cycle team meetings it really depends on who's in your cycle; unfortunately cause some people are like wow this is so great and some people are just like wah wah so it really does depend on who's in your team. This is a good team so it does help but we don't do it very often.

Moving Forward/Toward

I think I am more leaning towards working groups now that I am ... than me learning. I think I maybe am moving toward a mentorship role as opposed to a mentee role. That is how old we are [laughing] ... Well you have to know what you are talking about if you are going to be mentoring someone.

I would want more time for professional learning with other people who teach my grade level. I would want more time with ELA teachers from PETES or another school where we could talk about what we do but I would want it to be on a fairly consistent level because for the first couple ones of those meetings you're always a little bit, it's a little bit of a pissing contest right. Like everyone's a little bit trying to prove themselves as a teacher during those, a little bit, you can't help it, right? A consistent professional learning community with other teachers at my grade level consistently ... I think more mentoring would be also helpful ... I think it would be helpful for me actually. I'm feeling like I'm at the point of my career where it would actually be helpful for me to mentor someone else because ... you know when you've got someone observing you you're always a little more cautious of what you're doing right?

[M]y goal that I'm going to start actually after the New Year is I'm going to put one prep period aside per week where I'm going to just sit down with the text and read that text for my prep period. So fifty minutes door closed, cup of coffee in hand, read the text, that's all I'm doing. I'm not making phone calls, I'm not marking papers, I'm not cleaning or organizing, I'm just reading and that's my goal is to make myself do that because I feel like I'm in a bit of a rut right now as an English teacher and I need to expand a little bit and so that's the only way I can think of to make that happen ... I get five [preps] in a six day cycle. Fifty minutes. I can make

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that work, I can do that. Like you know if I work real hard in the other four I can take one as my reading prep.

Eventually I would like to go into resource. That's my career goal. In terms of early reading professional development I think I'm kind of beyond the point of doing the workshops so much. I think I'm kind of at the point where I need to start making more time for myself to sit down with professional text ... go through them and find those tricks that I want to do or really take a year ... be "this year I'm really going to explore this book and really use this book and really try to understand this book and make this philosophy, really try to explore this philosophy," and I think I need to do that a little bit more like challenge myself a little bit more to become a personal grower.

Profile Blending Elementary Teacher 2 (Bt2)

My Early Years and the Influence of Reading in My Early Life

[G]rade 3 is a big one. I can remember those years but not before ... I have very vivid memories. One is going to the town library with my dad ... and I guess the happy feeling of going down because you had to go down in the basement. It was an old fire hall and the red banister or whatever, but ahh, Ramona Quimby books, like I remember the Beverly Cleary's ... getting those and the whole ... world opening up because of reading. And that was at the age around grade three. [A]lso going on vacations; we would go south every few years and it would be in the back of a station wagon, the pre seatbelt days where the whole station wagon was laid out at the back at the back. Four kids, sleeping bags and a box of books; and then dad would drive for two and a half days. I was the third girl and we were all fairly close in age ... I do remember it as a sister thing because we would share the same books ... so I do remember that and in the classroom having that little escape where you got to choose any books. So those memories for me are very vivid. Also I was getting to grade six or seven, my mom who went to grade 10, and them being very supportive of and enthusiastic about reading and education, I remember her going and asking a neighbor who she thought had a higher education about what kind of books that she, you know, what would be good books or novels to get for us. I kinda remember, I must have been aware that she was doing something special or different as a mom to make sure that she was able to get us interesting reading material when she didn't know. I don't remember a lot of reading to us. I'm sure there must have been reading to us but I don't remember. That doesn't stand out for me. Being given books, being brought to places to get books, like the library, that kind of stands out for me. I was one of four. And I don't know, I

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don't know if the value at the time was placed as high as it is now for parents to read to their kids and how important that is.

I do remember my middle sister never feeling like she was never really good at reading ... Now that I'm a teacher I also know that she was one of the younger kids in the class. I do remember my sister being quite frustrated and I didn't have that feeling ... so that stands out to me. I have some memories of her, I think feeling frustrated with homework where I never felt like that. I liked the reading homework and for her it was frustrating. I have some memories of her I think feeling frustrated with homework where I never felt like that. I liked the reading homework and for her it was frustrating. [Reading] just came ... I don't really remember specifically being taught to read. I remember getting our little books to read and learning how to read but not in, I guess, in a dissected way.

I don't remember being surrounded by literature in the younger grades. I don't remember stories being read to us, or being surrounded by literature. I remember getting readers. We did get See Sam Do This, See Sam ... I remember liking the reader ... See spot run ... Dick and Jane. [F]or school I do remember reading those with my dad. We did have readers for sure and I remember in grade two there were reading groups so it was definitely levelled ... working on something more close to our level which had its pros and cons because if groups were working on a certain level than other groups dependent on how the kids in those groups felt some of them took that as a negative. And I remember nothing of grade three instruction which is interesting ... I know the teacher in grade three was not a lot of fun. We all kind of sat in rows, did book work ... [G]rade one was probably a similar experience to grade three. It was a very serious kind of woman who I think really didn't like teaching ... She was a nun, it was a Catholic school. It was not cut for our group. And the one in grade two was more group work, more interactive.

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More group work, it was more group work, interactive. I have stronger memories from that being engaged.

I specifically remember at school, it felt like for the first time, it was grade seven, that there was a box of novels and you got to choose, like it was finally, you know instead of just being given text to read. I remember reading pretty voraciously any available book ... and it being a big part with my sisters as well. Like I remember grade seven, eight, I remember [my sisters] deciding what I was allowed to read which is very fascinating. I remember them deciding that. In high school I remember an English teacher reading to us and I loved going into that class and she would read to us and it was so relaxing, so enjoyable but I can't remember, I can't remember my elementary school teachers doing a lot of reading to us. Which they must have! Nothing stands out strongly as I remember them reading this book!

For me it is a pleasure, an escape. Friends, it's a connection and sharing with friends as well. And my family, like with [my daughter], it's like, it's something we connect over. In the last little while she has been reading more on her own... Every now and again we find a book I read aloud to her again. And it was nice just hearing her... For a little while I thought "Oh wow that's kind of starting to disappear from our life." And then this year when her teacher sent home a note saying home reading had to be aloud ... at first she is like balking a bit. We've really been enjoying it. It was a good reminder for me ... There is definitely a lot of reading in our house ... We have the newspaper, we are not looking at it on the computer, we have the newspaper, we get magazines, we have books, and usually before bed I have a novel and read a chapter.

Preservice/Teacher Education

I applied for BA programs and [the university] just had started kind of a co-op; a combined BA/BEEd at Brock University. I got accepted ... for the BA and then on the first day I

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arrived they said there was actually space, you could do the joint program, and in my thinking at that time because I hadn't made it on the first cut I said no thank you because I wanted to play sports; and because if you didn't get a certain grade level the first year you were out of the program. My rationale at the moment when I was there was that I would probably work and play sports and if I don't make the cut I have to stay an extra year and finish my BA.

The BA I was taking was early childhood development and it was filled with a lot of pink sweaters and pearls ... and I thought I don't think I can work forever with these people. They really seemed to have this narrow focus on life a little bit. I'm sure they weren't all wearing the pink sweaters and pearls but it was just kind of a strange environment. So when I finished my Bachelor of Arts I did not apply to teachers college. I worked in the residence as a Don. And then I stayed and ... finished my three years and I thought what am I going to do. I worked for the university for two years as a liaison officer. [A]t that time it was a bit of a crossroads for me. I applied to some jobs, more business jobs, one was for a publication company of education material, and I also applied to teachers college. I was offered the job at the publishing company and I wasn't sure yet I was [accepted] at the teacher's college. I was also offered a job for the summer with Project Canoe doing 10 day canoe trips all summer. It was a little bit of a cross roads, and I really I wasn't sure. I asked the publishing company if they would wait until after the summer trying to buy a bit of time cause I did want to do the canoeing and they said they couldn't. I did the canoeing job and I did get into teachers college.

This was the nineties. It was whole language all the way, good bye phonics books. We didn't even talk about phonics. [I]t was like whole language full force. I did a placement ... in a kindergarten class. It was everything I would never be as a teacher. It was interesting but it was very very structured. Everything was too directed *and it was a kindergarten class ...* then it was

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in an alternative school. [The] alternative school [was] super super big on meaningful literature and the whole language stream as well. It was elementary. Being at the alternative school though they had multi-age classrooms like grade one-two-three and, four-five-six. I was in multi-age groups. [G]oing into university and then going to the alternative school it just all completely made sense to me ... [A]t the time that was my experience so it was a lot of whole language learning, just providing lots of opportunities to read but zippo on instruction. We were all very happy and very enthusiastic [laughing]. Nobody was stressed ... I'm sure it took a little longer to learn to read but everyone was happy. I would say that it kept me very relaxed because it was okay to struggle.

Beginning Teaching

Before I finished teacher's college the school that, the alternative school, I knew somebody was going to have a maternity leave ... so I went to the principal because ... I didn't want to commit to working all year with the board. I wanted to go back and do French courses in Québec City ... So before school was over I went and said that I would be interested and she said great, you're there. That year when I was in Québec city [and] after I'd done my six months teaching I thought I would probably go back to the Ottawa board but I worked across the hall from a woman [whose] husband was a principal at Wakefield and she said you should go up to Wakefield ... I know that you like to hike and ski, and she was just so nice to me that year, I just applied but ... left thinking I'll probably go back to the Ottawa board and that year is the first year they cut teachers. Two hundred teachers at the end of the year including the woman that I worked across. They all got a pink slip at the end of the year.

The first grade I taught was a one-two ... and it was surrounding everyone with literature, being very positive, being very enthusiastic, well it takes a huge amount of stress out of

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everyone's life I have to say, and we weren't doing any guided reading tests, there was no levelled tests so parents weren't coming in to an interview and getting a mark based on what the board thought what level they had to be at ... I guess I was eternally positive. I do remember I did have a boy ... and he was really anxious about reading and writing, not necessarily from his grade one experience but because he wasn't feeling confident about his reading and writing and it was a big bridge for him when he came into grade two; and anyway lots of cheerleading on my part and opportunities ... He's a doctor this day, he made it, but he was really anxious. And aside from that tool of being positive I think I had zip. I really don't think, I, we weren't pulling out any phonics workbooks ... working on sounds. We were being positive, giving experience so I can't believe how few tools I had and how we actually made it. Like how the kids kind of did move along and they started to read and write.

Then later on in teaching, and kind of in the middle, the first three years I had kind of kindergarten to grade two and then I spent quite a bit of time in grade three and four, and then a five and six, and then after I came back for the last six years I've been back into the grade one area. So it's been a fascinating little puzzle to go back to after seeing the older kids, having that early experience with younger kids and coming back to it.

Teaching (and) Early Reading

I have them for English Language Arts which is reading, writing, communicating, and that is the only thing I have the one group for. And ethics. [W]e are on a six day system so five of the days I get them for two periods, so a 110 minutes. And then on the sixth day only for 50 minutes. The sixth day the odd 50 minute period I use as our library period; stories and library times. The other five days ... when we have them for longer they get a lot more action and different things happening in that time. Monday's a kind of special day with journal. So 30

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minutes, I'll say Tuesday to Friday that everybody does those, so a story, they read to self, they partner read, and then outside that we usually we have a Daily Five time. At the beginning of the year, September, October is putting a lot of things in place. I find September is sometimes a housekeeping and also an evaluation time doing some little evaluations with them independently to see if they are reading because sometimes students come into grade one and they are reading fairly high ... I don't set all my units up for the year but I do have an idea of things I would like to do ... [I]f something seems a big interest to the kids then I can plan it in ahead. I'm seeing them engaged and because of the BAS system I can also see them progressing at a ... pretty steady pace.

[I]t's hard for me to separate like just reading itself when I ... let's say [a] bird unit for instance. [T]hat's in the spring time. Whenever ... I plan something I kind of really kind of mind map all could we do with birds ... [W]here does that relate to reading and writing and how? Appealing to the kids in class then choosing things or offering things they're interested in. Last year it was a girl who was totally keen on dinosaurs. This year it is a kid totally keen on frogs. [Y]ou don't always find everybody's connection ... but if there is a kid that loves something get books on it. That kind of thing. I think it has to translate into their idea of what reading is about. Somebody that is enthusiastic about it and sees it as fun or says things like this is one of my favorite books, and we're going to read this today, or I've seen this book before, I love getting information from these books. I feel like it does. So I think the whole language was my, I guess is the essence for me, is what makes reading fun and enjoyable then layering it with a lot of other different strategies or tools helps the kids.

I was never convinced or totally satisfied of too many programs in terms of spelling or phonics, they all seemed to be [an] awkward fit and not right for everybody ... [C]oming back in

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six years ago, Soundprints was big and Daily 5 and guided reading and they, all of them are super fit for ... my thinking of the whole language philosophy of surrounding kids with great literature and being enthusiastic. Soundprints I find is a great bridge for kids that need those tools ... and it's a beautiful way of giving them those tools that's not painful, it's short, it's quick, it makes sense. The biggest one, it makes sense. They are not sitting over a workbook filling in endless sheets, we do it on little whiteboards, we have pictures, we use sounds when we are writing our own thing. And then that writing and sound experience comes into their reading ... then doing their guided reading experiences as well has I feel upped the game for me and helping kids, all kids, kids that are at different levels of reading and if they are struggling ... it's helping, doing those guided reading experiences can break certain things down for the kids on what they should be doing to become a better reader.

I think it's hard for that small or low group at the beginning of the year, at the beginning of the year we're all kind of doing the same thing, but right now the other kids are settling in ... The other kids are settling in, doing their home reading daily at night, they're able to read their book to a partner. [N]ow there are I would say two kids right now that it's hard for them to read to their partner during the day because maybe they haven't read at night, the books are hard for them, and they don't have a long attention span. [S]o now I see the other kids starting to take off in their reading and then there's some kids that are not taking off yet. So it starts to become harder for them and frustrating for them.

Organizational strategies are to me a key to making the day successful ... You don't leave a lot of time for arguing about things, time for sorting out things like a partner, like where do I sit, like where am I going to go, all of those things. I even remember when I first came into teaching wow nobody taught me at teacher's college that I should have found a place where they

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could put their lunch kits. It was those little things that actually those little things in the day ... If you're spending all that time it can suck the day like you only have two fifty minute periods ... one day I only have one fifty minute period and if you're not organized and if the kids don't know what to do then you're not teaching and they're not learning.

Also making sure that you have connection to the home where they're getting a bit of a picture of what's going on in school because not everybody has had the same reading instruction that their children are getting now. [M]aking sure you have the home connection so when you're providing the tools you also have to make sure the family or the parents know what tools you are providing so that they can guide in a similar way. [Y]ou're not asking them to be a teacher but you want to give them the information too so they can do the best job they can.

Challenges in meeting students' early reading needs

Ignorance is bliss ... I know there are some teachers that I went to school [with], but I really enjoyed it, I think found it more stressful ... I was not stressed out about it at all. I thought we were all doing great. I think part of that speaks to not having a lot of pressure from the board. There was none. [These days are] [t]otally different. [T]hey are doing exams every few years for kids. In October and the end of the year you have to hand in your BAS results. Okay, tell me as a new teacher that is not going to stress you out ... you can't change the demographic of your class. Tell me that is not going to slightly stress you out that you are not teaching okay if your kids are falling below? I wonder if they even know if there was a time and age when your class was your class: "go ahead and do what you need to do, you're a professional." Getting tested all the time, having to report your marks and things like that. Anyway it must be incredibly stressful. June [fellow teacher] will say highest number of people out on mental health and mental leave is the younger not the older. [T]here is a lot of pressure right now and I didn't have

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that ... I had parents coming into the interviews. Like many parents they wanted to know if their kids were happy. They were seeing that they were learning something and "my child was happy, thank you." I think it's just I think it's really important to keep the balance of uh of what kids are all about ... But it's no matter what teachers look at "Wow, jeez I gotta get these kids moving along," ... or you're going to right away in grade one parents are going to think "my kid can't read, my kid doesn't read very well," whereas instead of them getting a report card that didn't have marks that said "maybe needs more time," "meeting objective."

I think there are more consistent outcomes in terms of every year I can pretty much pick how many kids are going to reach the benchmark that the board has set. I also think I'm having earlier outcomes that kids are reading um higher levelled books earlier than when I first started. Now I'm gonna put this into context. So when I first started in 91 and 92 there were no benchmarks. We had no, "you mu [must], we're trying to get the kids to read at this level by the end of this year," so there were no benchmarks so I was going into it ... that we're providing this environment and that eventually they'll read but there were no benchmarks at that time ... Do I think this is better for kids or do I not? So yeah, so we are creating I believe we're creating earlier readers. But I also believe that sometimes that is putting a lot of pressure on kids who would eventually become readers anyway. I do have a little bit of that feeling because when I started we were all very happy in 1991 and 92 taking home whatever book out of a selection of books to bring home and to read and we were all eventually becoming readers at some level but now I find there's a lot a lot of testing, a lot of benchmarks for them to hit young and they're I consider them pretty high for a bilingual program that these kids have to hit these benchmarks so there is a lot of pressure on parents and kids and teachers to keep moving on. When I started in 91 I had the whole kid ... so the whole kid was doing things at this time of year like making

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piñatas and really getting into holiday kind of spirits and discussion ... and there is a part of me that knows that some kids in this group rather than having three teachers who are then racing from one academic test from the next could really really be a happy little kid if they were being a whole, it was the whole child with one teacher and just going out for their French and coming back ... where that one teacher had the space and grace to have their language arts but layer it with their with science and theme activities in a variety of ways that a young person age six and seven would have a little less pressure on them to always be performing a different academic task. So that's where I'm slightly conflicted with the early reading part so early reading is great and it's important and I'm enjoying the successes of the kids in reading but I lament a little bit the do we really need to do this so fast, so intense all the time. [T]hey have a lot more going on than they did twenty some years ago. So yeah anyway it's a bit of a little bit no turning back time in some ways but it would like I said I I'm seeing successes ... I'm also seeing happy kids. Not every kid is feeling the pressure and some of the kids soar with it so I just there's just this little group that I feel for that might have been nicer if they didn't have to do this so intensely right now.

When I first started teaching a K1 [kindergarten and grade 1] I had the kids for everything. And we did science at that time too, I had them for gym, I had them for science, I had them for math, so you could fit reading into anything. And that is where a whole language approach is, you are fitting it in. You know it is math time but we are doing a calendar poem, and we are reading it together. So it is a little bit different I find now that it's a shorter amount of time with this heavy focus on language arts and I more enjoyed having the kids, the same group all day ... [I]t is a little bit different and I feel a bit more constrictive in terms of when I had kids all day I would be able to incorporate more outdoors days and learning. I find it a harder fit now

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that I've just got them for a shorter time ... you just don't have the flexibility, the longer time period. I'd say that's it, like they still may have this 110 minutes of English but they would have been with me for art, and drama, and science and something else. I totally miss that but what can I say, I am working part time ... I'm nostalgic for that time [laughing]. At the same time I have a daughter in the system and I can't believe how much French she can speak so at the same time it is a little bit of a trade-off.

[T]he board is focusing in readers of all levels, maybe not specifically just struggling readers so I'm not seeing, I'm not necessarily seeing uh professional development kind of focused on certain types of learning difficulties or learning disabilities ... I think they're going for the broadest. Soundprints hits a broad range, it gives tools, it's a tool so they're giving lots of tools for reading but we're not becoming trained in specific learning disabilities or difficulties ... so we're not getting a lot of that presented to us or offered. Who gets the attention of that resource time? Where do you give the attention? Where is the most effective, most bang for your buck kind of thing cause I do have one student who is way over here. Now does she get the everyday resource to try to move her up slightly or do the kids that are slightly below level get the boost so that they can become an average reader? It's a real hard call. I forwarded all names [for upcoming learning assistance] cause we were asked and I gave the run down. Three of them that it's a combination of attention and academic ... and then there's four of them that just are kind of missing the mark, they may just fall slightly below sixty, might just miss it by a level. Maybe if they had a little boost might be able to get that level kind of thing. Yeah it's tricky.

Involvement in Professional Learning

I think some of the early professional development I did were ... the one hit wonders. [Y]ou know the big conference in Québec in November I would go to those and there would be

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lots of interesting workshops ... but it kind of sat on its own, it wasn't a daily practice thing, whereas in the last probably ten to fifteen years of my teaching what I have found that has really kind ... of survived year after year have been any of the workshops that I've gone to that have been ongoing ... or have had accountability built in with them ... which are usually the ongoing ones. We might practice a little technique here but then you're going back to your classroom, you're going to implement it then we'll come back next time and then we'll talk about it ... So any of those ones have been the ones that I think have really survived in my classroom. The other ones were great. They were exciting for the two hours I was at it with the with the person but then you know ... I enjoyed the experience but then you get on with your busy life and you kind of forget about it or it gets filed and then you may or may not try it, so these other ones ... I'm a little more selective about it now ... and I haven't just because of a little bit more time restraints, or a family now, I haven't been to the Québec conference in Montréal in a while but it's not as appealing to me anymore to go to those workshops. I can think of years back going to those kind of one day or two hour workshops which were fun and interesting but then didn't end up implementing after but it would have been kind of the opposite of the Barry Bennet or the Soundprints.

Recently it's been a lot of what's been Board offered. They've had the one's ... at the school which is super convenient. So Soundprints, Daily Five, has been at the schools ... some are at the board office but they're also language based. Some of it is personal. I know when I came back into teaching young kids Gordon Neufeld, psychologist, talking just about kids and kid development, was being offered in Ottawa and I saw it and I thought "[my daughter] is about that age," and ever since I saw him there I've seen him a number of times because it is so

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applicable to this age group to just where they're at. So a little bit of both. What is offered and a little bit of personal choice.

Barry Bennet ... certainly was a revelation to me ... [S]o we had Barry Bennet, we I spent maybe three or four years going to Barry Bennet workshops with the board ... so his stuff, a lot of stuff that stuck with me was the organizational stuff, just the little things he would say and that's where my partner list came from. I use em in my class, I use em in gym, I make them up and I don't keep the same ... Barry Bennet was a big one. I think that would be the biggest. Again if you're if you're not organized and you if don't ... it's the same well it's the same kind as the Daily Five. I kinda use or modify some of the ideas. I don't run a full Tribes kind of program where we meet certain groups and that but that, the ideas behind Tribes, being engaged and feeling comfortable in your group, knowing your kids

[W]ell Gordon Neufeld would be one and he's on development, child development. It was a big one. It talks a lot about kids of this level and you know he's great ... First conference I was at [he] was like you know: "I love kids this level, they have forty conditions going on at once. They've got OCD, they've got ADD, they've got," and he went on and I thought wow. It was my first year teaching grade one for many many years and I thought "*that is so true*" ... Talking about how their brains aren't connecting: Their right and left hemisphere of their brains aren't connected till they're you know seven or more so they're just firing on impulse and it helps me have a bit of compassion for the kids that you know really they're [laughing], they really ... No wonder they can't settle down some times and you know focus on an academic test. They're you know, they're caught up in the moment ... [I]t helped kind of validate or explain what was going on with kids and helps me a little bit have compassion for the kids as they're in class and they can't [sit still] ... I've gone back several times to see him and to listen to him, get

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his, I have some of his, reading material but ... it's not reading specific but it's about the development of the child and I think that's really important. I don't think you can separate.

Soundprints I've been trying for probably five years but having more PD and more focus on implementing it and implementing the Daily 5 has, just all those little blocks connecting them all together and giving them meaningful experience for the kids in language arts has been a big focus I've had for the last couple of years ... It's just not going to the PD but kind of organizing the classroom in a way and training the kids so that they can function; and having the tools within the class so you can kind of pull it off. ... That's why I find the Soundprints [PD] so effective. Meeting with the same groups, small group, meeting the same group, kind of building up over time ... It was something that ... you came, you listened, you talked about then you had to go away and do something, then you were coming back again to meet, talk about, then go away and do something but you're kind of responsible for taking action ... and also being given tools along the way ... the same thing was in Barry Bennet. We would we would come learn, be given examples and then we had to go away and try something and come back again and talk about it ... when you're committed to a group and you know the group and you have to go face them in three months you may forget about it for two months and then you remember I think better try this [pressured voice] ... it just forces you, it forces me to do something. I'm great at working to the deadline ... Also great [for] thinking about things I'd like to do so it was it I thought "that to me is effective professional development" combined in with being given resources when you ask ... Dreena would bring things for us, whether it'd be Soundprints text and share with us and then we would talk about it and then we'd go and do stuff ... she would always bring different things and then see what we'd like to do and she'd always invite us to share ... I feel in the last three years I've been able to go from kind of my activity centres to

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Daily Five work and made that transition over and there's still more fine-tuning to do ... so I'd like to continue fine-tuning before I'm searching for something else. I don't like to get kind of off task or distracted into something else before I'm finished.

[I]n our school there's a lot of cooperation and a lot of collaboration. And that's very valued by the principal here. It's valued by my colleagues. And because we're working in a bilingual system we share a lot of classes. So way more dialogue than I would have been having previously ... [H]ere you're sharing a lot of the kids. There is a lot of talking. You're sharing. There's more than one grade of a group. So collaborating on how you're proceeding with a group because everybody wants to have the same benchmarks ... lots of collaboration and the boards initiative on Soundprints, Daily Five and guided reading have provided kind of inservice training here ... [A]gain we have a great group of teachers. We've talked about it ... as a learning group of teachers while we're doing things like Soundprints ... [W]e're a lucky school because we've had the same core group of people in this cycle for a while and we're all talking the same language because we've been into these workshops together ... so we're all implementing them in some form in our classroom, so it really I guess gives us a spring board of where we're going to. Within the school and seeing the kids, like you are building something, that is building the community and not only meaningful in your class ... but it's something that they're going to know for the next year and the next year.

Moving Forward/Toward

Right now I do find I'm maybe not as willing to commit too many days outside of the classroom, kind of a fine balance between getting those experiences but also being in the classroom and the time with the kids ... I'm not interested right now in going away for weekends to get development ... just with family and that and then yeah what's offered on my doorstep

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right now ... But if it's not kind of there on my door step I'm probably feeling busy enough or satisfied enough.

I guess there's been a lot of layering since I've started teaching. I started in 90, 91 so I feel like I've been able to layer kind of different strategies and techniques on top of each other that kind of fit in with my own philosophy about teaching as a whole which is a little bit more about the child and being excited about learning in general; but layering all those things along the way to have a nice organized reading instruction in the class that makes sense but layering the different things I've learned professionally from I guess child development like ... learning techniques as a whole ... [L]ike doing the different things from Barry Bennet to Tribes then layering them with Soundprints and Daily Five and keeping in still some of the essence of whole language about being excited by books and having great books in the class and modeling my own love of reading with them ... [D]efinitely, it's an it's an ongoing thing. [P]ersonally, if you are doing something do it well and if you've committed, like right now for me it's the Soundprints and the Daily Five, then try to do your best in that area and see it through and there may be other interesting things going on and keep those in mind but don't have too many things going on at once or it'd be hard to [do] any of them I guess really well. Certainly I'd continue on with Gordon Neufeld and continue learning a little more about the development, this age development cause I think it ... ties in a lot to how you uh organize for kids and how you treat them and how you think about them. You can't I don't think you can, you can't separate that part with academic stuff.

Profile Outer Elementary Teacher 1 (Ot1)

My Early Years and the Influence of Reading in My Early Life

I think I've always been that Type A personality that wants to do well, is self-motivated so I always did it. My brother who was a struggling reader, hated it, hated those books, there was nothing fun about them whatsoever but I just, I did it cause I could ... But you felt that victory when you switched levels, like even that's still there. You felt the disappointment when your friends reached ahead of you though.

[W]e were encouraged to read, reading was everywhere even on road trips my dad would ask us "well what does that sign say," or "can you read the map," like reading wasn't really approached as a task, it was just a necessity. I had a stay at home mom and there was only 18 months between my brother and I so we had reading every night, bed time stories. My grandmother used to read. We had a collection at the cottage for in the summer time. We never had summers off. You know what I mean? There was always still a culture of reading ... I just remember reading kind of coming naturally. With three kids [my mother] didn't really have time for personal reading but there was always books around. [W]e always had children's books, we always bought from scholastic. Like I remember my mom volunteering for all kinds of things ... Field trips, helping out in the classroom, even the Reading Recovery ... My dad never read ... He did before I knew him. Robert Munch was still popular back then and I remember my parents took me to go see him. He was doing a book reading and signing somewhere in the neighborhood and they took me to that. Like that was really important for me to go. And that would have been very young like six or seven, probably grade one, two. I remember my sister as she got older she would steal my stuff. My books about Gem, or Barbie or whatever it was. Shopping my mom would give me the grocery list, she'd make me write the things I need on the

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list as soon as we were old enough to read and write. I think it's made me aware of text. And even as a teacher now what kind of things I can use from the environment that do have text and will interest the kids and will make it realistic learning.

I remember small group reading, I remember the choral reading but I think if it's not a difficult time it's easier to forget. I remember the struggles. I can think exactly to grade one where I was supposed to learn how to play the recorder and it was a horrible memory for me ... I remember there was a bigger push on grammar too. As opposed to spelling it was grammar ... It's more build in vocab but I remember a push for perfect handwriting. I remember the goal was to get your pen license so that you could use cursive writing and that kind of thing. Like there [were] stages that everyone went through but those really early ones it's a blank and maybe that is why I enjoy[ed] it.

I don't specifically remember the moment [I learned to read] but I do remember the moment where I was no longer afraid when the teacher called on me ... You know when you had that shared novel that you were reading and everyone had to read a paragraph and the teacher would call on you ... and you had that fear because you would struggle and people would laugh at you, so I think it was ... grade 4. I was the one who would read two paragraphs because my friend beside me was struggling and nervous. I've read articles recently saying that the average English native enters preschool with three to six thousand words. I'd say I was probably at the top of that list. I knew how to read, I knew what words were, I knew what sentences were, I knew what the letters were, I knew that they made sounds, it was just a matter of looking for patterns which I'm naturally good at. I don't feel like we were ever instructed or had one on one reading.

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I remember back in junior high and high school and I remember hating most of what they gave us. It was very old books ... the same recycled material that it was almost like a rite of passage, you had to struggle through it ... I don't remember there being a lot of significant enjoyable reading in my younger years. I was 16 when I decided to go look for an author that I would like, a genre that hadn't been introduced at school. That's when I discovered historical romance ... The few that are hanging around at my cottage, and that's when I got into it and I've always liked literature since then that has a lot of history ... I was ... 14 when I started reading for pleasure outside of school ... Before that it was just quality time with my parents I guess, or homework.

You know a lot of kids today think that why do I need to read it's not that important. You know I can just Google it and you know my phone has voice to text to voice but they don't realize how much reading you do in daily life I think ... [W]e were aware at a young age that you need to read. I make the time. I have favorite authors, I have favorite genres, I do a lot of online reading since I'm not in an area that's going to get a newspaper. I can go 48 hours straight if I have a book that I've been dying to read.

Preservice/Teacher Education

I never thought I would be a teacher. I originally wanted to go into medicine of some variety and then I realized that I'm not cut out to sit in a lab for hours every day ... Most of my teachers in high school told me that I would be a really good teacher and that I should consider it. [A]fter one year of biochemistry I switched into arts and when I was done I thought, "now what do I do with an art's degree?" I had friends that were teaching overseas. That was a big trend back in the early 2000s ... I did three and a half years of early literacy with zero guidance. We had to write our own report cards, we had to plan our own curriculum, we had to order our books

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from the United States online, it was just a free for all. Like you really had to learn quick if you were going to be successful ... And you really learn to work together, to resource, and to ask for help, that kind of thing. [W]hile I was over there I thought, "well I'm going to be 30 soon so if I ever want to go home I need to get certified in Canada," so I came back and did [an] onsite program.

I've never had any interest in high school. I think it takes a different kind of person to do high school and you really need to have a specialty so that you can motivate the kids there. But I like the young ones. It's also character education at this point which I feel strongly about you know. I have very strict classroom rules and ways that we should talk to each other and treat people and that kind of thing. I learned more from my practicum part of it than I did from my professors ... It was intense. It was four days a week ... in the school classroom. You had about two weeks to figure it out and then you were teaching 100% for the rest of the semester... [I]t was very intense but I think it was the right choice for me ... because I already knew about classroom management. I did a grade 5 regular class, there was almost no special needs, like a few adaptations that was it and then I did a 1/2, 2/3 split class. It was a giant accordion room with two classes and two teachers with the accordion divider up the middle. [W]e did our literacy groups together by mixing it up according to level since we had 1/2, 2/3 ... [T]hat was probably the most amazing experience of my life. Two onsite teachers, one to two EAs in the classroom ... and two teachers ...

Beginning Teaching

I had finished teacher's college, was living with my parents, I was officially out of money. I had about five hundred dollars left in my bank account when they offered me this job. So I drove across Canada and did that for a year [laughing]. A lot of, there was no resources

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there, there was no books ... all we had was a Smart Board and an empty class ... I was hired as the grade three teacher. By the time I got there they stuck me in grade seven which turned out to be seven, eight, nine, ten and whoever showed up for school ... So I did one year there. I did sign up for a second year but there was some embezzlement and corruption within the school board system and I was let go in order to save money five days before the end of the school year.

[The summer I left] I had a hard time finding employment so ... I came back and I did three AQs: early reading, the ESL part one, and ... spec ed part one. I kind of thought, "you know if I'd done three in one section I'd be specialized and I'd have a higher pay grade," ... but I thought "I don't know where my weaknesses are at this point." You know like my experience was in ESL. Obviously I was doing early literacy, that kind of thing. I wanted to see what gaps I was missing in my professional development. [I] did one of the, one of each of them that I thought would help me out and give me an idea of which one I wanted to specialize in and then I got this job ... [T]hose three things were what got me the job because this place needed an early literacy specialist basically. [W]hen [OP] was hiring she wanted someone who would stay ... I'd never heard of the location. Googled it and I came out for the interview. My position had been kind of recycled through for about four years, never the same teacher, which in a split grade is not ideal. I think she picked me knowing I would stay because Namur is a tough place to live. The other hires don't live here. They don't want to. But like this is not that isolated compared to where I was so I enjoy it here.

Teaching (and) Early Reading

My philosophy of education, we all had to write one for our professional portfolio. I go back and I read the one that I wrote before and I'm like bullshit ... as you gain experience you realize that your early reading needs to be fluid and you have to figure out what that flow is

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going to be for each student or as a class. Like it has to be a natural flow of understanding language ... and when a teacher has a bad day and you're banging your head against the wall and you're like "I don't understand how you don't get this," ... you just have to realize that everyone's got their own pace, it'll happen. You have to have faith that it'll happen, you have to encourage the kids that it'll happen too.

I'm doing grade 1 this year ... I was in a panic. I was like "these kids can't read, they don't know their alphabet." I assessed some of the kids that seemed the brightest off the bat and they knew like six out of twenty six letters ... And I had these expectations that professionally I've always gotten children to produce work at this level. I said "I can't ... It's not fair for me to yell at the kids or make them feel upset about this. I just needed to switch it up." I'm doing some things that I would have done in first term. I've even done some things I'm planning on ... starting the third term which I have often done in the fall as well. So we're getting it done, it's just a different order.

Classroom management is the key. Um usually the first two months of any class you're teaching them the routines, your expectations and I found that young children, they need that ... [S]o once they know what they should be doing they really do get down to business and once you've established that, you've had time to get to know your kids, you've had time to see what level they're all at, you can start making groups for reading groups or writing groups. [T]hat's when I group by academics. I have a higher group who can be more independent, I have a middle group that I may start out with, make sure they're on the right track, and then I spend the bulk of my time with that lower group that needs more individual instruction, repetition or modeling that kind of thing.

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[I]t's the process of modeling early reading behaviour; what it means to sit and read, to look at the words, to look at the pictures ... to understand what text is and you know obviously after books you look at other types of text. Signs and posters and instructions and that kind of thing. So getting children familiar with the concept of letters representing sounds, making words, words making sentences, sentences making paragraphs. [I]t's never, never ending how you build into that. [I]t's teaching the basics ... consonants and vowels and vowel blends. All of those rules and habits. It's modeling fluency.

[O]ne of the things that I added to my curriculum this year is time to just enjoy reading. At a young age that's what you want. You want to get the kids interested, excited, enthusiastic, confident about reading and writing so model that. Model enjoy reading a book ... You enjoy your book, I'm going to enjoy mine and they get to see me just sit with a book and that's important ... [A]fter that it's not just the joy of reading but what reading can teach you. So we look at why we read, that kind of thing. We talk about the different reasons we read the different types of book. We distinguish between fiction and nonfiction. It's really that gradual release of responsibility but it's also modeling what literacy can do for you I think. ... Obviously there's more nitty gritty to that. There's the different aspects of independent reading, modelled reading, writing, creating stories and all of the steps that it takes to create different types of literature. But appreciating authors, the creativity of titles. All of those things have to be taught. The more hands on it is the more enthusiastic they are, the more concrete it is for them ... They need it practical, like everything. We think about math with manipulatives but language arts needs it too. When we had animals in our classroom ... Every kid wanted to touch the animal, wanted to learn about the animal ... [T]hey knew wings, they knew claws, they knew nails ... they would be so observant, they would see ... it has eyebrows, or they wanted to know what the wiggly thing on

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the turkey was ... [S]o they ask questions and if I just showed them a picture of a turkey it wouldn't have been the same. They really ... could get their adjectives describing the colour, the texture ... and we had all that rich vocabulary to put together for writing.

You got to figure out what the kids like. [E]ach student is a little psychological project. You gotta figure out what their interests ... [I]f you can get them hooked on a specific genre and they can learn to enjoy reading at a young age then they're more open to trying different genres later in life. So I use a lot of nonfiction to teach them vocabulary, get the sciences in. Things that blow their mind. Often I can start with a YouTube video that was something really cool and then we can go into a book that covers kind of the same material a little more specific. I'm always watching online for something that could be a good topic of interest. I'm always going to Chapters and looking for a new book. I will spend hours there and think, "How can I use this in the classroom, what is this going to help them achieve." So I really try to bring a lot of different literature and nonfiction into the classroom.

Before the year starts I create assessments ... I want to know what letters that they know ... [T]hen I have to sit down, I have to analyze them ... which letters do the class as a whole not know. I create groupings ... these kids need to work on these letters, or the whole group needs to work on this letter; so I might introduce a lesson that focuses on a particular letter, we may just review the whole alphabet, we may have to review the differences between sounds and names. So I have to kind of get that done in the first week, think about where I want to go ... I don't like to pair weak with strong ... I feel strongly about that as an early literacy teacher you know. Like it's there's so much to learn that it's a waste of time to be partnering with someone who's going to drag you down ... I usually plan my year syllabus. [I]n the beginning I kind of planned it by month. One month is not enough for ESL learners ... so I now do per term two topics. I try to

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really do whole thematic teaching which I enjoyed because here I am responsible for my whole class. I've been in others systems where they bounce around so if they're called out for math you can't necessarily do a project that incorporates your language arts and math.

I try to pick a theme that is all encompassing, something that a lot of the kids can relate to, that's going to give them a lot of every day words that they don't necessarily come to school with... I like to leave it broad so I've done themes like music. First term the topic is usually pretty light because I'm heavier on the basic phonetic instruction, the language cues, you know just reading left to right, noticing punctuation, ... letters, uh phonemes, digraphs ... the very basics, the nitty gritty ... I have not focused a lot on grammar in early instruction because I'm focusing more on success. Are they picking up the vocabulary, are they thinking independently, are they understanding? So that I tend to leave behind until grade two once I see that they're really starting to read and they're starting to notice those errors in their own work ... I have not focused a lot on grammar in early instruction because I'm focusing more on success. Are they picking up the vocabulary, are they thinking independently, are they understanding? ... [O]ne failing that I noticed in my teaching is that I didn't do a lot of vocabulary focus when I first got here, and ... I can see that some of the students I failed them. Like they are in grade four or five now and they don't have a firm grasp of those Power Words and that's my failing. So that's something that I'm really working on this year ... [T]his is an ESL community, they need it.

[O]n Monday I introduce five new words. I put them on the board same place every time so they know where they are. We talk about them, "what letters do we see?" We may clap them out, we may stamp them out. Sometimes I model the next day how to write them properly using the lines. I'll have them dictate what letters I should use or some of the kids are dictating them. Then we have games around the room ... [T]hey're reading them but they're also writing them

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... But it's grade one. They need to be able to read the words. Writing them is a bonus ... I also stop after about twenty five to forty words. It just depends on how the term goes. I stop, we take a break, and they just have to practice reading them and I do a quick reading test and then we go on to new words. [M]y goal is to finish all of the two hundred words plus a few I've introduced ... which may be sound-out, so it gives those other kids a chance to be successful.

[L]anguage is never in isolation in my class ... I always find a book that will fit. [T]o teach instructional writing well I spent two hours at Chapters and I found a book called Dragon's Love Tacos. [S]o what kid doesn't like to make tacos? So you can use that book for character identification, for beginning middle end, for making lists, for instructional writing, like that kind of thing. Like I really try to find the right book for what I need to teach. [J]ust finding those special books that make it really interesting. Repetition is so important right now and if you're going read the book you have to read it right. I don't know how many times I've introduced a book and I've done it with voice and character to get them excited and then I'm just having like a crap day and they're "Miss this is not how you read it ... just a little, give us something more."

I [had] always felt it was a waste of time to just read a book but it's not. That's something that I've had to accept. [S]ometimes they just want to hear a story and that is important to building a love for reading ... that's my goal, like I've done some crazy stuff to get these kids motivated and I find sometimes you have reluctant readers and I think that comes from the struggle but when they're interested and they're talking and you can take the time to read with them they all enjoy it ... So I've lightened the load of instructional forced reading where you're embarrassed, I take more volunteers than anything but then we do choral reading together for simple things like instructions in math, that kind of thing, where you see the words around you and you know it's a road block unless you give it a try. They really attack those roadblocks now.

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But that's taken three months. I had no English speakers in my class when I first started. It's been a slow progress but it's that motivation and the removal of fear ... I usually give them about five days before I have any obvious expectations but I let them know what's going [on], give them lots of time to practice before I test. I really, like I can tell that they need confidence.

I get a lot of my evaluation from the anecdotal stuff whereas all of their testing looks perfect because I don't test until they're ready. Like 100% ready which is not like the true report card mark that I'll get but that's what they need to see in order to keep trying. They need to see success. There's no point in giving every child a failing mark right ... I have only eleven students, very homogenous group of weak students all round. Weak in math, weak in literature, weak in just reading vocab, everything ... If I have a group of kids that are at kindergarten level I have to teach kindergarten, I can't move forward ... [Y]ou can't be motivated unless you find whatever is going to click with them and it has to be something that's got a personal significance to them. So that changes with every school that you go to, every community. And this ones very different. You know it's gotta be more sporty, it's gotta be a little more risqué here because you know hatching an egg is exciting to a kid in the inner city Ottawa but hatching an egg is a daily event and chores here right so you gotta, so you gotta keep mixing it up.

I love reading, I want kids to love reading. Like making grade 1 fun, making kids love school is a big part of how I approach the program. So that's definitely, that influences how I teach. I think my experience in Korea, being trapped in the country with a foreign language has taught me to be understanding and to take that into consideration and I approach my students like that. I know what it's like to not speak the language, to be left out, to feel like I'm missing something and it's easier to just go back to your old ways, and speaking in this case French right?

Challenges in (and adapting to) meeting students' early reading needs

I was just plopped into the Québec system. They're like, "Here's the QEP [provincial curriculum]." It's a giant website that's impossible to navigate, it's all in French till you get to the one document that you need. It's a hidden PDF with a French title, and [sighing] it's not all there. And then you have the Progression of Learning which is very confusing cause you should introduce this but they don't have to master it until like four grades later ... I had to really get used to that and even after three years of doing that when [my partner teacher] showed up ... [w]e found differences. I found a few gaps that I had missed things that she though worked well in first term or I had had in third term and we switched it up ... This is my fourth year teaching [ELA] and I found that I've caught a lot of lot of things that maybe I missed.

[The curriculum document's] very wordy. It needs to be bullets. Like when I make my syllabus it's teach instructional writing, teach vowel combinations, teach blends, teach diphthongs, teach diagraphs, teach list making, teach character, setting. I have very specific things that I want to hit on. Why don't they have a document that literally says "term one teach this shit, term two this". It's so wordy and the way that Québec, our system does it, maybe it's not all Québec, but our school we have in language arts the writing, and the reads and/or listens to text. What are we assessing there? The ability to read has nothing to do with your ability to listen. One is vocabulary and attention span and one is decoding in grade one. Right? It doesn't make any sense. And I struggle with well what is this for, what is that for when I do my report cards. Does it fit into competency one or competency two. Like the writing is obvious but the other two are blurred and I can't be the only teacher that thinks that.

With early literacy I say it all the time to my principal: "there is no set way of evaluating." There's things that we're supposed to look at. There's you know little check marks

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that we have to tick off of our more technical side of things like nouns and pronouns or vowel sounds or blends. Like we need to hit those milestones but how do you say the difference between a 55 and a 60 when you see a child is struggling. Sometimes they get it, sometimes they don't. Like it's very hard to assess oral skills and I have created checklists of what I expect and every year that I teach, the grade, it changes a little bit cause I know on average what to expect.

So does there need to be an early literacy for ESL kids, does there need to be one for English natives? Most definitively. It's totally different and it's not fair but then again they don't have exams till grade 3 so you do have those three years to catch them up. How you approach it is different and how you evaluate it has to be different. The pacing in itself, but like that checklist is my experience. What are other teachers using I have no idea. So why don't we have a sharing session on evaluation tools. I've seen a lot of them for anecdotal notes. I don't know any teacher with a class of eighteen checking off, "oh yeah look they're doing this right? I'll take a little scribbly note." Yeah right if there isn't one monkeying off of you, like in an ideal world you could get that done but there needs to be almost like the kindergarten curriculum has, more like a checklist of habits and stuff like that so, I'm not sure if I'm doing it right. I think I've kind of honed it down nicely to the point where my checklist is within 5% of where I think the child is at so like I think that's a good sign but I'm always crossing things off, adding things you know. I'd be very interested in seeing how those teachers evaluate because there's probably teachers who have more than four years' experience at the same grade level so maybe their checklist is more refined. Maybe they have it in a more efficient way of being able to calculate a percentage off of that. Then again we use percentages whereas most programs in grade 1 use A, B, C, or D. So I definitely know the difference between an A and a B and a C and a D but do I know the difference between a 63 and 67? I don't know ... but it needs to be fair.

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[S]omething that I haven't figured out how to fit in [is] how do I get to everything that I need to when they are struggling and I need to go back and spend two months on alphabet sounds? And that's the basic 26 sounds, then you got to think about hard and soft sounds, then you gotta think about silent letters, and letter combinations, and diagraphs, and diphthongs. And so you really have to be organized and then choose your battles ... We have the Ethics demand which I find very weird. You know we're supposed to teach our anti-bullying policies, our Tribes icebreakers, and our character development and that kind of thing and then there's in Québec you're still allowed to teach holidays so you have to teach Remembrance Day, and I don't know Groundhog Day and Halloween and that I find is very difficult and you have a plan and those things are thrown in. Like I don't know if it's necessary. So that kind of thing is limiting where you all of a sudden realize you're losing 5, 6, 7 days a month to what I would call bullshit.

[I]n my ESL Part One my instructor had said, "If you can use the second language, their first language, their mother tongue is an asset that you can use," ... [T]his year I made the decision that they were so weak and just scared, they were very immature, they weren't ready for grade one you know, they weren't ready for the pressures and the expectations, and so I do a lot of translating almost as a way to, to break the ice. Like they're so shy, they don't want to make mistakes, they were terrified. I had my students tell me I was mean cause I asked them to speak English. You know I'd never encountered that before. So I found if you want them to take on the risk of speaking another language and being laughed or just making mistakes I need to do the same thing. So we, I have been using a lot of oral translations in my classroom, just making those connections ... It has helped but I wasn't really sure about that advice in my AQ until you know I got here and I needed it ... Like I have kids who didn't know six letters in the alphabet. I

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had kids that couldn't tell me what a word was, what a sentence was, even translated. And then I had kids that were reading at a level F and I was: "How?"

I've felt very isolated in the past because there's just some, not personal, but I would say there is the teacher in the 3-4, is not sociable, she doesn't share resources. The 3-4 teacher used to be the early literacy rep before I did ... [Y]ou know how many things could she have brought back to share with us? But we just don't seem to have those sharings ... So you know like the kindergarten teacher does her own thing and 3/4 teacher does her own thing and I'm stuck in the middle with a very big task and ... I wouldn't even know what the 3 teacher wants from me cause she doesn't communicate well. And kindergarten same thing. [I]t makes a difference having a co-worker that you can work well with. [Collegiality is missing] and I really feel here cause it's so isolated.

I find because we're in a rural area our TAs are not EAS. They have no education, they have no experience, so I find that they're in my room observing me so that later they can start pulling kids and being useful ... I don't have time to plan a separate lesson, right? This is remedial work, special needs work is not the teacher's work if they're being pulled out right? Obviously we differentiate within the class and accommodate but to plan those separate lessons is very difficult ... [O]ur TAs are very kind people in the community. They don't have experience, they don't have any professional development so that's hard as a teacher. I disagree with the new Québec program has put a full time aid in the pre-K class. I said "that's daycare." We have an aid who I spent three years training. She is so capable of teaching my lessons in an emergency I begged the principal to let her teach my class cause I knew she would do better than any supply teacher coming in right? She knows how it's done and her talents are just being wasted watching kids play. I think the government of Québec needs to step in and realize that

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grade 1 is when literacy starts. In grade 1 if you're going to spend any money anywhere that's where the extra money needs to go.

I know all the research says that class size doesn't make that big of a difference. I had eleven this year and all of them are progressing faster than any other year so what's the difference? It's my class size. I have less help. I had a full time TA last year and now I have people popping in and out with no training. It doesn't make sense to me. The more individualized instruction a child gets the better they can come out of their pits and reach a peak... Keeping the class small means I can make sure that I get to every child before they get frustrated or depressed. Or angry. Kids with behaviour problems if they're struggling they get angry, they cause fights. Kids with low self-esteem they just shut down and they refuse to do anything. Like if I can make sure to get to student A and student B before they have that breakdown, that emotional effect that makes them hate learning then obviously they're going to progress faster. So, yeah, class sizes no bigger than ten would be perfect.

There needs to be separate early literacy for ESL kids... Maybe there needs to be petitioning to create more of a focus and I know that [our] high school teacher [name omitted] was talking about that. She was like, "it's ridiculous, like why did they need to write that, where's the five paragraph essay that we've had to weed into us all of our lives?" We [when OT1 was a student] started five paragraph essay writing in grade 3. They don't, that I can see. I think a lot of kids get to the university level with no academic writing levels but yeah sure they can write a narrative response, tell me how it feels, probably relate it to me or another book I read. Yeah it's interesting cause it's a real world and you talk about the kids here ... the whole foundation of their schooling is finding a way to connect to their real lives cause you're taking French learners into English learners and ... they're learning probably the vocabulary that their most closely

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connected to first right? I would like to see narrative response, fiction analysis removed by grade three because I don't think you need that anymore. Now you can now go about your daily business and draw those connections. You don't need someone to teach you how to do it out of a book, and by grade 3 you've usually caught up to natural language learners if you start in kindergarten; it usually takes about three years to balance out, boys a little bit longer but I think that's when they're ready to flip over.

[I]t seems teaching is the only profession where you don't get to choose your holiday right? People everywhere complain about how teachers get the summers off. Well you know what about some free PD? I wouldn't mind taking some courses in the summer if it was offered but it's not. The few things that we have are retreat getaways. I don't have five hundred dollars to go on a retreat. They don't pay teachers enough. Yeah you're reimbursed for some of it but not all of it and it could be six months before you see that money. So that that's a problem. You know like if I want to take it online well then I can take it online at my own expense in the summer but I don't have a class. So you're not using those skills right away. It's use it or lose it right?

You know in a rural school video conferencing is so boring. I've done videoconferencing when I got snowed in and I did not get nearly as much out of the session as I would I'd gone to the board and interacted with people and we played it out and we shared idea ... So distance for rural schools is definitely a barrier ... [A]nd the time off. Like I'm not sure what we could do. Western Québec School Board has more PD than other ones but when you're not given a day off to do report cards it's assumed that you're going to work overtime 48 hours straight on your weekend. It's just preposterous that we would not take one of our floater PD days to get our report cards done. So then we're not taking those PD opportunities but you have to draw the line

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somewhere ... I think the longer you stay in the profession the more you say screw it I'm going to enjoy my weekend. And you don't want to get to that point because then you get those teachers that are not doing the best that they can. [T]hey don't have the time, the energy to focus on each individual's needs ... I think definitely a problem is assume that teachers are going to work in their free time unpaid ... So if they want teachers to do more professional development I think there needs to be something done where it's either more convenient or it comes at a time when we're not expected to do report cards. ... [Y]ou get to a point where when you stop taking PD, you stop learning yourself, and we're teaching our children to be lifelong learners, that you need to read so that you can have more experiences in life, more opportunities in life and enjoy life. Yet we have teachers who are so burnt out that they're not taking PD and they're not growing personally and they're not taking care of their kids as they should.

[A] small network of teachers made these [online early reading resource portal] and ... posted them for everybody in Western Québec ... [S]o there should be more sharing and our school actually has a plan if we ever had time to find all those books and bring them back in here, that kind of thing, so we can be more efficient with those portal lessons, so you can just click on the portal, go find the book, print out the lesson, give it a try right? Comes with the assessment, that kind of thing ... But there's other things on the Virtual Library that are just so impossible to access. They're just buried in there, they don't seem worthwhile or the webpage is out of date every time I try ... something like that which would help the kids... Our computer lab hasn't worked for three years. It's finally been revamped but you know I pay \$500 for a subscription for A to Z readers and I have two computers where you can plug earphones into. [T]echnology here, and I think other teachers find that as well, but especially in this rural area where we're not serviced properly and we lose power often you can't depend on it. Like if I left a

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lesson plan for a supply teacher that was based off of anything that they needed to access YouTube for I would have to plan an alternative activity because you know probably 30% of the time our internet's down ... So like I think that it's great that things like the portal exist cause it's a way to share but I was never taught how to use the portal when I became a Western Québec teacher [in the board] ... I was two months without a working computer when I started here.

I've seen one child who in first term was doing very well and all of a sudden there is no more at home reading coming back ... This child has stopped reading and their progress has completely stopped to the point where I'm concerned. [T]his child knew their alphabet at the beginning of the year and another child who only knew six letters has surpassed that child because he is reading at home. It makes such a huge difference and I find parents aren't aware of it unless they have friends with children in the same grade ... I wish I had a day where it was parent volunteers and we had a twenty minute reading block where I could watch them read with their kid. [P]arents don't know how to do it, they're not teachers, they're not professionals. They don't necessarily know what they could do better or what maybe they're enabling their child to not do better ... [O]r how to approach it with a gentle hand. You know some parents are very militant and it takes the fun out of reading you know. I would love to see how I could help them and I can't do it if they don't come in and talk to me.

Involvement in Professional Learning

My first two years it was the New Teacher's program so I didn't have a lot of choice. I did observe Daily Five in the classroom in Chelsea which was no help. It was the middle of the year, the kids were all totally disciplined, they knew the whole routine. It was like watching a show. I was like, "I want to see the struggle, I want it to be real" ... I'd rather sit here and communicate with my cycle team to come up with ideas or something. I did choose to do at the

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Teachers Convention, a math one this year because I felt like my focus has been on literacy for so long that I wanted to bring some fresh math ideas into the classroom and luckily it was ... perfect for me. You know I'd heard about it from a co-worker last year and that's what I want to do. I really want to build up the math vocabulary because that's part of ESL right ... So that worked out really well. But for early learning there's, I haven't really done anything ... Like going to Montréal it's very expensive. It doesn't matter if they're throwing some PIC money at you. It's very expensive and you're putting it up front. Yeah. So I tend to do my own research. I talk to other friends. I have all my friends from teacher's college, other places that I've taught. You know we're online, we talk, I hit them up. I'm still debating which direction I want to go for my next AQ. Do I want to Reading Part Two because I really got a lot out of part one? Or do I want to take something else? I will have an autistic child in my classroom next year so maybe I need to go back and take Spec Ed Part Two, brush up, cause you know if you don't use it you lose it ... Unfortunately the way the Québec system works the coding, it doesn't, there's not enough help. There's no professionals I could talk to, to find out how to deal with an autistic child in my class.

I think one of the ones that was most influential was [when] I was the early literacy rep with the school board for two years ... I didn't love the drive, but I liked going in ... [B]eing able to sit with a bunch of other reading teachers, they would give you new ideas, new text. I think that was one of the most influential ones that I had ... It was five or six days of the year we went to the board and we met as a cycle. So that was the first time I got to meet other cycle 1 teachers; grade one and two teachers. It was similar problems, people who'd invented some real good lessons and wanted to share. The first year was on poetry and I hate poetry ... Like simple things like write a line off of, you know, like you take a poem and you start just making it longer

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... So I did a huge poetry unit last year and one of my goals was to put more song into my curriculum last year. So we did songs, we did putting poetry to music, drumming, you know all kinds of things like that and it was so successful. The kids liked it and I think that was the biggest difference. I needed to learn to like it before I could teach it. [I]t was specialized and she [the leader] brought a lot of these techniques that she'd taken [from] other development and brought the best of it to the group and I brought almost everything that she taught back into the classroom and that made a big impact.

In our staff meetings here at the school we're working on Vocab Rehab ... Ways to bring more vocab into the school, and I've seen a big focus on that. Like the math PD that I did it said to create these mini-books about vocab or these picture posters, picture like dictionary ones like references. That seems to be very important for early literacy is everything is a photograph. I've spent hours creating Smart Board lessons. Every word has a picture to go with it. So obviously verbs might be a little bit harder than nouns. Now I've even added a level to that. I now record my voice saying every word so if they go up and touch the word cause they forget it they can now hear it and repeat it.

I think there should be more very specific early literacy PD offered. Like niche lessons. No one's teaching you the most effective way to teach *-ing*. Maybe there is a way and I haven't stumbled across it yet. Maybe there's a real fun way to teach you know vowel blends and I haven't discovered it yet. I could spend hours of my time Googling Teachers Pay Teachers and you know looking at YouTube sites and I'm going to find a golden nugget. ... But I can't share that with anyone, right. And of course we have copyright laws right. So if I go and I spend four hours making a Smart Board presentation and I'm just using on the Smart Board it's almost like taking a screen shot. So screen shots illegal cause it's copyrighted but you're taking one anyways

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right? ... But if I was in a shared group of my colleagues and my board I could show it to them ... and if I met them in person I would feel comfortable saying, "Hey I'll email to you, right? Just don't put it on Teachers Pay Teachers cause it's going to come back as..." But to add all those copyrights would probably take me another four hours. I don't have time for that. So there is something to be said about you know a larger school or a larger school network where you can share those things that you may not share with strangers.

Two years ago we had a Cycle 1 get-together ... to create a lesson sample, and a rubric so that we would have a consistent expectation for grade 1, term 1, term 2, term 3 writing. We didn't finish that because of the strike last year. [O]ne teacher that had been teaching for like fifty years was like "this is what I've been doing, here it is." I said, "well that's not creating something new ... your expectation of one perfect sentence by the end of grade, one grammatically perfect sentence is preposterous, it's BS." How do you go from doing one sentence to creating a three page paper in grade three? There needs to be more gradual release of responsibility. So relax on the grammar and create writing endurance right? [T]here needs to be more of that PD within the board and then I think as more boards have that perhaps they'll become more provincially aware because I know that program that we['re] working on ... our work was submitted to the government and if it wasn't approved we weren't funded. So there is a connection between board PD and the government funding which means provincially they have to be aware of it which means they have to be collecting it.

Moving Forward/Toward

Last year during the strike they tried to do some stuff, video conference. It's so boring you know. They're like pretend you're in a group discussing ... Yes they're sending you the materials and you kind of flip through it and be like, "oh I can see the potential in this." It's not

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the same as collaboration ... isolation is hard ... [Maybe] isolated schools should have designated professional development ... maybe isolated rural schools need more days off ... [T]hat's something that the government needs to think about, or simply our board; that rural schools there should be mandatory collaboration meetings at the board. Yeah it sucks, we're going to have to drive in but we're still paid for the day right ... But it needs to be in person and the rural, like I sat in on a PD last year that had nothing to do with my kids and I literally sat there grading my papers. You know ... Behind my laptop grading my papers cause I didn't feel it was relevant to me.

When you look at the examinations in the older grades there needs to be a focus on teaching nonfiction and nonfiction response. The boys especially who are often more reluctant readers and writers, they love nonfiction ... I'd like to see a change in the early grades to focus more on nonfiction because it's effective and they need it later in life. So perhaps there needs to be some professional development in teaching nonfiction ... cause everything in their later life is nonfiction ... It's all about nonfiction. That's where the kids' reality is.

I really miss my position as early literacy rep. Did I enjoy driving there? No. Did I enjoy having to prep for a supply teacher? No one does. That's like twice as much work. Any teacher will tell you it's easier just to teach your own class. But you know if I had the day off and I didn't have to plan for a supply teacher and I knew that everyone teaching grade one from the board where we want consistency and evaluation ... and if they were all going to be there sharing ideas, I would go. Like it's fun. Teachers are social by nature I think. Most of us are. Yeah so if individual boards got organized with those professional development I think there'd be more teachers going ... I'd love to be able to go and take this and say look this is this is what I found, the kids love it, this is what I've done with it. [I]t doesn't have to be so formal ... So if

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it's less formal where you're just sharing, socializing, writing samples, most professional teachers can look at what's been produced and think "Oh shit, I know where she was going with this, I can see the variation, the differentiation techniques."

I know next year I'm going to be looking at a child with um severe autism so how am I going to work that child without an aid cause there's no funding. How am I going to work a child like that into my program? The child is currently addicted to iPad, uh it's the only way that he will sit in or classroom, or, yeah very high functioning. They say high functioning on paper but he is not participating in any classroom reading whatsoever so are there apps out there that he might perceive as game that I can you know like get used to? We don't have any iPads, I have no training on iPads, I use Samsung myself so I need access to one of those. I would need training. I need someone who's going to show me what kind of early literacy apps are available that might help him transition from addicted to iPad games to learning games and also coming off the iPad right? Like I don't know. We're only finishing term 2 this year but I know that that is coming my way right? ... Yeah. So I don't find that we do enough for special needs kids in early literacy.

Profile Outer Elementary Teacher 2 (Ot2)

My Early Years and the Influence of Reading in My Early Life

I just know my parents read to me ... but I don't remember the stories or them pointing to words or me reading it. Just them reading it to me. I asked my mom "How did I learn how to read," and she said, "I don't know you just knew how to do it." [W]hen I was little and my mom used to babysit me and my friend she had these ... gold, hard covered books and we would pretend that they were our homework from high school... I guess I knew it was going to be a lot of reading eventually. [M]y dad was always reading the newspaper, my mom was always reading her novels ... I think I really wanted to read ... I wanted to read those Baby Sitter Club books so badly so I ... would just read as much as I could and if I didn't know a word I would skip over it, but you know you got the whole idea of the book. I always wanted to read the comics ... I wouldn't get the jokes until I was an adult and I was like that's why it was so funny ... I [also] liked choose your own adventure books when I was like able to read. Those were fun.

I don't remember any instruction in the younger grades, in grade 1 or 2, I don't remember ... I remember grade 3 I had the readers, in grade 4 it was Charlotte's Web and the choral reading. In grade 2 I had a male teacher and he yelled a lot. I probably had readers in grade 2. In grade 3 I had the best teacher ever cause he was just so awesome and he would tell stories about his life all the time. I lived right near the school ... and then a couple other people lived right around me and we would stay after school and clean his blackboards and stuff and he'd get us donuts and would let us eat them in front of all the class. In grade 4 I had two teachers and one of them was really awesome. I think she realized a lot of people were coming to school without eating. So she used to bring this French bread that was warmed up and the goal was to pass it around the circle as many times as you could so you weren't taking too big of a piece ... I don't

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remember the grade 5 teacher. I had the same teacher for grade 5 and 6 and she was mean. Yeah, she was real mean. I don't remember reading in grade 6, probably had quiet reading time or something. I just remember writing lots of notes ... pages and pages and pages of notes ... she would write them on the blackboard. She'd write so many on this blackboard, she'd go over here, she'd write them and then she'd start erasing from the top to write more notes. It's like we were just writing notes upon notes. I don't even know what in.

We had those readers ... everyone had the same reader throughout the year ... readers, [...] choral reading and reading at home. I feel I had those readers in every grade. That might have started in grade 1 and 2 and but I really remember it in grade 3. I remember putting it into my desk and pulling it out. And I remember reading Charlotte's Web as a novel study ... up and down the roads. You never knew when she was going to call on you ... [Y]ou never really knew so you were trying to read ahead so you'd sound good cause reading in front of the class is intimidating and sometimes people'd be reading and you're like "Oh my god I totally don't understand what you're saying." I remember listening to this one guy in my class and thinking "Wow he reads so well" because he would pause a lot at the periods give that break and I was, "I want to read like that." I don't think there [were] any positives learning to read in school ... I feel like I didn't like to read at school, when I would read on my own it was always in the summer break or something like that ... [D]uring school I feel like it was forced, that we all did the same novel and it was questions to go with the novel and taking out library books that I never read.

I love reading, yeah ... It was always on my breaks that I would read and I would read three or four books. Lighthearted books, nothing like too heavy. ... [J]ust general kind of, like My Sister's Keeper and The Time Traveller's Wife and things like that. I find that during work I feel guilty if I'm reading. I feel I should be doing something toward my classroom ... planning

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more. There's always something to do when you teach ... so I feel if I'm reading ... it's sort of like a guilty pleasure.

Preservice/Teacher Education

I wanted to be a teacher when I was younger and I remember I had a little blackboard ... and I would teach my stuffed animals and toys. Then as I got older I wanted to be a nurse for some reason and then I wanted to be an anesthesiologist and then I wanted to be a nutritionist.

I went to college instead of university first and took a general arts and science program and there I did a program like a Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts for underprivileged children who just can't afford to go to that kind of thing ... organized games ... a lot of team building, self-esteem building. It was a diploma in general arts and science but part of the thing was ... it was an employment type thing; go out and volunteer so have some experience. I had a job which was serving but I continued that ... I ended up taking early childhood education after that. After that I worked in daycares ... went to university and took linguistics and teaching ESL. Then I ... volunteered at a school that did an intensive language arts program ... for kids that needed help reading, writing, listening, speaking ... [a]nd I wanted to be a speech and language pathologist ... As I transitioned through the linguistics program the requirements for every university kept changing ... I was like "okay well this is more than my degree now. This is going to be like two or three degrees so forget it" ... I didn't end up doing that but ... I did my like ESL certification at Carleton and taught adults. That was fun. But there was no employment there ... [A]fter that I worked in the school board as a registered ECE in the Ottawa Carleton School Board ... with kindergartens and then I went to teachers college ... "I was like I want to be a teacher, I want more than this" ... And not that it was a bad job. I wanted more and I didn't feel that I was done even though going to teachers college was my tenth year of post-secondary education.

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I think Teachers College is just a little fluff ... And I feel everybody has that opinion right? Teachers College is a lot of "let's reflect upon this, let's reflect upon that." Any regular teacher reflects all day long. You know you always reflect upon what you did. Did it work, did it not work, did you get through, did you not get through. Reflecting is just a natural thing that people do but I find it was constant reflection on everything you did ... forced reflection. And some of the classes I was just like "this is useless."

We had a really good language arts program ... The teacher was really good, he was really motivating, he showed us videos, we did running records off the videos. I think we did tests like every week and had all these readings to do. I mean I kept like that material ... Except he didn't really teach how to do guided reading. [H]e gave us the general idea but guided reading I learned to do by watching You Tube videos of other teachers doing it. Maybe doing some actual guided reading. [S]howing you, modeling it, giving you mini-lessons to do. ... Those little things. You can say "do this, do that," but you actually have to do it with little kids in your practicum... That would have been good. Like this is your assignment ... some reading task and you would bring it to your practicum and practice ... and you know your teacher would be aware, like "yes they need like that thirty minutes to work to practice that reading technique." I don't think there was any instruction on how to help struggling readers and I think that we should all be taught that program they had a couple years ago [Reading Recovery] ... I think we should all be taught that program ... At least pull out the important parts and teach it in university or offer that in university. That would be amazing ... all these teachers coming out who are Reading Recovery trained. I don't know what it is. I've never had the opportunity to partake in any training in it but I think it seems like it's a worthwhile system

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I had a practicum grade 1 class and they were like angels so it was like really great and they were all pretty good readers. I remember just working with a couple that had some struggling issues and it was a lot of repetitive practice on the Power Words ... So it was a lot of repetitive uh practicing of those words ... it was very posh, it was a Catholic School ... [T]hey all could read basically ... there was maybe one or two kids in the class who had challenges. The other one [practicum] was a grade 4 class ... with a lot of behaviour issues. The other one was in Moose Factory so ... this little island. It's called the gateway to the North. You literally need to take a bus, and then a train seven hours north. I feel the main thing there was lack of motivation ... They had no motivation to do well ... they didn't care. I had two students that cared and the rest of them didn't ... I went up there every day and entertained them like I was an entertainer. [T]hen at the end cause I taught them angles, they were like "we never met a teacher that loved angles so much," cause I was "I LOVE ANGLES!" I would be up there like "this is a show, this is a tv show. How do I make them that excited?"

Beginning Teaching

When I graduated I worked in a daycare as a kindergarten teacher. So this is still when they had the half day kindergartens, so the one day I had one group and the next day I had the next group ... [T]hen I worked at ... one of those mall colleges. I was like "I can't do this anymore," and I literally called my friend up and I was "Is there any job openings." And she's "Yeah actually someone's going on mat leave." So I applied for the job in October, I got a call in December, and I was working in February.

February 2014 I started working as a teacher ... in Politimore which is a similar community and and village like this ... This is a big school compared to Poltimore ... I was teaching from February to June. So it was a half contract cause this girl was going on maternity

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leave. There [were] a lot of things I didn't know about Western Québec [the school board]. I didn't know about the Soundprints. I didn't know about the pacing guide for math. I didn't know about situational problems, application problems. ... The teacher who was going on mat leave ... was just like you know trying to teach me everything, she's like "just don't worry about teaching anything for the first three weeks." Honestly after the first week, I was "I'm bored, I've got to start teaching something."

I felt prepared but not because of teachers college. I had other experiences, I asked when I was in the kindergarten classroom if I could do the BAS ... I always took that initiative to do what I could to learn more before I went to teachers college ... As an ECE in the kindergarten classroom I was like "I might as well get as much experience as I can now," and I saw the way the teacher taught reading, which wasn't very much ... I saw her do some word families, some guessing the words by ... go[ing] sound by sound. So I felt prepared enough and I watched a lot of You Tube videos.

I was only supposed to be there until February but it got extended to the end of the year because another teacher had to go on mat leave. Instead of switching me to the 2/3 class which she was in, the teacher came back from mat leave and went into the 2/3 class. So my class at the time was a pre K, K-1 ... So I had pre Ks, Ks and then grade 1s in my second year of teaching which was interesting cause I had 19 students

Teaching (and) Early Reading

I didn't have trouble reading ... which is difficult when I see them reading cause I didn't have those problems ... and I don't have that experience to draw upon. [Y]ou need to motivate them. You need to build them up to have confidence ... I mean I was coming out of like just a regular French program into French immersion. Every single class was in French. ... did really

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well but the teacher would build us up so much. He was like “you guys are the smart ones, you’re going to be the future, you’re going to have all the good jobs,” and honestly I think that because of that teacher I had more confidence and so I try to do that with my kids. I want them to have confidence in themselves, and in their abilities ... I feel that if you build these kids up then they’re going to “I can do this, I can read, I will read,”... So that’s something I bring to my classroom. Not any of the other ways I learned to read.

I did a teacher placement in Moose Factory and I found students had no motivation to do anything and I did this exercise with them like “what do you want to be when you grow up, like what kind of things do you have to do to get there?” And so I think that I bring that experience with them when I see like a lack of motivation to read. “Well do you want to drive, you have to take a test, you have to be able to read the questions.” I know that’s so far in their future but they all want to do it ... So it’s “oh yeah I really want to do that,” so it’s something ... maybe it’s giving them a goal.

I’ve definitely told them The Babysitter Club story because [as] I was saying you can skip a word and still understand what’s going on even if you don’t know how to sound it out... I feel if they get stuck on that one word they won’t try anymore ... [S]o I always always tell all my students that, and actually when I told my students at my last school this I saw an improvement in their reading ... It was amazing. That story’s important. We talk about reading a lot. And I talk about the importance of reading and I always say you know do you want to drive and they’re like yes, all of them, and I said well you need to learn how to read so like let’s go [laughing]. [Snapping] You know. You have to build that relationship first though ... They have to have that bond with that teacher first because if they don’t feel comfortable with their teacher then ... I

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talk a lot about my own life ... I feel those are the teachers that I really liked the most. The ones that I felt ... I knew stories about their life.

[A]t the beginning of the year I assess them all with this beautiful box [BAS assessment box] ... and see what level they're at, and then I can put them into groups. I started doing a lot of whole group stuff in the beginning to see where they were, like letter sounds ... [and] lots of grammar stuff in the beginning just to see where they were. So you can read, you can write or you can write, you can read and they intertwine at some point. So we do a lot of writing. I guess computers they get [a] reading program on computers. They have to do a half hour of their reading on Thursdays. So they get to listen to it and it's read to them, they have to read it, and they have to answer questions. So that's a good little program ... I'd like to do it all days ... Fridays is usually when I pull them for reading individually. [M]y assessment ... I can tell when they're ready to move ... I mean sometimes I make notes about certain students, especially if I'm in a group I like to make notes about certain students but you can kind of tell, you're like, "Okay they understand, the fluency's there," ... [and] sometimes it's too fast and you're like "that was hard." But sometimes it's perfect and right on so. [I]t's a professional judgement.

[T]here's so many things that we do for early reading instruction. There's full group instruction, there's small group instruction, there's guided reading and just opportunities for reading in the classroom all the time ... I guess to me the biggest thing is the guided reading ... [T]hat I try to implement in my classroom because I feel that it has the most impact... You're grouping students who have the same abilities together, you're working on the same strategies ... I use Soundprints too ... I do use Soundprints too ... sometimes we do a large group and we'll do words ... I have varying groups ... I go with what they're interested in and so that's sort of how the reading goes ... It's whenever we have time. [W]e can do it with Soundprints but they

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get bored with the subject sometimes. I thought we were doing this great one on hibernation and they didn't really enjoy it ... it's finding their interest I guess and doing a lot of vocabulary work within that and reading. I probably learned that from the experience of being in this class but also previously working with ESL students because I would do a big vocabulary thing before we started our lesson so that they had sort of some understanding.

And then within the groups we can guided read together ... I don't plan like a crazy big plan ahead of time ... No. It's very that morning. Like "I'm going to pull this group," and this is what we're going to work on; I'm just going to look through the books, "these are the words we're going to pull out and we're going to work on stretching words." [W]hen I first started teaching I was doing these a week in advance and then I would have to do it in pencil because I would end up erasing every single day and I was "like this is ridiculous." You just can't plan like that. A lot of my groupings don't really work. I have to do a lot of individual instruction with them which is hard because they all need different things. It just doesn't work like that, kids don't work like that ... Sometimes we do whole group reading with the Soundprints books ... So I pull out pieces from there and I rewrite them ... in kid friendly language if they're too hard. I bold some words that we're going to work on that day, I make the little box at the end so they can draw a picture, I read it to them and then they read back to me so there's a little bit of planning there ... but I mean I can do that twenty minutes before class ... So even if I'm going to do a Soundprints day of I read, they read, then they read and they read to me, sort of that idea, I can do that, I don't put a lot of like focus, I just know where I'm going.

[G]rammar we, like we focus on it from time to time ... not like every day ... cause it's boring ... But a lot of word work, we do a lot of word work. [T]hey have spelling tests every week with the Power Words ... Soundprints ... [W]e we practice those every day or we practice

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just words on the Word Wall. They have to pick a word and then they have to make a sentence with it because a lot have problems with proper sentence structure ... [T]hose are like ten minute little like blurbs in the day ... I'll throw them a ball, and then ... they get to choose a word of the Word Wall and make a sentence ... A lot of them can do it now which is really interesting because I was trying to get them to do it at the beginning of the year on their spelling tests. Like, "Here's your five words, we've done it, make a sentence with one of the words," and a lot of them couldn't do it. But now they're thinking up the sentences on their own so that's really interesting. Um so yeah those are just like little grammar activities that we do, it's not a big intensive grammar lesson. Then the guided reading is whenever I can stick it in. You know like or pull out just one on one even.

Every day we do 45 minutes of writing. That's like Monday to Friday. I also have an aid at that time. So I usually do ten minute lesson of what we're going to do and they go and write. [B]efore the break we were writing letters ... [W]e did that as a group and then we did it in groups of two and then they did it by themselves ... [T]he gradual release of responsibility so that they felt confident by the time they were to write their own letter. Reading happens sometimes within the writing period. So I'll pull certain students at that time to read if there's time. That depends on what we're doing, how much they've accomplished, do I think that they can accomplish it within that period, there's a lot of things that go into it ... I like to pull the weaker groups more or the ones that I know that don't read at home, more than the stronger groups. So I probably see them like sometimes three times in a week and then the ... Yeah like maybe once a week, twice a week ... Sometimes we're just catching up on work so I'll pull groups then. Often during art I'll pull groups because they're just doing art or during free time on Fridays [whisper and laughing]; last block of the day I'm like come on less playing lets go read

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... Also I have aid that comes in and she pulls out the lower readers so they get that reading. [T]hose struggling readers go ... twice a week [with] Deborah [our] early literacy and numeracy consultant ... [S]he takes them out and does Soundprints with them. Two times a week I have another aid come in and she takes in my low readers and I give her ideas to work on as she's more new to this ... I have another aide [one of the aids]. She comes in and does the writing period with me so she does a lot of the helping with writing ... and with reading ... Which is what they need. Plus at lunch time on Tuesdays and Thursdays they go and have reading buddies ... [W]henver I can fit it in, I'm "Okay we gotta read."

Challenges in meeting students' early reading needs

I think all professional development is, you have to modify it cause it's never going to be like this perfect classroom that they portray in teachers college. [T]his perfect guided reading lesson is going to work with your perfect Daily Five set up. It just doesn't happen like that. That's not real life and it took me like that [first] whole half year to realize this isn't real life. [T]his is like a different case because these are second language students right ... So a lot of learning, a lot of reading, you have to have sort of some background knowledge on a subject before you start reading it because that lexicon is not going to come to you, another word for something isn't as readily available to them as it is to an English language speaker. [T]here is a struggle there. [W]hen you read you're guessing the word basically. You're not reading every word ... So I think that's the main point I have to work on with them but I mean how much thematic reading can you do.

I have like a group that's pretty low that I know like they tell me they don't read at home. I have a child that was really making progress and then all of a sudden it kind of halted. It actually almost backpedalled a little bit and I said, "Oh are you reading at home anymore?" And

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he said “no,” ... and I could totally tell. I was like, “You know how important it is to read at home. I’ll get you some new books and you’re going to read at home ... you need to do this, this is the only way to get higher” ... So then he promised me was going to read again. I was so disappointed because he was making such progress and all of a sudden he just couldn’t do it... [M]y struggling readers what do I do with them? I have those strategies that I use and we just go one by one to figure out ... maybe one strategy works for them, maybe one it doesn’t. [T]he struggling readers, once they’re struggling it’s really hard to bring them up so we have to do a lot of word work with them. I send home books ... I expect that the parents are going to help a little bit. But if they don’t then I try to read with those children more ... I feel they should offer ... PD on struggling readers ... cause when you use everything that you think you know and it’s still not working ... where do you start again? ... I’ve done all these types of strategies that I know and I’ve done pulling out words ... but maybe there’s a strategy of some sort that I don’t know that I could learn from.

I did a lot of research on Daily Five before I even took any PD on Daily Five and I was really for the movement and I really wanted to implement it in the classroom ... in Poltimore and then I realized ... it’s not a reality at this moment ... , the age group is too young. I [had] four grade 1s and a bunch of kindergartens ... The next year they gave me a budget to do guided reading. I was in a preK, K1 class. Like “how is this manageable? They don’t even know how to put a CD in and press play to listen to reading.” ... I would have to micro manage everything so I was, “no this is not going to work.” [The board] always want us to set up Daily Five and I don’t really, I don’t know if I believe if it’s the best ... use of time because a bunch of grade 2s are not going to work on writing continuously for 30 minutes while you’re doing guided reading groups. Yeah they might listen to reading, yeah they might read their own books, yeah they might buddy

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read and do word work but they're not ... going to be not getting the focused instruction that you want while you're doing guided reading groups. I just don't find they don't engage well in Daily Five ... Yeah if kids actually during Daily Five were writing and writing rich writing pieces and other kids were doing rich word work and listening to ... books and actually were engaged in it ... and I could run a full on beautiful guided reading process I would. But it's just not the situation ... It's just their age. They're going to rush through their work and be done so they think they can get some free time which never happens because I'm like read [laughing] ... [I]t's just their age, they're not able to sit there and write and my lower ones would be super frustrated if there's no one there to help them. But if there was an aide to help the lower ones while I guided read with the higher ones... I really wish we could do this Daily Five business but it's ... taking the month or two months ... or sometimes three months to really train them to do it ... I feel, I'm losing so much time ... I also lacked a lot of resources here to do that so ... [S]o yeah maturity of the students, [and] the lack of technology and materials.

I've observed Soundprints and then my own research and other than that at the board level I don't find there's much professional learning in how to teach reading. [T]here might be [a] writing course with the book and the sample to do with your class ... [I]n my second year of teaching I went to just to brush up ... and one was how to do the BAS marks ... another one was on reading instruction or whatever ... [M]ight have been a Daily Five type idea. But anyways those were on your own time, after school ... I drove to the board to see them ... But other than that like [p] and like I can't really remember in class. Like I learned, like in school I learned how to do the running records and how to do the records for the BAS but there was no like this is how you do it. These are the strategies you should teach. This is what you should do first. If you have a struggling reader this is what you should do. I google my own, like "struggling readers what

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should you know?" And I have a couple in my class that I was like you know what, I have tried, we have tried, we are starting from square one ...

Involvement in Professional Learning

I do my own [PD]. [T]hat just comes from what I think I need to know, what I think I need to bring to my classroom or what I think I need to work on. I source out my own stuff ... But it's sort of like my passion ... it's interesting to me ... it's like my hobby [laughing] ... looking at You Tube videos on how to teach [laughing] ... [O]ften I go, "How do you teach reading?" and Google will give you a million things. Or Teachers Pay Teachers. I learned all those reading strategies, like chunking and flipping the vowels and stuff like that. ... [R]ight now the one that I'm using a lot is making your lips make the first sound of the word before you pronounce it right ... I literally researched that method ... printed out the posters and then I used it. But I did it on my own. [T]hat was my own research. I watch a lot of guided reading videos on You Tube. I also get a lot of like how to group students, sheets on things to work on and stuff from Teachers Pay Teachers. So it's a lot of my own ... honestly this is stuff I got off Teachers Pay Teacher and then I looked up how you use them. Again I wasn't taught this. I learned it on my own.

[At our school] we do we do some Vocab Rehab book ... with Tammy [OP] ... introducing new vocabulary to the students because they need extra vocabulary stuff. [S]o we talk a lot about vocabulary and activities to do with vocabulary ... School thing ... [I]t's pretty good ... we just started so we'll see where it goes or how good it gets.

[The literacy consultant] comes in sometimes ... She like talks to us about Soundprints ... I like to watch her do it and sometimes just refresh my mind a little bit ... [I]t's not a PD day. She just comes into my class ... I like to mimic like a lot of the things that I like from seeing

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other people teach. And I really like the way Dreena [SB3] teaches so just watching her do a lesson ... reignited my passion for Soundprints reading.

[W]e had a Soundprints, Daily Five type group working together and I asked if I could be a part of it because ... I wanted to implement it in such a young grade which I found [was finding] not possible. I guess I've watched, seeking out, I've asked to watch a lot of other people do it. I've asked the resource teacher, I asked my mentor teacher, I've asked if I could go to this model Daily Five class a couple times ... I've seen her do that a couple times and I've seen her do it at, in her classroom. I've seen her do Soundprints in um Kazabazua [town name omitted], at Queen Elizabeth [school name omitted] ... I've watched her do it in a kindergarten, a grade 1, a grade 3 and a grade 6 or something. So it was really interesting to see the different, how it kind of progresses ... and I've watched her do guided reading lessons. So I've watched other teachers do them ... I don't know if the group is still going but I couldn't make any more of the meetings ... They wanted to ... create a little package of mini-lessons to teach before doing Daily Five ... I don't know if they ever continued with that but ... I would really be interested in getting my hands on those little mini-lesson ... Oh I liked it. Just getting into the school and seeing other classes and seeing like other examples.

Moving Forward/Toward

I feel like every year there's a new way to read which is ridiculous. I'd really like to master early reading, to know just what to do. I would like to be super confident, everything I do is going to help these kids ... like they used to have Reading Recovery, I'd like to do that ... just to have those kind of tricks and tips in the back of your head to be like "Okay I know what to do cause this is what they're struggling on so let's work on this." But like I said there's always a

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new, I'm sure in 5 years from now Soundprints will just be like a thing of the past and it'll be something else just like Reading Recovery was something.

I guess [I would] like strategies to use with struggling readers ... [I]f there's a PD that they could [provide] I think that would be the best one because sometimes you're like "I don't know." You know they're struggling but you're like "I don't know why" ... I have one student, I took a video cause ... she just wrote letters that she knew. Like all the way down. No breaks, no nothing and then she read it to me ... So at that point you're like "What is she missing?" because we worked on spacing, we worked on sounding out words but yet left to her own when there's no one there to guide her every step of the way that's what she produces ... I'm like "I don't know what's missing, what she doesn't understand because we've worked on it over and over and over" ... She just memorizes the books and then reads them. I run out of books because she's memorized every single one. [T]hen it transfers over into math and everything else. Like ethics if I want them to write then there's that, she's not producing anything that's that I can mark. [F]or like students like that where I'm boggled ... what is that one little secret that's going to help? Does anyone know? Maybe not. But maybe there is. Maybe there's one little trick that I can try that I haven't tried, or I don't know. So struggling readers PD would be like the best ... You know? Because I've tried everything I can think of. So I feel out of options. It literally stresses me out. I go home and "why can't she read, why can't she read, why can't she do these things?" ... And then you feel a little bit "Oh, am I good teacher or not?" I like to think I'm a good teacher but then when you see the other kids you're like "maybe I'm not [laughing]."

Profile Central Elementary Teacher 1 (Ct1)

My Early Years and the Influence of Reading in My Early Life

I grew up in a rural farming community where my parents were not readers you know. [T]heir education was grade seven, they were Mennonites ... they only went to school to grade seven or eight and then they went off to work on the farms. I actually did grow up as a in a Mennonite community but not, in a modern Mennonite community ... we didn't have a horse and buggy but my family was Mennonite. [W]e ... were completely assimilated in with all the other kids so it was just a regular public school probably. There's five children in my family and of the five of us I'm the only one to do any sort of, to do any post graduate, any kind of anything, university or anything so I have to say that early literacy was not a big part of my growing up.

We didn't have a lot of books in our house [M]y true beginning is bedtime stories. That's what I remember the most is hearing, being read to in bed at night ... I grew up in a religious family so I remember we had this the whole volume of like bible stories, right ... it was like the world book of bibles so there was volume one to twenty and it had all these beautiful pictures inside but lots of words like not picture books but I just remember listening to those stories and having like right away having my favorite one. I remember having my favorite story and asking for it and loving the pictures. It was like a little girl getting hurt or something, the picture was someone with a wagon or something. So the pictures made a pretty big impact.

I don't remember learning to read. I don't remember like when I learned to read or how I learned to read or any sort of feeling of ... I sort of wish I did. [A]ctually I do remember a book. It was the the the Snow Plough in the Snow and it goes on and on. I think it's called Katie, Katie, Katie and the Big Snow Storm. I found it in our school and I've since been rereading it to my kids [students] so I do have one book that I loved ... I do remember like books like that and I do

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remember actually my mother buying me a book from the Scholastic book and I remember getting Caps for Sail and it was this story about a monkey and he kept putting all his hats on top and walking around so I remember that as being one of my favorite books.

Like I can't I can't think of any wonderful reading experience from elementary school at all. Does that mean I'm so insignificant in my students' lives right now? Like, I'm working so hard and they're not even going to remember any of it. Really? I had the same teacher for grade one, two and three. I remember in grade four I had a math teacher who made a small group of kids that were brighter and gave them more challenging math work ... I was chosen to be part of that group but my marks were never you know super great or anything so maybe that's why I felt so intelligent. I remember having a music teacher, we had music every day and I remember learning all the songs to Mary Poppins, all the words and same with Sound of Music. I remember learning music and I still remember the word to all of those songs from the music teacher. She'd sit us in our desk and play her piano and we'd all sing ... and then I switched schools for grade seven and eight ... because our family moved. I remember doing science fairs. I remember loving science, doing some science fairs because it was a project you could do, that kind of sticks out of my head.

I do remember um struggling slightly and ... written on my report card that my weaker part was comprehension. I do remember struggling slightly in that area or that I found that challenging to write down what I read. I think just pulling out ... exactly what happened, I think, cause it was comprehension. I had some trouble with it, you know in elementary school but going into high school no. No high school was fine, it was fine. I don't remember working hard-hard. I was not a straight A student you know. I think I'd get marks in like the 70s and doing my homework and just sort of doing it. Not excelling, not failing you know?

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Before I had kids and in the summer time I would just read; like that's what I would do as soon as school ended I would just read for two weeks. I would do nothing but relax[ing] and reading. Now I have children ... they're nine and eleven so it's been about eleven years ... Like if I'm reading anything I'm reading about teaching struggling readers and you know different people in the field and I really every once in a while, mostly in the summer, I read a good novel but I'm not, I would not call myself a huge reader like the people that are reading all the time... Like I do love it I think I just don't make time for it or it's just a lower priority. It's almost like I feel guilty because I'm like I should be reading this book on Dyslexia or I should be reading this book ... it's just like you just feel like if you're going to read something you want to read something that makes you a better teacher right and there's just so much to learn. Like it's never ever done right? There's new research, there's new whatever. I could take a few minutes to read before I go to sleep for sure but I end up reading so much to your children you end up falling asleep while your ... like [sleeping sound] and then you wake up and it's eleven thirty and you go to your own bed but I am trying to; somehow my daughter has a passion for reading ... and my husband is a big reader, so I think that kind of role modelling is important for kids.

Preservice/Teacher Education

I went from high school to college for two years where I took like an outdoor rec program and then I ... ended up working in an outdoor education [centre] ... for a couple years after I graduated from college ... Grade six classes would come up for a week at a time and I just talked and met so many teachers and decided if I'm going to work with kids I might as well be a teacher right ... I met some amazing teachers you know, a lot of really amazing teachers ... I lived at the outdoor ed centre, there were three teachers on the full time staff and I was a program assistant so I just worked with teachers all day long ... and so every week for two years I met a

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new teacher and sort of got to know them ... and so by the time that was done I was like yeah I'm going to go to teacher's college. So then I went back to Ottawa U and did my undergraduate and then went to teacher's college there as well. I was a skier and I was from southern Ontario and I was tired of having green Christmases and not enough snow and I had some friends in Ottawa and I'd had some life experience right, I wasn't right out of high school so I was just picking like ah Ottawa.

I enjoyed the teacher's college at Ottawa U. You know it was like busy, busy work. It wasn't hard. It was like being creative and planning units and working in groups and you know psychology. I remember planning a literature unit for Stella Luna and I remember you know learning lesson plans and having science class and yeah; no I remember teacher's college and it was all, I think it at least gets you thinking in the right direction right. Like it gets you thinking about what a teacher is. And I remember learning the theory like Bloom's tax[onomy] and all of that but just it doesn't actually prepare you to teach so much. I can't remember anything about reading at that time. I just remember being taught how to use books and stuff like that ... And I remember I actually remember going back to some of that stuff in my early teaching and looking for my teacher's college notes and stuff and going okay what did I do with this book or what did they say or how do you write a lesson plan, you know the ones that are this long, like you know you're expected to write everyday ... so um I do remember that class. But not a lot.

I did a placement in a grade five classroom for one month and a placement in a younger classroom. My first practicum was at the Turnbull Learning Centre. It's a private school specifically for ... children with specific learning disabilities. They specialize in that but it's just a private school ... but they focus on children with learning disabilities ... I remember the Turnbull Learning Centre was very phonetical and they were using these books called Explode

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the Code and stuff like that where you know you're really breaking it down ... [M]y first placement [was] with an amazing teacher. She was amazing. I enjoyed her a lot and I enjoyed the way she worked with kids and she was a very good supervising teacher... And as it turned out, this is funny, she eventually, when she eventually left Turnbull she started working for the Western Québec School Board and when I was leaving Low [2nd teaching position] they asked me to interview for a position in Chelsea Elementary that was a contained class for um very low functioning children with various special needs right and my competition was that teacher ... [T]hey gave that job to her and they gave me her job so I ended up going into her grade one class. That was so weird. So I ended up replacing her and then she took the job that I didn't really want anyway.

Beginning Teaching

This is my eighteenth year and it's been grade one or grade two for sixteen of those years. I started in Japan [a country in Asia] ... and then came back here and was in **Low**. I came back from Asia and again I decided I'm going to go back to Wakefield. I'd lived here for teacher's college and then you're out there and I was like "I can live anywhere in the world right now, where do I want to live? Okay, I'm going to go to Wakefield," and I found a job in Low; very part time K4 teacher. And then I supplied here and there and then they hired me in the high school for the English teacher ... like I'm telling you I'm not a reader right and they're hiring me to teach high school literacy. It was the biggest joke ever. I was never trained as a high school teacher but in Québec you can teach anything like; it doesn't matter. I think it was hard to get teachers in Low too and I was living in Wakefield and I had already been in the school as the K4 teacher ... I was so bad. I was not a good teacher when I look back at those two years, I'm just like oh god I'm so embarrassed.

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[I]t killed me ... every time I wanted to teach a short story I had to read ten to find the right one right. Or teaching a novel to grade eleven it was way over my head. So I did that for maybe two years and by the end of the second year I was like teaching is not for me I'm going to leave teaching. I went into the principal and I was like "this is not for me, I'm just going to go on unemployment for a while, think about what I'm going to do and just figure it out." And she was like "you have a permanent contract, you can't go on unemployment ... I'll help you transfer."

So I went from grade eleven to grade one in one year. In one year I went from Low to PETES in the city and, it wasn't PETES at the time, and so then I was a grade one teacher and my first two years like I didn't know anything. [T]hat's another question right, how did Teachers College prepare you teach reading. Nothing, I didn't know anything. I was thrown into this classroom, there were no books, the school was growing faster than the materials. I met this principal and like she, I had an interview and she asked me "how would you teach balanced literacy in the classroom." I have no idea what I said cause I didn't know what I know now right? But whatever I said she liked me, she gave me a chance, she let me transfer in and I had two like really difficult years but I loved teaching reading.

The third or fourth year ... I remember teaching reading through balanced literacy and doing all those things... And then like February instead of the kids during silent reading time looking at pictures they were all reading. You know and I was almost in tears. I was like oh my god they're reading! I spent those first two years figuring out how to teach reading right by going to endless workshops and reading books and talking to people and just learning by doing right. Like yeah and realizing the importance of home reading. I really learned that right off cause I was um I remember um thinking that you couldn't teach kids to read until they knew the whole alphabet and all of the sounds right, and so I wouldn't start a home reading program until like

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November or something because I thought well the kids they can't. And then I realized they can, they can learn to read without knowing the whole alphabet right. So I would do it all at once and do different things and just became much more successful. And I loved the challenge.

Teaching (and) Early Reading

I think that the early reading instruction actually for most kids starts in the home with parents right, with parents reading to their kids and kids learning that this is how a book works and this is what you know; the lettering goes from left to right and like the whole the basics I think is the very beginning at home and then beyond that I think that when they come into the school ... they're learning the alphabet of course and the sounds ... and then it and then we move into like site words, early reading site word, memorization, just straight memorization and then all the strategies ... like the guess the word, what's the beginning sound ... what do you think it's going to say, do you see a smaller word inside the word that you recognize, just the different strategies that they need to learn to decode ... So all of those are to their reading instruction and then within the context of the whole classroom putting that in with you know the read alouds that teachers reading to them as part of early reading instruction ... The small group reading that you're teaching and guided reading. The practice, the word studies ... the writing, just like the whole literacy program is all combined; [that] makes the early reading instruction. It's taking a child from a blank slate basically that doesn't know how to read a word when you put it in front of them and it's teaching them how to make meaning out of the written print in an early literacy book right. So it's teaching them how to get that enjoyment and then that reading from books at their level right?

This year I happen to have two grade twos ... It's awesome! My actual teaching assignment is I have two language arts classes and one math class so I am pretty focused as far as

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teaching ... on literacy. When they come in grade one they're almost all in the same page because we don't really teach reading in kindergarten. There's always a handful of kids that have learned it on their own or their parents or they're just those kids that innately just know how to read. So there's always a small handful that but when they come in grade one they're basically all on the same page. Like my classes are two French immersion and most of them are not having any trouble at all. In fact most of them are ahead of the game. [A] year, it's a year that happens like every five years. It was not like that last year. I have a number of kids though that came from the French system. We always have a bunch of kids transfer from the French system that haven't had any English language instruction up until now so they're quite a bit behind. But they seem to be doing okay. You're making me think now about what I have to focus on more. I have my homeroom for a hundred minutes of language arts and then I have them for a hundred minutes of math and then they go to French class and then I have the other class for a hundred minutes of language arts. So I'm also in this sweet position where I repeat what I did in my day for the most part.

Maybe cause this year more of my students are stronger, it doesn't seem as much pressure but we just took two weeks to do a research project and there were times when they spent half an hour colouring you know the title on their poster or something like that and I was just going okay ... Like a couple years ago, I just kind of went okay this is okay like this is this is part of learning too right, they don't have to spend every minute of their language arts class reading and writing you know. They're reading and they are writing as part of their project but if this afternoon all they're going to do is colour in something or make a picture on it it's okay. So I think I've learned to relax a little bit about it.

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Because I've done it so many times basically I almost know what my topics, or what my units are going to be throughout the year. First thing I do though is set up my Daily Five program so that I have that running to go cause that's really when I can get my small groups so I make sure I have all those areas ready and then right off the bat I start to read with the kids in September to figure out who's where right or who's actually struggling and who I don't have to worry about too much. I would introduce how I expect them to read to self and then [teach] write to self and introducing each of the five things and then hopefully by the end of September I've got that up and running so they can do all five things and then I also know what level their reading's at and then I just put them into groups and get started right away as soon as possible with small group instruction or guided reading and get that Daily Five going ... [T]hen I will go into various units and introduce new vocabulary. And then out of each of those groups I've got a group at the table.

So they come in and they have about 15 minutes of read to self. And then I gather them at the carpet ... [T]oday I did a read aloud activity, we read that book and then we did a response writing activity. So we had a mini lesson and it was like a shared writing activity where we had discussion and then they wrote their response and then I gathered them back to the carpet again and they chose their Daily Five activities and then I had a group of very advanced readers with me actually ... I read with them every two weeks just to basically check in because they're already where they have to be basically for the end of the year so we just read a book together and had a discussion [with] them. I'm going to see them every two weeks and I'm going to see another group every two days or every three days because I have the lower groups that I want to move so I see them a lot more. I keep track of all of their reading. This is like, the, like I have a list of each class so I keep track of all their reading groups and everything that we've read and

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notes and stuff on ... where they're at and who does what, right, every time we read. So I can go back and the next time I'm reading with them I'll be like okay we did this level and we did this and just remembering what you have to work on with each student.

And then another part that we have is also response writing right so I introduce that around mid-October and um get that going as well. I used to sit down and say this month would be this and this month would be this ... but now I have all of those things ready to go all of the time and so I sort of flex and groove with the interest of the kids and where we're sort of at. For example last month the kids, we'd been working really hard, and I felt like they really needed a chance to do their own thing a bit, so I always do a project in the fall and a project in the spring so we did reading for information and everybody did a research project on an animal, so they did reading and writing and then an oral ... presentation.

I don't use it [Soundprints] all. I don't use it all because um, ooh, I don't like it [hesitant laugh]. To me it's just so, it's so prescribed ... and I'm sure it has its place and maybe it has its place for a class full of struggling readers you know ... I just find it so unnatural and so text booky, such a text booky way of learning ... [T]hat kind of teaching also would drive me crazy if I would have to follow somebody else's idea of how I should do it every day. Like there's a menu and you teach these sounds today ... [F]or my style of teaching or just for who I am as a teacher it's way too prescribed. But I see the value in it for sure and I see the value ... for a teacher who's just starting out and doesn't know how to teach early reading cause that's a really tricky thing right, so to have that instruction manual it's a really really great thing. I teach in Soundprints, I do it, just sort of as part of my lessons every day. Like introducing new vocabulary when I start a new unit and looking at individual sounds when they come up in context and so it's not nearly, I don't have the board with each sound, but I just, I can't think that

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way. It's just, I can't ... I've looked at it, like I went to the workshop, the original workshop, to say this is what Soundprints is, and here's the menu and this is how you implement it in your classroom. So I've looked at that and just I went no.

When we were doing our projects I teach like words like habitat and words like appearance and you know all kinds of new words come into everything you do. Christmas vocabulary, holiday vocab, you know ... I'm teaching it but it's all very natural and all very relevant to what they're doing ... like what do they need to know right then and there and I think that's the whole idea behind the whole language approach right? I haven't broke it down to a code. I'm sort of like the hippy dippy, I believe more in like the relationship and the child and the individual, where they're coming from than you know, the text book, the prescription. My year is not structured around themes now my year's more structured around curriculum I would say and then, and moving just kids ahead and then figuring out how to do that. I don't know, maybe it would be more interesting for the kids if I did more. I mean kids love science right, and they love outdoor science so I'm trying to do a lot of that now, I'm moving more into that. Like when I go back in in January and February I'm looking at doing a just like an outdoor, like a birds in winter kind of unit right. So we'll use that to for our writing and we'll use that for research and stuff and then um we'll go outside and look for birds and stuff.

Challenges in meeting students' early reading needs

My favorite kind of reader to teach is the struggling reader that you can move. For sure. Because ... the kids that can already read perfectly there's not really, there's no, nothing to do right. It's just like, they're interesting because it's fascinating what they can actually comprehend at their level you know or if you're having a discussion and trying to get to a deeper meaning or something then they're interesting that way but for sure the best the most enjoyable thing to do is

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to teach a struggling reader, that you know how to move them, that you can actually make progress with.

And the ones who can't it's just like oh my god [whisper] ... There's two kinds like of struggling readers. There's the kind that you can move forward you know. It seems like there's the kind that struggle for reasons like they don't have the support at home or they haven't had their early literacy experience or they don't come to school ready to ready to learn you know like in the whole sense of they're not at rest or they're not, they're not comfortable so they can't learn cause the rest of it right? And I find those ones easy to teach right cause you need to just give them, feel attached, like develop a bond with them. Once they trust you can just work with them or they can just, you know so basically with those kids I just take every minute to pull one out and read with them or do just give them that little thing and they're going to move ahead right? And then there's the other kids that there is something else going on right. There's like a learning disability or there's a limited a limited ability ... or there's like a like a memory issue ... and so those kids are the ones that I find really, you know it's really, you move them like one, two, maybe three levels ahead every year and uh it's a small percentage but you wonder where, like what is their maximum potential. We have like, we have different resource teachers in our school, like we'll pull those kids out and do things you know but... what does an IEP do. [I]t definitely states what their issue is but their goals that you, I mean, yeah I've never been a big fan of them cause their goals are like this is what they can do and you're going to move them forward from that. Sure you're going to do that absolutely.

Honestly when I've had ... classes that have struggled, that have had difficulty I've had the most success moving them through small group instruction. Then of course I mean I've had students that that have that that have a difficulty like we were talking ... like a very specific

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learning disability that I've just not moved those kids or you know maybe one or two levels all year kind of thing ... Like two girls that I'm working with are just globally low. I have them for math too and they're really struggling in math and for those kids it's like, I believe also it's a lot, your relationship with them right and also really helping them see that, it sounds so corny but that they can do it right. Like once they just get a little bit their motivation just really goes through the roof and they're like wow I'm at level G now or I'm at, and that kind of thing ... really helps them learn I think. With my weaker readers ... my two weakest readers in my one class my direct reading with them is me at that table every second day. Basically during Daily Five I'm able to pull those students and work directly with them so they come to me with whiteboards and with a book and we work through and I can tell exactly what area they're struggling with. In the other class they come in after lunch every day and do silent reading and the one little boy that's struggling in that class during silent reading I read with him alone pretty much every single day and he's moved up to level, he's moved from like C to H just by that kind of practice and just by having a teacher work with them almost daily.

But the struggling ones, like there's only so many things they can struggle over. That's what I'm saying. So as a professional learner you should be able to learn to teach each one of those. It's not an impossible task right is what I'm thinking. Like it's the whole Neufeld thing right. If they're not at school, at rest, ready to learn then there's nothing you can do. You can try so hard to bond with them and they're not going to perform. If they're so defended and they don't trust adults and nobodies been, like their life has been such that they haven't had a positive experience and they don't come to school with their basic needs met then I don't think there's anything you can do except work at that attachment, work at getting them to trust you and then when that happens you can move them ahead then just by doing all these things that I'm telling,

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that I'm doing, you know. So um, yeah, I think that after you consider their basic needs right; like making sure that they have food and clothing and stuff like that and they're participating in the classroom I think what's missing is the home support and you have to try and replace that home support with school somehow right because you know that it's not going to happen ... They just need to feel safe and have all their needs met.

Involvement in Professional Learning

I think that my professional learning has hugely influenced my classroom practice because the stuff that I have chosen, or the learning that I've taken part in I've implemented stuff directly from all of those workshops or from all of those learnings. Definitely taken that learning and put it into practice in my classroom ... About three a year I'd say for about 15 years ... mostly all of them focusing on literacy instruction. I would say like seventy five percent would be focusing on literacy instruction. Probably like maybe like ten percent on math instruction and the other fifteen on really the whole child ... Probably I really focused on guided reading for a lot of it.

The way I learned to teach reading, was the Bureau of Education Research. [T]hey used to do these workshops for teachers and they'd come to Ottawa probably about twice a year or so and we all just knew it was going to be good. Their presenters were so good. Like they were interesting and they gave you materials and such incredible practical teaching stuff that whenever they came along I would go to those workshops and that's where I learned the bulk of my early literacy skills and experience. I went to them all of them. Like I remember going to one teaching guided reading, I remember teacher guided, they used to give you these notes to take home with you. I remember going to a word work one, I remember going to one on teaching shared writing, I remember going to one on behaviour management. If I look at those first

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workshops in those, on everything that I learned, and applied directly in my classroom it made the whole level of teaching better for sure. So it's benefitted my teach[ing], my students for sure and made them have a more knowledgeable teacher ... I remember going to those workshops and then thinking that makes a lot of sense and I should do that stuff and then coming right back into my classroom and doing it and seeing it work. Right? And then having the kids engaged and enjoying it because of what someone else has taught me. Just one day. Chock a block. They would target like one thing right.

There was also a lot of professional training from the school board at the time that was really quite good too. I remember getting a lot of training in Write Traits program from the school board. There was a lot of PD that was really useful and I hated her for it but our principal at the time used to make us, she used to have someone come to the school every Wednesday after school and make all the teachers go every Wednesday after school and listen to someone tell us something to professionally develop us and it was always literacy related cause it was always, we seemed to always focus on literacy in our school and increasing literacy and what could we do you know ... And all we talked about was balanced literacy for years. Like it became these are all the things you need to you know it was like shared reading, read alouds, guided reading and writing and just it was that you were hitting these five things in your language arts class every day.

So I was it was my second year teaching and it was my second year teaching like full classes of struggling students ... I taught grade one/two splits my first two years in elementary of like twenty eight kids ... and by the March break of the second year ... I was like "oh god I'm not going to make, I'm not going to do it" and I cracked in front of the school one day and she [the principal] could see, this was like Thursday before March break. She could see that I was

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just like at the end of my rope and she sent me home and said don't come back until after March break and I didn't and then when I came back after March break she sent in a very experienced, like a retired teacher, but very non-threatening and that teacher came in and she watched me teach and she helped me do stuff and then at the two thirty or three o'clock every day when the kids would leave, we'd sit down for two hours and we'd talk and we'd and she showed me how to do like a year plan basically and we had it on chart paper and we had the months and we had this subjects and what I was going to do and we basically planned out the rest of the year and then yeah she helped me with what I was good at, she helped me with what I was struggling at and it was like my own professional development. So personalized to what I needed for an entire week and it changed my teaching career. So if everybody could have that, on a maybe not so intense right, if they're not at the point where they're really you know. um I remember it making me feel good like she was telling me what I was doing well you know. Like she made sure to really include that in here information. And then she showed me how to get ahead of the game, really, which was also a big help right...

The Daily Five came in ... because we were always struggling with guided reading which I believe is a really amazing way to teach readers. [E]arly on in my reading teaching I became quite focused on guided reading and becoming a good guided reading instructor and as soon as that happened you could really make your students progress. [T]he whole mystery and challenge was getting ... the rest of your class busy. So we were always trying to do centres and all kinds of things but really it wasn't that successful unless you had a second adult in the classroom for whatever reason right? Now with Daily Five and we've been doing that gosh I don't know, maybe it might be like between five and ten years I would say for sure now in our schools and guided reading is part of that and the kids get trained in Daily Five in kindergart[en] or grade one

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right so they just get like they just know what to do and what their choices are and they love it so it's great, it's great.

And I've seen a lot of Gordon Neufeld like so just that's where my interest lies. I follow what he teaches, I read a lot of his stuff so just personal interest .. [L]ike the principal in the school drives [this]. So he sees it more early literacy and early reading success will come as a result of well attached children who come to school ready to learn right? So in in the essence it's the same, one and the same to him. So he pushes that in an effort to improve early reading. So the professional learning that he does, especially at the kindergarten level, he does his own professional learning like he, when I was, when I was teaching kindergarten he would have workshops regularly with the kindergarten teachers and grade one teachers too on Neufeld and how to implement his thing, his theories I guess in the classroom in an effort to improve student success in all areas ... It's making sure the children come to school ready to learn too right and so his theory is that we, they, can't learn unless all of their attachments have been met. So we have to make sure that they're not hungry, we have to make sure that they're warm but if they, and they have to come at rest right so we have to make sure we as teachers that that they feel safe and that they feel comfortable with us so that we can teach them how to read ... I found it so fascinating as a parent as well as a teacher so I love it all, like I can read Neufeld for like for ever ... [b]ut for other teachers you know they felt really, they feel very like enough is enough kind of thing

Ineffective? ... Not practical. I can remember one. It was um helping people, children's behaviour and it was so like obvious everything that was said was so obvious I felt like I left with no new information and nothing really useful ... So I remember being at a workshop where they were, and feeling super motivated and wanting to create like ten story sacks and then never

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really having the time. ... I think that particular school had mothers put it together for them. A wonderful idea but it has to be something that you can realistically do. Like I just went to teacher's convention in Montréal and it's useless. It's like 45 minute workshops. I guess they just give you information on where you can go to get more information ... We just go and party. That's basically what our school does. I don't go to them anymore. It's a one day and it's like they're 45 minute workshops. But even in the beginning when I was first teaching those were interesting and some of them were really great but now they're like go to this website and it'll show you how to do this program or something like that. Like they're not horrible but they're not terribly useful.

I haven't found any really amazing professional development recently. I remember being wowed like in my early teaching years and then loving it and going into the class and wanting to implement everything I read and I haven't had that feeling for a while cause I haven't had anything new maybe, seen anything new or maybe because I've been in it for twenty years maybe I feel like I have enough experience to do what I think is, is best. I remember just getting lots of opportunities when I was younger ... I don't think it's lack of wanting to do it or ignorance or anything like that. I think it's always just the same old same old thing right. It's interesting though now I think that they're looking at changing the focus.

You know what there's so much on the internet now. Like I really turn to the internet for a lot of answers, and a lot of resources and a lot of ideas to be honest. I used to have shelves and shelves of just teacher resource books and um they're almost obsolete like you can find anything within minutes of what you want on the internet. If I had a specific question I would read about it on the internet. Like last year I became very interested in um testing, exams and stuff for at the young children and and and there was I was there was a plethora of information of course to read

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about that on the internet. [B]ut even if you just were to do struggling readers you could find like all kinds of information on ideas and things that you can do and things that people have done you know. Pinterest. Do you know what Pinterest is? [T]he internet has just really changed the way we access information. Sometimes like at night when I'm relaxing I'll just like scroll through that stuff and see because that's what we're interested in right. Like we were saying I don't read a book I go to Pinterest in the education site and see what I might learn or what I might gain or what ideas I might get for my class or something. There's so many ideas it isn't even that hard to do.

[S]o good ones are just the ones [where] the instructors are interesting and giving really valuable stuff that you can practically apply in the classroom. Like I think if someone were to walk into a school tomorrow and say okay who wants to, what literacy teachers want to sign up for a workshop on learning specifically how to teach children who have um memory difficulties or who have dyslexia or the the workshop will be full. Like anyone will go to that. Why wouldn't they. They'd be like what you're going to help me teach these kids of course I'm going to come to that you know. But I haven't seen that happen. So I think very specific professional learning that would I think that would target specific disabilities. Like because of a lot of the professional learning is how, how to implement it in your class, like how to teach the whole class, that's great, I think something specific about targeting the certain disabilities like we were talking about would make for great professional learning ... and uh [sigh] professional learning from experienced people..

I think um time for professional learning like good professional learning would fit nicely into a schedule you know. Like not on a Saturday morning or something like that, like I think that it has to be built into a teacher's schedule somewhere ... I think a lot of this stuff you go to

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because it's one day and that's the way its set up and that's the way it works but you know one afternoon a month for six months or something where you you learn something, you go to your classroom, you have the, almost like a university course right where you instead of just being given it by, like follow up I guess I'm saying, or ongoing. if I was going to take a course on teaching kids with dyslexia, taking it once a month where I go, I learn something, I can do it in my classroom, I go back, I learn something else, I can come with my questions you know and then go back and do another month, you know? So that it's sort of broken down into steps instead of like one big thing all at once. I would sign up for something like that if it was ever, like, if it was from three to five or something you know.

Moving Forward/Toward

Like I feel like um more confident on what I'm doing. [R]ight now I do have a bigger interest in, it just seems like there's a lot of kids as far as struggling with dyslexia and stuff like that right now. You know, I don't know if it's just happening in my classroom right now but that is one area that I'm looking into getting more education in right now. It's obviously a difficulty that a style of learning that some people are challenged by like it's whatever you call it or wherever it's come from I think that it's very real and that effects the way some children learn to read. Just the willing to be able to help struggling readers. You know just something like maybe I don't [know] much about that so maybe I can learn something more to become better you know. Just my choices change. So that is a goal of mine in the New Year to see, to contact those people and see if I can do a workshop then. But that's all on me, that's just me.

In a perfect world every second Friday I would go to school and someone would teach me how to things better in my classroom. I wouldn't um I wouldn't necessarily, it would be more proactive than reactive I guess is what I'm thinking. Like it would be, like right now I'm like I

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gotta learn how to do that, or then you know I'm trying to keep your head above water where in that sense I think it would be like, yeah, someone would motivate me every two weeks I'd say to try something new with a great idea and to do in my class. And they'd even give me like, do this tomorrow, try this it would be so awesome and your students will learn this from it and I would come back and then I would do that. Or maybe in a perfect world someone would come into my classroom like a professional or someone that was going to like say yeah this is good this is good but you should try this but you should do this ... [and] just smaller classes; like fifteen students as opposed to twenty three or something like that. [An] endless budget. Wow, that's just such a crazy dream. For Daily Five I think because it's such an important program I would probably have better materials for that. Like the CD players are always breaking and you know stuff like that. I would have maybe tablets, like technology in the classroom where the kids could do listening on a tablet although I hate to take away the books but probably I would have more books and newer books every year. More relevant, nicer materials for the kids to actually touch and use ... I would have no desks. Just alternative seating completely and then I'd have all their materials just stored in beautiful shelves so that the kids could just access their stuff easily but they wouldn't sit in desks. I might buy some of the flashier word work stuff you see online you know, something more, I would also have like I think that the kids like as I say I struggle with the um the word work actual idea of teaching kids specific words so maybe I would have more time for just smaller groups where I would just work on that.

I feel like the PD, the training, the experience, I really feel like I've gotten better with age. But I think the onus is more on me now to find something that I want to learn about. Maybe I want to be an expert in something. I think it's really the, the onus is going to be on me to, through professional learning really, like through through internet, through reading, whatever

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I can attend you know, workshops that kind of thing. I see it as um like it's my um, like I must do it [laughing]. I must do it and I want to do it, I'm not bored with it. I just think I will keep doing it until I retire and I'd love to keep, like I'd love to crack the code. Like I'd like to be one of those teachers that this is how you do it, that this is what worked for me you know, like I'd love to be able to, yeah I see it as a major major part of my life still.

Profile Central Elementary Teacher 2 (Ct2)

My Early Years and the Influence of Reading in My Early Life

English is my third language, I was born in Brazil, and my parents are Lebanese so I speak all three languages and my mom used to always say we speak Portuguese at school and Arabic at home so we could keep the languages and when she started teaching us how to read it was oral stories first and that's how we started; it was all oral and then she started teaching us how to read using the pictures and stuff cause she wanted us to keep the language. So it was hard like Arabic here and then Portuguese at school so that's how she did it; she spoke in both languages, she did the oral stories in both languages and then started, moved on to the books. I was eight when I moved to Canada. I only learned English when I came here because in Brazil they teach you English when you get to a certain age. My dad got us a tutor before we came and started teaching us like the general things in English.

I came here and I was in grade three. You go to school as an eight year old, you have no idea what anybody's saying, you struggle with reading and writing but you pick it up pretty fast as a child, the language, and because I knew the two other language it was easier. Because they didn't have the ESL programs at that school they would drive us to Ottawa from Greely to a school called Carson Grove and they taught us ESL there where they would teach us the grammar and stuff; things that we don't do much of now. But it was just learning like the verbs and adding words to speak properly and a lot of oral.

You didn't get to form the relation with the students in the class too cause you felt like you were being pulled out of something that everybody else was doing but you ... that you had to go to a different school cause maybe you weren't good enough to be in the class with them.

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[W]hen the teachers would ask you to read out loud ... it was always a struggle and kids always made fun of the way you pronounced things. That was not a very positive experience.

I was only there for a year and I didn't know much about what was happening I just knew that you're going to learn how to speak English at the other school so I don't know what I missed ... again I think we picked it up real fast because it was similar [to] the Portuguese, the letters were similar, it was quick to learn, and it was the same pronunciation kind of to some words so we found the transition very easy. My parents made it easier for us right, and I had the family around and just learning the culture cause Lebanese culture is so much different than Canadian culture. But it was good, we transitioned well. When we ... moved here to Canada my dad wanted us to learn the Arabic language, like read and write so at nine year's old I went to Arabic school on Saturdays ... so I also at that age learned how to read and write Arabic.

I always loved picture books and I still have a passion for picture books and my parents again would buy us books after books and they'd have a time set aside for us where we'd sit and just look at books or read for a certain time of the day, yeah, and just I love to read. I used to always play teacher; like classroom [with] my siblings and cousins and I always had to be the teacher all the time. Our elementary school had actually a book mobile, a bus that was a library and every Thursday it would park in the parking lot at the school and we would ... get books, all four of us, my siblings and I.

[I]t was about grade four five where I remember books being sent home to do book reports on. They had usually a competition going on where you had to make the worm go all the way around the school so we all had to read and it was like the more you read ... the longer the worm becomes so it we all wanted to do that so those books, we'd take books home then and then you had to do a book report on [it], talking about the book and writing a little passage about

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a book. I liked novel series when I was that age: R.L. Stine books, yeah those I used to read, the Baby Sitter's Club, and we had a set time to in class so you all had to read quietly for about twenty minutes.

I had one specific teacher where she would do reading circles and she'd have you echo read so you would be the reader and then I would have to echo read behind you ... That's one thing she used to do and now here we do that in the program Soundprints. Sometimes they picked the kids at the same level and worked with them in a small group setting. We did the reading circles; I think the reading circles and the guided reading were the biggest things. Where they put you in groups, like not just with a teacher but then you would have jobs to dissect the text so you'd be the illustrator, I'd be the author like talking about the text, and somebody would be the news reporter reporting about certain things in the text. So those helped a lot just to talk about what was happening and working for comprehension.

[I]n grade six my grade six teacher would sit and read us novels. It wasn't a very positive experience, but he would sit at his desk and we'd have to sit at our desk and listen to him read the novel. It wasn't like "let's join me here at the carpet" and we'll like [be] comfortable and listen, enjoy a story. So it was just like dictatorship. I had a teacher [at this elementary school] who never taught [me] *but she was my mentor teacher after when I did my placement in her class*, and she was also not from Canada. She was from El Salvador and she just would introduce me to different books and that was one of the things she did. Like you'd spend recess with her and she'd show you different books and take this one home kind of thing. I don't remember ever taking a book home from out of the school [library] to read. It was either me going to the library myself or using my own books

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I don't remember the challenges; just, like the pronunciation, and like reading fluently; that was hard too, cause you could, if when you start to read like the grade ones for example, word for word and trying to read fluently was a big thing. You don't want to sound like a robot and we all do if it's your second language or third language. [I] think that was one of my challenges reading all the time word for word until you get used to it. I think comprehension was a big thing cause you could read and decode but [that] doesn't mean you understand or that you can read just cause you can decode. I think that's again too, like I was able to decode everything eventually but then still comprehension was a little bit lagging. Like some people can read into the text and like find out, like visualize things [and] that's hard when you don't understand the language fully you can't visualize those things or the author's message.

[M]y parents refused to by us a computer until we were in high school because like "you don't need technology right now, you could get a book, you could play games." [A]s a teenager [I'd read] just novel after novel but now it's hard cause you're reading professional [laughing], professional books and articles and just to get a book, leisure, to sit and read it's hard to find that time sometimes. Cause of grade one I'm constantly like looking for picture books in reading, how to help my class and you don't find the time to read for yourself. I have three novels started [laughing].

Preservice/Teacher Education

I did my psychology four years and then I did my B.Ed. I wanted to do all these different things first. I took two years off and worked and tried to find a job in psychology and again everything kept closing in my face. So I just ended up "like you know what just go with it, that's what you always wanted to do." My passion [is] to teach kids how to read cause I had those struggles. I want to teach them the proper way to read ... because you'd want them to go through

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positive experience not like you, [you] want them to be doing it the right way kind of thing and not go through what you went through as a child.

I did my year teaching, teacher's college, and did my two placements at my [old] elementary school with a grade three class and a grade five class. It was amazing to go back to the community that you were raised. The professors were engaging and I liked them ... [In the] language one you had to do projects and create lessons using books, using different things you would use in the classroom. I had two great [practicum] teachers that worked with me but again they [practicums] were short, they were four weeks then, was it four weeks or six weeks at a time, and you were only teaching certain subjects at certain times so you were exposed to it but not much. It was my two mentor teachers who would help me; it wasn't anything that I got from teacher's college that I used; some of it was, but because [the mentor teachers] were so experienced (one of them was teaching for thirty years) so I took a lot from her: just pulling [the kids], if you got the kids to do certain activities and pulling the kids that you knew needed the extra support and doing the small groups I think that's one of the biggest things that we used to do in my placement. So if two of us were there we'd each have a group and work with them while the others did their their tasks ... you had to manage the whole group in order to pull the other group and making sure that they're on task in order to work with them. You get a classroom every single child has different needs so you have to meet all their needs well if you can and change a lesson plan according to what they can do, adapt it in any way you can. You have to just change on the spot and that's the hardest thing especially when you're nervous, you're in a placement, your mentor teacher's watching you, and evaluating you and then you have to be able to move on the spot to change things accordingly. That's something I've learned teaching here at [CES] cause sometimes it's just not working.

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Beginning Teaching

I started at [Central Elementary School]. I graduated April 2006 and got the job August 2006. I didn't know about this board ... My friend and I took SPEC Ed part one after finishing teacher's college and she worked at the daycare here at the school and she called me and she's like "they have an opening" and I was working at [a department store]. I was working and [the principal] kind of interviewed me on the spot; she called me in and she was like "I like you, you have the job." Like I had no experience, I have a job, like what do I do, where do I start?

It was a grade two/three French immersion. I did the grade two/three English and I taught them all of the subjects except for French and science and I did grade one math that year. It's my eleventh year ... [and] I've taught grades two, three, five, six, four/five, grade two again and then it's been six years I've taught grade one. You get to see the different levels; like grade six you're not going to do the same thing you do with the grade ones right so it's totally different. The first year [in grade one] I'm like "Oh my god David [CP] what are you doing to me?" He's like "you'll be fine, don't worry," and now it's like I love grade one, love teaching them how to read and write.

Teaching (and) Early Reading

I get here at 6:30am in the morning ... and I leave here in time to get home around 4:00. You have to plan especially for younger kids and I do a lot of planning at home, a lot of prep work for them but you never stop thinking. I try to have a couple hours in the evening but you're always thinking I have to do this next, I have to do this tomorrow, and making yourself notes and I gotta try this lesson and then you find yourself Googling something: "will for the next day?" Every year the cohort is different and you don't realize, you forget how low they come and how

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everything is play-based in kindergarten and you're asking them to sit and do reading and writing and learning all these things.

My group this year I don't know if I can even justify like they're really low. I have eight kids that can't even recognize the letters of their names. It's a really low group and yeah, so it's been tough. What do you do? They're not ready yet, they have to work at their level. This year they're all in one class, the weaker ones are all in one class. [Y]ou don't pick who you teach. You do have to teach every child not just throw them on the side cause they can't read or write. I know for a fact this year some kids are going to know how to read and they're going to just move and other kids are not going to budge. They're not going to learn how to read this year. That's the reality; even if you change things no matter how you change it, just not ready to learn yet.

I teach everything but French and Gym to them. Every morning from 8:10 to 9:50 [English Language Arts] and then math is the middle block so 10:20 to 12:00 and then they have French and gym and all the other subjects in the afternoon. So health, art and its 50 minutes for each, and ethics and language and math. Art I do a lot of combining, art and language arts so we do a lot of that using literacy with the arts ... using picture books to create a lesson in art.

[F]or language arts I have a hundred minutes so I do 25 minutes of Daily Five. I ... start [the year] with sound work ... where they are [in terms of being] able to sound out the words. The Power Words you can't sound out like getting to know those too as well and then when they do know how to sound out words and stretch them out and they're reading decoding work on their fluency. Being able to read fluently and not like a robot, and then comprehension, working on comprehension as well. I work with Soundprints and Daily Five and usually themes depending on the season or month. I work with themes and I try to plan that for the year and with the Soundprints. I do my mini-lesson first and like all of the routine stuff; mini lesson and they

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get to Daily Five and that's where we stop. We share what they've done in Daily Five and then I do Soundprints, and then I do a shared writing activity or a lesson and they get to go write. Daily Five starts off slowly right and then by the end in May they're able to do thirty minutes independently where they can sit and read cause they know how to read, most of them know how to read and use the book that they have in their book bin.

Working with guided reading and planning your groups is always challenging cause you have to work with BAS [Benchmark Assessment] scores and always moving them so you're always switching groups when they move up reading levels. Guided reading usually helps me more cause you're working with a small group and it's different text, not always the same text that you're using and you're using a variety like nonfiction, fiction texts. I wait and when I start reading with the kids and I start getting to know the kids that's when I actually, I do little lessons here and there, that's when I start looking at the kids and reading with individual ones. Like [for/in] Daily Five, I don't pull guided reading kit until a month after we've started cause I want to check in with every child to see what the situation is and how well it's going and then I start my guided reading groups and then I start looking at what do I do with themes and how am I going to look at this group and this group.

Our resource model right now is pulling kids, small groups out and working with the resource teacher. It's great with my resource teacher. She pulls small groups and we coordinate the same things that we're doing like the same Soundprints text and we're always on the same menu which works but again they're being pulled; is that the right model right? We always select students according to their BAS scores as well to group them together. My group she comes for twenty minutes so she pulls my kids for twenty minutes ... she has another class and she pulls them for twenty minutes so she tries to split up her time between different classes. We've

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worked it out that it's at that time and then when they are pulled the other kids are doing Daily Five so they're not missing a lot of instruction. And they come back and they finish off their Daily Five in the classroom. It would be nice to have a teacher co-teach. I've seen different schools where they do that and it's really beneficial. It happened in our school before and I was doing it with another teacher. She was a resource teacher and then we were just doing co-teaching together in the classroom and it was fabulous.

We have payback time where if you have extra minutes on your schedule, I have that in my time. You're supposed to teach sixteen fifty minutes in your six day cycle but if you don't have that many minutes you have to go in somebody else's classroom and do your payback time. Right now in a grade two classroom where I'm going to do my payback time in there I do three periods in a six day cycle. So I do the Soundprints and I get her started with the Daily Five cause she's a new teacher and I get her class set up with that and creating the text for the Soundprints ... and doing the Power Words and helping her. When that's all done and set up and the kids are independent you start pulling kids out and working on skills with them according to their needs.

Challenges in meeting students' early reading needs

I come, like I'm motivated, I want them to succeed and I feel like I'm accountable for them to succeed even though I'm only accountable a certain amount because I can't do everything for them but you, you think about your struggles and you think of why, everything you've been through, okay I don't want them to go through that, let's just do it now and help them out, so it does change your perspective of things. You know how important it is and if you can learn a third language they can learn a second language kind of thing right, so you try to push them and teach them.

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I have a group of six that are moving, that are strong, probably where they should be. I have about a middle group where they're coming but not as fast as you want them to. And the others are struggling. And it's like it's hard because you think every year you think okay it's getting worse, what's going [on]. Who do you work with? The stronger kids or the lower kids? But then the lower you don't know the lower kids you don't know that they're going to move up from their backgrounds and stuff and lot of times. It's cultural too where they're not getting all that um parent involvement in with their schooling and reading so ... The ones that actually do the work at home and have their parents supporting them are the ones that are moving up but the rest they don't even read them so it's not like a waste of time but it kind of is. You're just sending it and it's not nothing's happening with it at home.

Some of them come with IEPs, some of them don't, you have to get to know the child first. I had two that came in with IEPs in my class ... One he's a code 53 so he's language delayed and the other one just aggressive behaviour ... Right now in my class I have four of them that are probably going to have an IEP in May. So the teacher writes a profile, and with the help of the resource teacher, and then we come up with SMART goals to benefit them and how they're going to achieve the SMART goals and strategies to achieve those goals. I have to differentiate everything for them and that's my biggest hurdle; differentiating for so many kids. How do I do it? Yeah [laughing wishfully/sarcastic], some of them can decode but they have no comprehension. These are just oral and they're, even getting them to ask questions about the book, that's difficult for them. So I ask for them and some of them just look at you like you have three heads cause they don't get it but others they'll ask questions back or they'll look at the book. The struggling ones you have to feed it to them and constantly as I'm reading, for example, a story.

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Another thing that we were having trouble with my group specifically, we were talking about that yesterday, attendance; the struggling kids are never here. I had thirteen absents last week and ten or eight almost every day and some of them come in late and some of them just don't show up and those are the kids that need to be in school. So again what do you do? They're missing the lessons, they're missing all that. I'm always catching up or trying to catch up. The ones that are struggling are never there honestly [laughing]. That's the truth. [O]ne of them is there once a week and she doesn't know the sound, she doesn't know her letters, she has no reading strategies even if you tell her, like we're reading a book, and getting her mouth ready to even sound the letter word she can't do it. T ... [is] never here, she's here once a week ... If I'm not working with her one-on-one she's in everybody's face. She's getting up disturbing everybody and she's done, she's checked out and she doesn't want to do any of the work because she can't do it. Like writing she can't write. She doesn't form her letters properly and if she does they're always backwards. She doesn't [know] her numbers, not even from one to ten. If you say can you point out the number one she can't do that. She can't write her name, she has to go back to her desk to check out every letter of her name, to come back and write it on the paper if I'm working with her. So [her] interests, she wants to be up north this child.

I have one, if I wasn't [directly working near him], he's, he can move up and he's doing his best and if I didn't work with him he'd be a behavioural problem cause he's so ADHD. He can write, he knows all his sounds, his issue is right now making spaces between his words and writing in lowercase letters. Um he has the language, he has the vocabulary, he has a lot of knowledge, like background knowledge of different topics but again if I wasn't working with him he closely he'd be a behaviour problem.

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If you saw the schedules that I was changing just before you came, the visual schedules, and that's what I have for some of them too where they see you doing this and then you get a break so with the big group lesson I have to be constantly moving to every child. Sometimes I want to switch my name: "Ms. [her name]! Ms. help [laughing]!" There's three really struggling and [an]other two, two or three can handle it but then you have to write for them. For example yesterday during our lesson it was my day three and it was writing day ... we did the review of the text and they told me what they were going to write about so I gave them their sheet and they were off and I had three of them back at the carpet where I had to reread the story cause they don't have the language and the vocabulary to even know what to write about and even drawing the picture.

I have a lot of ... First Nations kids and I don't know, like I shouldn't say it's [school] not important to them. It's, culture's very important to them and that's how they run their life like the hunting and which is wonderful and spending time with their family, or up north in the bush, and when you tell them to read [at home] it doesn't, they come and go it's like so transient. Once [their] parents are done school they pull their kids out and they leave. So they're done school, they pull their kids and bring them up and apparently somebody was telling me that up north the schools, there's nothing going on.

More resources would help. There's so many grade one classes right now and we have no books to send home sometimes so just sharing those resources um if we all had the, say, the [right?] amount of resources then it'd be easier so you're not always "okay I can't send books home today because I don't have enough" or "I don't have any books at all." Smaller class sizes would be fabulous. Twenty one is the max. I'm oversized because I have two kids as well [on IEPs] so it's twenty five. The other thing, space is a big issue. We have no space in the school

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and they pay you compensation for that. We have no classes left in the school to make smaller classes.

I wish I had the support from the parents first off um for them to help me teach their kids how to read because I could only do so much in the classroom and if the parents, not even reading to the children, you don't have to pick a [book], just read to them, get them to ask questions or you get them to talk about the book your reading to them. That's been a problem where you don't see the help at home. You send books home and it comes back not read, not even looked at, it's still in the agenda, nobody has opened up their agenda. I don't remember too much of my childhood with me reading and learning how to read but I just remember enjoying reading and with all the oral stories that my mom would tell us and how she taught us how to read without knowing how to speak the language, it's just, I don't know, it's very important to have that support and now it's like I'm trying to get that from the parents and I'm not getting that this year at all.

Involvement in Professional Learning

I would say if I do five [professional learning days] a year I think it would be around fifty [so far in teaching career]. You don't know when you're a new teacher: "I want to go to this workshop, this workshop" [in a] big conference room with two hundred people listening to the person read the PowerPoints. [B]efore I used to just like any opportunity to go to a workshop, learn different things. I would just go but now I base it on what I'm doing, what would help my students.

There's always Soundprints or Daily Five. I just go with what I'm doing [in class] and that's what I choose. This year my kids need a lot of movement so I did a lot of workshops using movement and yoga and brain breaks. I've started experimenting with yoga and literacy. At [a

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recent] convention I actually went to a workshop and it was all about movement and stopping kids doing their literacy to do things with yoga or with movement according to what they're doing; the lesson and the literacy. I've done writing strategies, I've done guided reading workshops, I've done the Daily Five ones, Soundprints, reading coach one I took at the beginning when I first started teaching ... Six Traits. Yeah all based around language ... I like to focus on [language].

Perfect PL for me would be going into somebody's classroom and seeing things in action. If somebody was really experienced and they ran a certain program in their classroom I would love to see it in action. I find the ones that you do hands on right, you go into someone's classroom and observing the teacher teach, you get so much more out of it, and you get to see it in action and that's what I did at the beginning. I was going in different schools and I watched teachers do work with Soundprints and Daily Five and that's how I got to do it. But I just find that you're going to just sit there and look at the PowerPoint and read me the power point about reading and writing. I don't want to hear it. I just want to try new things, I want to create lessons, I want to do that.

The Soundprints one and Daily Five ... helped me structure my classroom and language period a lot. And I have lots of the resources ... they've provided which is good so that was very beneficial for me. You could only teach Soundprints if you were trained and that's the one thing that we [the board] were working on, training all the Cycle one teachers and getting them all to use Soundprints and Daily Five. We've done different after school sessions with [SB3] and she comes in and her and I do a lot of um workshop kind of, we call them workshops but they're not really workshops and she provides the text, we provide the lessons we created for the Daily Five ... some use it, some don't. [SB3], truthfully ... She showed me what it was and she was like

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we're going to try it with your class and she did and I started doing the PDIGs with her and she uses my classroom now as the model classroom for Soundprints and Daily Five ... it was her getting me to go to these workshops and picking me as part of her PDIG and okay you need to coming to do lessons with me. Um and that's how it happened. I found my niche I guess and that I feel like it's helped kids learn how to read and you're teaching them, you're modelling fluency [so]they're not reading like robots and they're getting a lot of background knowledge ... Last year we met five times, this year we didn't. No funding so we didn't do anything this year. Probably a priority shift.

One of the things I've done a lot reading, a lot about is the Neufeld. [I'm] doing a lot reading about him and the attachment theory and that's helped because forming the attachment with the kids and feeling safe ... they get, they start learning. [I] went to Vancouver two years ago and met with Neufeld and we had a whole talk about different students and how to help students and he's working with [CP] on this research thing about our school, with certain students. So that was a great experience just to sit at a roundtable with him and ask him questions and about your kids. [I] was with a [principal], [a] grade six teacher, the behaviour technician, and ... the kindergarten teacher. It's a great theory. It's not everything but it's good and useful information to use in the classroom. [A] lot of reading on the brain and how the child especially a six year old's brain and maturation. How's this helped? Well I understand it a little more. Not fully but just depending on the child like I go researching things. If I know a student's struggling with something and just learning more about it to help the student. People will think oh the Neufeld approach is so relationship and just getting kids to attach to you. No you have to be the authoritative figure in the classroom like you are in charge and showing the kids that you're in

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charge and then when they, cause they need that structure, and they need to be like you need to be strict with them but they also have a bond where they're able to feel safe with you.

Moving Forward/Toward

I would love to always stay in the classroom. I'd like to be part of creating lessons for teachers and um well there'd be mini lessons, creating reading lessons, guided reading lessons, um which they can use in the classroom, um and work with another teacher to do that. Um I don't know how to explain it I just I want to be able to help with especially newer teachers and help them with the struggles they have in the classroom creating these lessons. Depending on how long I teach I would love to eventually, again I think I talked about that, creating lessons, like Daily Five and Soundprints and being that person, the go to person to help new teachers develop those things in the classroom for them.

I know Daily Five is in most of Language Arts teachers, upstairs as well, the grade three to six classes. But the Soundprints, I think people are not nervous about the Soundprints ... They can't do it if they're not trained. They're not allowed to work with the text if they're not trained or teach Soundprints if they haven't been trained with it. I feel like Soundprints I would love every single grade one teacher to do Soundprints and [SB3], and Joanne [vice principal] was saying maybe you could set up a workshop on like Wednesdays and have, talk about Soundprints or if we do a PD day at the school we have different classrooms as different stations and people move from classroom to classroom and certain teachers do presentations and like hands on um things but it hasn't happened. It's a start. It would start with the school and then we'll see where it goes from there. Right now certain teachers down here, grade one teachers, they are following me with my Soundprints. So if I'm doing a text, so they when I'm done or we do it together. So

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there's three grade one classes we're all doing animals in winter or we're all doing snow is falling. So that works well, so we're all on the same page.

In August I always I go like what am I doing, why am I doing grade one again and then in June I'm like this is why I do grade one. Getting out of the classroom doesn't interest me but on the side I'd want to do that [helps mentor in English Language Arts] because I never had that support when I first started teaching and for the new teachers now cause you never had the support, you never had those workshops or PDIGS [professional development innovation grants] or the mentors or people work in your classroom I'd want to do that to help them out cause it's hard first year, second year teaching, it's difficult, especially when you don't have a budget, you don't have the resources do to all those things.

Before you're a new teacher you can read but you really don't know how to teach the kids how to read right? It's so important in your life. Reading is so important because I know the struggles I went through. [A]gain English is my third language and learning how to read Arabic before I even learned how to read English. So it is important and you need the support and you need to practice and you constantly have to go back to it.

Appendix E: Early Reading Teacher Interview Guides

Interview one: focused life history (90mins)

Questions in this interview will focus on participants' reconstruction of their past learning experiences and up to the present. My research is focussed on teachers' professional learning experiences and how teachers perceive it helps them with their early-reading instruction. To delve into teachers' pasts will provide a platform for understanding how teachers interacted/reacted and felt they transferred past learning experiences in their lives. To have participants reconstruct the learning experiences they had (for example, learning experiences as kids in school, clubs, teams, other jobs) will help put their learning experiences into the context of their lives (Seidman, 2013).

Questions will address issues uncovered in the literature review to help illuminate how teachers perceive their experiences shaped them as they became teachers and how they sought out their professional learning opportunities. Findings that flow from literature review indicate that many preservice teachers are unmotivated readers, that they did not receive adequate ER preparation during their preservice training, and that many do not receive PL/PD opportunities that positively impact their instruction and improve struggling readers ER achievement. To develop a story that represents as close to possible the experiences of the teachers being interviewed the first interview will work to "put the participant's in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself up in light of the topic up to the present time" (Seidman, 2013, p. 21).

Samples of Open-Ended Questions

These questions are examples of areas that the first interview will cover as I work to unpack the lived experiences of teachers from their days as primary students up to their present time. Though the flow of the interview will be guided within this context to gather information the direction it takes will primarily rely on the participants' responses, thought, reflections and memories of their experiences. Information gathered is expected to come from discussions centred on the following themes.

Outline of Themes and Estimated Time Spent per Theme

- I. Personal Early-reading Experiences (15 mins)
- II. Role of Reading in Your Life (10 mins)

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III. Becoming a Teacher: Preservice/Teacher Training (15 mins)

IV. Being a Professional Teacher: Teaching ER (25 mins)

V. Inservice Professional Learning and Development (25 mins)

Themes with Ideas/Probes/Sub-questions

I. Personal Early-reading Experiences

a. Tell me about your early-reading experiences as a student?

i. Inquire into how they remember learning how to read. For example, what reading activities do you remember doing in school?

ii. How was early reading instruction provided to you and your classmates?

iii. Challenges and positive experiences in learning to read.

iv. Can you remember what your ER teachers were like?

v. If you had some struggles with learning to read what kinds of strategies did your teachers use to help you?

vi. How do you remember your teacher motivating you to read?

vii. How did your school experiences motivate you to read?

b. How did your family and home-experiences impact your desire to read?

i. How was reading valued in your family, by your friends, in your community?

ii. How did your family's views or values about learning to read impact you in your first years of learning to read?

iii. In your early years were books assigned to be read at home or did you choose what you wanted to read?

iv. How did books or other forms of text impact your enjoyment of reading?

II. Role of Reading in Your Life

a. How do you feel about reading in general has played a role in your life up to now?

i. How have your views on reading shaped your path to becoming a teacher that teachers young students to learn how to read?

ii. How do you feel your motivation to read impacts your students' desire to read?

III. Becoming a Teacher: Preservice/Teacher Training

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- a. How did you come to enter into a teacher education program? And how did your preservice education help meet you're your early reading needs as a future teacher?
 - i. Specifically want to find out what life experiences influenced these teachers to become primary education teachers.
 - ii. How did your B.Ed. program meet your ER learning needs as a future teacher of students that struggle with learning how to read?
 - iii. How do you find your practicum experience met your needs?
 - iv. How did you feel that your practicum experience/s impacted your future ER instruction?
 - v. How did you feel that your practicum experience/s impacted your future ER instruction for students that struggle to learn how to read?
- IV. Being a Professional Teacher: Teaching ER
 - a. How soon did you find employment as a teacher?
 - i. How did you find the district/school?
 - ii. What are some of the things that influenced you to apply specifically for your first teaching position? For other teaching positions?
 - b. How prepared did you feel you were to teach ER when you began your career as a teacher?
 - c. How many years have you been a professional teacher?
 - i. How many grades have you taught and how do you feel these experiences have prepared you to meet the needs of struggling ERs?
 - ii. How long have you provided ER instruction?
 - d. How do you feel your past experiences (elementary school experiences, teacher training, and professional teacher experiences) have influenced the way that you provide ER instruction?
 - i. In general?
 - ii. In regards to struggling ERs?
 - e. How have your experiences with colleagues influenced how you approach/plan/provide ER instruction?

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- f. How do your other responsibilities as a teacher influence/impact how you approach your ER instruction?
- V. Inservice Professional Learning and Development
 - a. Thinking about the different types of PL/PD you have experienced, how have you made your choices to take the PL you have?
 - i. How do these choices change over time (day, year, etc.,)
 - ii. In regards to ER instruction how do you feel your choices of PL/PD has impacted your ER practice and your students' ER achievement?
 - iii. How do you make your decisions for the kinds of PL/PD you are going to attend?
 - iv. How has your understanding and teaching grown as a result of the PL/PD you have taken part in during your time as student of teaching?
 - v. How do you seek out other forms of professional learning to improve your ER instruction in general and for struggling early readers?

Interview two: the details of experience (90mins)

In the second interview the focus will be on the “concrete details of the participants’ present lived experiences” (Seidman, 2013, p. 21) in the topic of early-reading instruction and professional learning. Questions such as: What kinds of professional learning have you had? What are the details of these experiences? What reading professional learning experiences have you had? What instructional practices that you learned about in *some* form of professional learning do you provide to your early reading classes? The focus is to “strive, however incompletely, to reconstruct the myriad details of our participants’ experiences in the area we are studying” (p. 22).

- VI. Early-reading Instruction
 - a. How do you prepare your ER instruction for the year (topics, order of lessons/units, types of instruction, differentiating instruction)?
 - i. In as much detail as you can please recount what you do in preparing/planning for your ER instruction?
 - b. What does your typical ER class look like for the grade you are teaching this year?

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- i. Can you reconstruct this for me in as much detail as possible?
 - ii. *Probe for how teaching struggling readers look like.*
 - iii. *Probe for how teacher makes reading instruction motivating, interesting.*
 - c. Which areas do you find that your struggling readers have the most trouble with in learning to read? Can you please provide details of how they are struggling?
 - d. What do you find easiest (or most doable) in your ER teaching for average and more specifically for struggling readers?
 - e. What are the most challenging parts of teaching ER for average and specifically for struggling readers?
 - i. How do you deal with these challenges?
 - f. What is your definition of a balanced reading program?
 - g. What kinds of support are there in your school to help you assist your struggling early readers?
- VII. Professional Learning
 - a. During your professional teaching career, about how many professional learning days do you think you have participated in?
 - i. On average how many district and provincial PL/PD days are you provided with each year?
 - ii. What different kinds of PL/PD have you participated in?
 - iii. What topic have you participated in the most?
 - b. What does effective ER PL/PD look like?
 - c. What kinds of ER PL/PD have you taken part in?
 - i. What ER PL/PD has most impacted your ER instruction?
 - 1. Can you describe recount this PL/PD event in as much detail as possible so that I can understand what made it so effective? (Who provided it, size of PL group, topics covered, age the content was for, types of instructional strategies delivered, kinds of learning you were provided (active, passive))
 - ii. What kind of ER PL/PD has been least effective for you?

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1. Please describe in as much detail as possible (see probes in question above).
 - d. What barriers are there to more effective ER PL/PD?
 - i. School
 - ii. District
 - iii. Provincial
 - e. What is in place to assist you in obtaining the kind of PL/PD you would like to have in ER instruction especially to improve reading achievement for struggling readers?
 - i. School
 - ii. District
 - iii. Province
 - f. Besides provincial, district and school planned PD what other kinds of learning have you taken part in and if, it at all, has it impacted your early reading instruction and student reading achievement?
 - i. Where does this learning occur?
 - ii. How often does it occur?
 - iii. Who does it occur with?

Interview three: reflection on the meaning (90mins)

The third and final interview has participants “reflect on the meaning of their experience ... [to address] the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ work and life” (Seidman, 2013, p.22). This interview is akin to a synthesis of the first two where the researcher facilitates an experience with the participant so that they can consider how different factors in their lives “interacted to bring them to their present situation. For example, as an interviewer I am guiding this interview through what I have learned in the first two interview. I will generate approximately framed as such: *Given what you said about your life as a learner before becoming a teacher; or, Given what you said about how you felt or participated in professional learning as a preservice teacher and inservice teacher, how do you understand the PL/PD opportunities you are planning to take this year?* Says Seidman, “in interview three, we

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focus on that question the context of the two previous interviews and make that meaning making the center of our attention” (p.23).

I. Philosophy on ER

a. Based on the experiences you recounted on ER and your descriptions of what your ER instruction looks like:

- i. How do you understand and/or what is your definition of early reading instruction?
- ii. How could you describe the relationship between your professional learning and your classroom early reading practices?
- iii. How could you describe the relationship between your professional learning experiences, your classroom reading practices and your students' reading outcomes?

II. Beliefs on what would make better PL.

III. Perceptions on the influence of context upon early reading professional learning.

Appendix F: Principal Interview Guide

I. Background

1. Please tell me about your professional experience as a school administrator (*years, location, education, background in education*).
2. What kinds of experiences do you have in regards to early reading (ER) instruction (e.g., *previous teaching; understanding of*)?

II. Leadership Characteristics

1. How would you explain yourself as a school leader?
 - a. What is your philosophy on school leadership and how do you feel this informs your role in promoting/developing/organizing professional learning at your school?
 - b. Do you see yourself as a pedagogical/instructional leader, more of a behaviour enforcer/manager?

III. School Guidelines and Expectations for within-school Professional Learning (PL)

1. How does the school district allocate PL times and days in your district.
2. How much autonomy to teachers have to choose their course of PL?
3. How would you describe your role in planning PL opportunities for your school?
 - a. Could you please describe some of the challenges of meeting your teachers' needs in terms of providing various kinds of PL?
4. How do you determine what PL to provide?
 - a. Are there others involved in the planning of professional learning?
 - i. Who?
 - ii. How have they been involved and how did they get involved?
 - iii. How long does this role last?
5. How would you describe ER PL at your school?
 - a. What do you know about the kinds of PL the teachers that provide ER instruction undertake?
 - i. How is this undertaken (PLCs, off site, on site)?
 - ii. In what areas of ER do they focus on?
6. What do you feel limits teachers' opportunities to obtain the PL that they need?

IV. Perspectives on the State of Early Reading

1. When you see or hear of students who are struggling with learning how to read how do you feel that these students could be helped?
2. What do you feel are some of the factors that are influencing teachers' ER instruction at your school (*could be positively or negatively*)?
3. What do you feel are some factors that limit improvements in teachers' ER instruction at your school?

Appendix G: Board-Level Reading Consultant Interview Guide

1. Please tell me about your professional experience in your role as the WQSB's English Language Arts coordinator (*years, education, and teaching background*).
2. Please tell me about your professional experiences with early reading (ER) instruction and professional learning (PL) (*previous ER teaching, ER PL given and received*).
3. In your opinion what are the most efficient models of ER instruction?
4. What are the philosophical ideas of focus (goals) in regards to ER instruction in the WQSB?
5. From your experience are there a wide variety of models that teachers are using in their classes? In other words do you find a lot of variability in how teachers are approaching ER instruction across the district?
 - a. If so how would you describe them: teacher centred/student centred?
6. How do you describe the type of ER instruction that is provided in the WQSB (balanced/code-based/whole language)?
 - a. What tells you that this is happening?
7. When you see or hear of students that are struggling with learning how to read what do you perceive that teachers could do to help these students?
8. How does the school district allocate PL times and days in this school board.
9. Could you explain your role in planning PL opportunities for the WQSB?
10. How does the board specifically work with ER teachers to help them develop their reading instruction?
11. How much autonomy do teachers have in choosing their course of PL?
12. What kinds of PL are priorities for your WQSB and how were these labelled or determined to be priorities?
13. What kinds of PL do the teachers that provide ER instruction undertake? How is this undertaken (e.g., PLCs, off site, on site)?
14. How do you feel PL opportunities are utilized by teachers in the WQSB?
 - a. How do you feel that ER PL is utilized by WQSB teachers?
15. How are teachers' opportunities to undertake ER PL limited by other types of PL and board initiatives?
16. How could you describe some changes you would like to see in how PL opportunities are

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provided to teachers?

17. What do you feel are some of the factors that are developing teachers' ER instruction in the district?
18. What do you feel are some factors that could be impediment to improvements in teachers' ER instruction?

Appendix H: Detailed Description of Stages of Analysis

There were eight major stages to data analysis that led to framing the Findings.

Stage 1: Crafting Narratives

Final versions of the narratives (most up to date and refined) were compiled and entered into NVivo 11). As structure emerged into the profiles and vignettes I developed categories that followed a timeline from early reading experiences to perspectives on current learning and practice to thoughts on the future. Timelines for school principals and board-level employees were also crafted. I maintained research notes in a research diary related to this project (complexity theory, early reading teaching and learning, the research processes) using it to document or note particular perspectives that caught my attention (in unorganized notes doc). Initially an overwhelming experience these notes helped direct attention in early category and coding strategies. In this document I have an ongoing dialogue with myself about the construction and the role of the profiles and vignettes. This self-iterative process provided a foothold of all of the interview data and a way for sifting through the richness in the narratives. For example while organizing the narratives individual points based on case surfaced (e.g. the influence of a different home language, culture and context depending on school location.

Stage 2: Preliminary Categorizing

My initial process and thinking behind generating a coding system was a struggle. Not just because I wanted to ensure an integrity to process that is based in a solid foundation but because I wanted this process to as closely resemble the voices/perspectives of the participants. My field notes under the heading *On Writing* in my unorganized notes dated 2018-01-18 stressed this concern. For example:

On Writing

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The flow of the discussion or in the analysis and how themes were derived has to be told in the voices of the participants. I am not shaping this by where I want to go I am letting the voices of the participants tell/share their stories about the relationships that are influencing the grade one and two teachers' early reading instruction. By using the voices to be the storyteller we are going beyond teaching early reading (though early reading is definitely the sole focus curriculum-wise) the story tellers are providing us with an understanding of how context reduces complexity through lacking and reducing the number and quality of opportunities for receiving what they need to improve the teaching environment and subsequently improve their instruction (and relatedly their teaching ability overall); So as I guide my analysis the story connects with elements in the literature that are concerning, needed for follow up research, question what the state of early reading is and why; the need literacy to be more focused on a multi-literacy framework and therefore something comes out that impact student reading, reading professional learning, etc.).

This initial process was guided in the construction of a deep, free to emerge style of analysis that represents the early stages of reduction by creating abstract notions/themes used for beginning to form ways to direct and categorize statements. Constant redirection from looking at and prioritizing the guiding influence of the research questions aided/facilitated this process.

This wide ranging initial categorizing was done using all participants and resulted in an emergent assortment of categories across themes (or nodes in NVivo). Statements from the profiles fed into a range of categories; the same statement (some whole, some in part) at times fell into multiple categories. I thought of the narratives as representations of participants' perspectives on which reflected a process of transformation comprising perceptions on past experiences, present journey and future/anticipated self (mostly in terms of teachers). Categories, notions and ideas included abstract and underdeveloped themes such as:

- Achievement/accomplishments/success; conflict and challenge;
- Culture and community (school, home, town, context, demographic, family);
- Experience (lack of, maturity, time, and practice);
- Exploration.

Initially these terms were ordered visually as interpretive maps representing stages of the educators' transformational journey. The theme of journey was an early way to conceptualize the

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change process of teachers but was too far removed from the goal of the research and the guidance of the research questions. Conversations with my doctoral supervisor as my thoughts on analysis emerged helped me to refine a focus for thinking towards the data more specifically in relation to the research questions. Remarking on 2018-02-16:

On schools as cases

I am beginning to look at schools as individual cases today. This is a difficult transition for me as it is something new. I have profiles of all the teachers and the principals. Keeping the research questions at the front of my mind I am going to build a description, a narrative of what I gather from the particular schools (based in my participants' perspectives [narratives]). So as I begin I should outline this process as I go along, my steps to opening up and illustrating each school. I am beginning with CES. By the end I should have a description of the schools as cases. The process (my emerging process)

1. From the words of the participants what is the context of the school?
2. Guided by the perspectives of the participants how do the teachers and the principal see the relationship between the particulars of the school and the reading outcome for struggling readers?

****I just spoke with XXX about the process that I have been struggling with. It seems like I was stuck too much in a descriptive process again, a description that is covered in the profiles of the teachers and vignettes of the principals. So what I am going to do is take the narratives and pull themes that are in there*

The beginning stages of my process to analysis was heavily influenced through my commitment to being as open as possible to the perspectives of this study's participants. Foundational to my analysis I chose to follow a phenomenological and inductive process explained as a place where: "concepts and hypotheses emerged from an examination of the informants' lives reported in the interviews. The induction process was constrained only by the research perspective" (Erickson, 1986, p.). Seidman's in-depth three-series interview process is organized for a deep probe into the lived experiences of the participants. Underpinning my developing analysis as sensitive to contextual variations I followed as open a coding structure as possible. Though this led to a vast number of ideas I believe it allowed me to ground my analysis in the participants' lived

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experiences (Seidman, 2013). Bodgen and Bilken (1982) speak to the importance of open coding and Attinal (1991) followed the looseness of their suggested phenomenological steps in “creating coding categories related to context and setting, informants’ definitions of situations, informants’ ways of thinking about people and objects’ process (sequence of events, changes over time), activities, events, strategies, relationships, and social structure.

Stages 3 and 4: Data Reduction and Preliminary Coding – and – Refining and Secondary Coding

Gaining a sense of grounding in the data the research questions were used to bring greater structure and to move from wider into more conceptual categories. Considering the data from all teachers and administrators the research questions were used to guide a more refined yet still quite open process of coding. On NVivo 11 five major categories comprised:

- i. School board context and demographic information
- ii. Relationship between professional learning, early reading instruction and student reading achievement
- iii. Provincial context
- iv. Contextual variables at the school, board and provincial levels influencing early reading professional learning
- v. Context specific to each case school

I shifted related sub-categories into each main category which allowed the original coding categories to give way to conceptual categories that gave some structure to developing a sense of organization towards answering the research questions.

For example in considering the notion of the research question: How do teachers perceive the relationship between professional learning, early reading instruction, and student reading achievement 5 overarching conceptual categories emerged (*parenthesis demonstrates number of respondents on the left and number of highlighted/related statements*).

- i. How teachers’ current reading programs meets their learners’ reading needs (6, 112)
- ii. Maintaining commitment to learning a reading program (6, 103)

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- iii. Mentorship and support (6, 78)
- iv. The key role of early reading professional learning in their career (6, 97)
- v. Responsibility to students (6, 79).

The research question, How do teachers perceive contextual variables at the school, board and provincial level influence the uptake and opportunities of early reading professional learning had four quite general conceptual categories feed into it.

- i. Access to, availability of , and opportunities
- ii. Driving forces of teacher learning and change
- iii. Influence of stakeholders
- iv. What is missing, ways to improve

For this research question there were a high number of sub-categories within each of the four conceptual categories. Whereas the research question on perceptions of teachers to professional learning and perceived influence of this on their reading instruction and student reading achievement was quite connected to the relationship between early reading instruction and professional learning, this question cast a large net to capture elements of context. I was confident that a sense of how teachers perceived professional learning, a sense of their understanding of early reading instruction was emerging in the thoughtful dedication to process of categorizing, coding and abstracting themes.

Following the suggestion of grounded theorists (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) I initiated a process of memoing as I worked to streamline the data into their working categories. This process of getting familiar with the data, beginning to untangle and ascertain assumptions of the participants was a necessary first step in opening myself up to the data. This inductive process allowed me to settle myself into participants' stories as related and reflected through in the two research questions. Over the course of three months I explored and generated the fairly unbounded conceptual themes before setting them aside to concentrate on analysis of one research question at a time.

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I was ready to begin within-case analysis following approximately two months of what was preliminary data analysis and saturating myself in the lived experiences of my research participants.

Stage 5 (a) – Within-case Analysis RQ2¹¹

The choice of order for within-case analysis in research question 1 was an arbitrary choice. However I reversed the order when I began analysis led by research question 1. Order of analysis was CES, OES, BES in research question 1. Initial conceptual categories were retained from my preliminary analysis described in steps 1-3 above. The process of analysis was structurally similar for all three case schools though the process also underwent ongoing refinement throughout analysis and drafting the findings. This section describes the general process of generating themes and the major evolutions in the analysis process. The five conceptual categories generated in preliminary analysis provided the structure to the preliminary organization of within case analysis.

First statements from each of the conceptual categories were transferred from NVivo into tables that I created in MS Word. For example for participants at CES I organized a separate table for each participant and created individual tables for each conceptual category. Following this I created descriptive memos for each pulled statement that reflected my interpretation of how it represented the conceptual category it was placed in. I called this process *notes and quotes*. Following this I further categorized each memo by giving a heading to each memo. For example in the conceptual category *responsibility to their students* I had headings of memos speaking to

¹¹ Initially I had the two research questions laid out in the opposite order. This is why the order of the description of analysis refers RQ2 before RQ1. The number of the research questions were reversed as it became evident of the role of context upon teachers' perceptions of their professional learning upon their instruction and their students' early reading development.

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motivation, diversity of academic readiness, stress, attachment and trusting relationships.

Following the memoing and labelling of memos I assigned a letter to order the memos and corresponding number for matching with the corresponding statements. This progressed towards emergent themes related specific with-in case uniquenesses of the case schools. For example for CES the notion of time, motivators to change and the influence of a mentor started to emerge as central ideas influencing teachers' early reading instruction, perceptions of professional learning experiences and statements relating practice and student learning which led to the initial statement of themes: Motivators to change, Awareness towards influence of social and emotional well-being, and commitment to providing an effective reading program. The statements led to themes that were related to but in the end quite distinct from the conceptual categories used to begin the process of within-case analysis. Following an initial draft I moved on to within-case analysis with the other two schools and followed a similar process to construction and writing.

This was an emerging and refined process. For OES, the second case analyzed in the first research question I pulled participant statements, crafted memos and used a pen to write down connections and labels to the statements. Whereas analysis of CES for the same research question was done primarily on the computer I found that having a hardcopy to write on was helpful as I developed the labels. After creating labels and memos I created a table that represented current themes and that used statements previously sorted into the initial (and dissipating) conceptual categories. This led to an outline with three preliminary themes: motivators to change, importance of social and emotional well-being, and commitment to providing an effective reading program. Before going on to write up four more drafts I continued my within-case analysis with BES.

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Blending Elementary School I feel had the benefit of being the third school in this phase of within-case analysis because there was a growing sense of comfortableness and confidence as I progressed and developed experience in this deep qualitative process. I followed the same strategy of sorting statements into preliminary conceptual categories, adding memos to each statement, printing hand notes and labelling statements but then I went a couple steps further. After adding my hand printed notes to statements I cut them up so that I could have them spread around my writing table. Preliminary themes helped me begin to sort and I refined the theme-labelling process as I sorted. I labelled each group and created flow charts to help better order my developing concepts and themes. As I organized and refined my analysis I created a lateral flowchart to help show the relationships reflecting the research question.

The process of analysis for RQ2 described throughout Step 4 provides an overview of the commitment to following an iterative and emergent process of analysis. Initial conceptual categories provided a flexible foundation for helping the data flow into their unique places and the resulting themes at this stage of analysis matured, altered and developed in terms of richness and deeper representativeness of how teachers perceive the relationships between their early reading professional learning, their instruction and their students' reading outcomes. The iterative process continued through multiple drafts until I stepped away five months after beginning within-case analysis related to research question 1.

Stage 5 (b) – Within-case analysis RQ1

Similar to research question 2 analysis of the first research question began by sorting each of the participants' statements that related to (fit in with) my preliminary conceptual categorizing. This research question was structured to gather and unpack how contextual variables at school, board and provincial levels were perceived to be influencing opportunities

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and uptake of early reading professional learning. Considering that my initial category development was open it is important to remark that there were a high quantity of references (pulled statements) across the four broad categories. In terms of this question principal perceptions were connected much more to this second question compared to the first one. There were 1529 statements that loaded into one of four main conceptual categories (accessibility issues, forces of learning and change, stakeholder influence, and missing or needs improvement). These categories had a number of sub-categories within them. For each case I followed the same process as in Step 4. I created tables, generated memos, and hand printed labels and ideas to refine the sorting process into representative themes. A very important step took place after I had created the tables and memos for each case in RQ1. I noticed that as I created outlines from the iterative coding and theme generating process that a number of statements were showing up in the emerging themes. This was expected due to the openness of initial preliminary coding but was beginning to pose a challenge as I worked towards depth rather than latitude. To seek out redundancies I sought repeated statements using my coding of statements/concepts organized in my initial outlines.

This process at times was slow and painstaking but deeply aided my shift to analysis as a process of distillation. In general colour coding was used to distinguish where statements were repeating within an emerged draft of the outline. If codes were repeated in the same concept/idea one was struck out. When codes were repeated within a meta-theme deep consideration was given to how, where and why it would best fit into a certain notion. If codes repeated across multiple meta-themes one was usually chosen to be represented; however at times the same statements were kept to ensure that the kernels of information/ideas pertinent to both constructs

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had an opportunity to be expressed within a written draft. This process of reduction greatly aided the essences of the emerging themes and was an immense help to the drafting process.

In all cases repeated statements were tracked, considered and dealt with. To ensure there weren't too many redundancies across the analysis of both research questions repeated statements were checked across the most recent outlines for all cases. Though there weren't too many redundancies across research questions those that existed helped enhance thinking about the current notions. Drafting and analysis proved an iterative process that shaped how the themes emerged towards the final drafts of within case analysis.

Multiple drafts for each school for each research question were developed in which the emerging nature of the themes came into their own. For example following four drafts of one case school on RQ1 it appeared that I had completed my within-case analysis. However after discussions with my supervisor it was evident that there was overlap between aspects of both sections (RQ1 and RQ2). Further reduction and distillation of themes across each of the within-case drafts was done. The results of this deep distillation led to less themes, a more connected narrative and a process for considering the conceptual implications expressed in the wide net of the research questions.

Step 6: Creation of Contextual Networks

To create these networks I applied Miles and Huberman's suggestion for listing antecedent and mediating variables (1 antecedent through multiple mediating) and outcomes. See Figure 11 for an example of how this was initially organized for Central Elementary School.

Connected to this stage of analyses are three figures (see Figure 3, 4 and 5 in Chapter 4) I created to display how themes were subsumed into the different contextual variables. This stage of analysis took its formal shape through seeking to identify what variables and factors were

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linked to perceptions of influential early reading professional learning and also how they were linked to participants' perceptions of what influences their students' reading success. Miles and Huberman speak to the value of narratives as secondary but essential aspects of this process of data analysis and representation.

Figure 11

Screenshot: E.g., Beginning Steps toward Generating Contextual Networks

Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña
Qualitative Data Analysis 3e

Central Elementary School

Antecedent or Start Variables	Mediating Variables	Outcomes
Foundational development	Perceived lack of readiness / unpreparedness Forced learning Varying early reading professional learning experiences – putting pieces together Undertaking core reading PD / even individual workshops	Development, receptivity and dedication all lead to increased student outcomes
Receptivity	Curiosity and willingness to seek out as much as possible Finding an approach that works and developing skill in this area	p.13 on guided reading "as soon as that happened you could really make your students progress" *** this connects with the row below
Dedication	Seeking ongoing learning opps Finding ways to meet student needs (letting that guide your PL) AK working with DS over time	Developing ways to include small group instruction
School board providing sustained opportunities for learning	Connects to mentorship experiences that is noted in the cell above;	
Mentorship experiences	Relationships (connect with students as well) Resources Training	Knowledge Skills Confidence
Societal shifts /	New focus on developing relationship skills so that learning can take place Social emotional readiness of students at CES which guides teaching practices and influences direction of PL Discordance of curriculum with needs of many grade 1 students	
Perspectives on PL and the influence from the board	Academic based and with PL often considered in terms of across the board Funding opportunities Exclusionary barriers for many teachers	

Source: Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Following the creation of pathways I developed narratives for each which synthesize within-case findings of contextual variables at play within each participants' teaching lives at each of their schools. In doing this I distilled the themes derived in my process of within-case analysis and moved from case narratives to contextual narratives that portray the movement of and between the variables perceived by participants as influential to early reading professional

learning and student reading success/achievement. The contextual networks were then used in my cross-case analysis to generate themes.

Stage 7 Cross-case Analysis

The transitional link between the within-case and cross-case analysis phases incorporates Miles and Huberman's causal network (Huberman, Miles & Saldana, 2014) by adapting its stylistic visual flow of streams and pathways. Whereas Miles and Huberman create causal networks to explain within-case qualitative cause and effect relationships the adaptation to a contextual network visually portrays how contextual variables appear to be influencing participants' perceptions of their professional learning, their early reading instruction and their students' reading outcomes. These contextual networks portray the findings of the within-case narratives in a slightly more linear-like fashion and is an attempt to clarify how different contextual variables can influence professional learning, practice and student learning. They do not claim to be cut and dry causal explanations but rather a range of pathways or streams reflecting the varying processes and experiences that teachers in these particular case schools appear to be influenced by. There are no weights put onto the relationships yet the value of certain contextual variables can be ascertained by the connecting arrows to and from them.

Two central reasons for creating visual contextual display are to have some clarity that might not be transparent in the unique case narratives; and second, pathways to and from succinct and fairly generalized terms help to situate the audience into a location from which more generalized patterns and abstractions across cases can be made. Creating the contextual pathways was not a straightforward, smooth and quick process. The within-case narratives were used to pull out variables and multiple deep readings were conducted to help show the interactions and pathways represented in the participants' perceptions. At times a very messy

process the final products of each contextual network illuminates the uniquenesses of each individual case and provided a platform from which I was able to draw out abstractions across all cases in cross-case analysis.

Stage 8: Creation of Conceptual Framework

Following within- and cross-case analyses and writing the findings for each one more step of analysis was undertaken. A conceptual framework was developed. This followed a process that answered each research question using content from each theme in each stage of analysis. Within-case themes were colour-coded to relate resemblances, each theme for within- and cross-case analyses were numbered and tables were created to specifically answer the research questions. I have provided these tables in their original form below as part of this description to show the coming together of within and cross-case analyses.

You will notice how they are organized by research question. You will also notice in Tables 5 and 6 that there are numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 in parenthesis within the tables. These numbers refer to the theme from which the ideas have been pulled/subsumed. You will notice that Table 5U in answering research question one breaks down answers based on levels at the school, school board and province as per research question one. Following this table is my thinking (in italics) about how this process towards the conceptual framework is going to connect to variables of teacher, student and the learning system. So, for example in Table 5U or 6U under OES you will see a (1) and this signifies that this theme relates to within case *Theme 1: Exclusion: Geographical, Cultural, and Personal Professional*. Cross-case is represented in the fourth column of both tables. There were three cross-case themes and these themes are represented by the numbers in parenthesis throughout the column as well.

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These tables were used to bring the data together and have led to the current conceptual framework (Figure 10).

Table 5U

Answering Research Question 1 by Bringing Within- and Cross-Case Together

How to contextual variables at the school, board, and provincial levels influence the planning, delivery and uptake of early reading professional learning?				
	OES	BES	CES	X-case
School level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -geographical location relates to feelings of isolation; difficulty with attending professional learning (1) - teacher experience influences how they go about obtaining or undertaking personal professional learning (formal or unstructured) (2) - low teacher population inhibits development of sharing community (1) - current web conferencing and collab tech is not looked at favorably by the teachers (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - changing personal responsibilities as well the quantity of professional responsibilities influence how much PL is undertaken (2) - important to have refined selective focus (2) - professional learning connected to peers in their school is deemed important for developing school community, shared language (2) - consistent cycle meetings felt to be an important ingredient influencing learning and change (3) - transitional elements from style of kindergarten to more traditional structures/expectations of grade 1 is challenging for students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teacher experience important to understand in early years of teaching (1) - didn't feel that they didn't know a lot at the beginning (1) - beginning years are a dizzying time (1) - understanding the needs of your students or needs of prospective students would be useful knowledge for influencing the PL you might need (1, 3) - when given time to learn there is the perception of solid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - course of being a teacher is never stable as is shown across the perspectives of all participants (1) - a range of opportunities in early reading appeared to benefit BES and CES participants (1) - teacher lives (families, commitments beyond the class) interplay with uptake and decisions on PL (1) - Discussion points: in connection to above 3 points would be interesting to gather feelings of teachers about how included they feel in the

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	<p>- majority of students are French language 1st and this adds a particular challenge and needed focus for PL (1)</p> <p>- importance of having a classroom community interested in, wanting to learn how to read, and especially in an ESL population (2),</p> <p>- classroom community cont'd in terms of pulling from prior experiences and seeking out ways to meet cultural needs of students (3)</p>	<p>- mix between school and board but the fact that you have to seek out PL (5)</p> <p>- principal belief on ERI and learning to read (5)</p> <p>- costs to teachers can be expensive (5)</p>	<p>understanding (1)</p> <p>- having a principal recognize and act on CT1'2 needs kept her in the profession (2)</p> <p>- creating school community based on needs of students; basic needs of their students (3)</p> <p>- societal changes and the real important needs of students to allow learning to take place (3)</p> <p>- transitional challenges and delayed readiness of students (3)</p> <p>- teacher background; by drawing on the backgrounds of teachers related to their own learning how can this influence the direction they take in their learning and practice (3)</p>	<p>available learning opportunities and also to see if there is continued engagement with PL (has it levelled off, why?) (1)</p> <p>- within school mentoring and learning networks effective for BES and a goal for admin of OES due to its isolation (2)</p> <p>- student needs are highly contextually dependent so there needs to be PL that is sensitive to this beyond just the school, especially for rural and isolated schools; but also related to CES' urban context; and this could be explored in all schools in terms of what teachers see, principal sees and how success/positive attachment to learning at school is considered (b/c not a concern</p>
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				expressed to much from BES) (3)
Board level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is a desire for teachers to be connected through something like a rural school teacher's network (1) - funding and timing of PL inhibits opportunities for realistically participating (1) - induction program limits scope of what teachers could be working on; and who they are working with; and ends abruptly (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - opportunities for varying kinds of professional learning over time can provide a number of ways to design and provide instruction (1) - collaborative relationships across the board and within schools are essential (peers, mentors, experts) (2, 3) - creating networks of learners is desired (2) -sustained networks perceived as so beneficial (2) - experts essential to helping them really understand elements of the reading process (3) - Drop in early reading professional learning (5) - change in focus limits sustained learning opportunities (5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - connections with a reading expert mentor was invaluable (2) - board influenced by academic successes which might not be the most important thing (3) - board is seen as driving much of the professional learning (4) - is a wish that board would listen or find out what teachers think that they need to make PL more connected to teachers' needs (4) - sense of reduced amount of PL (4) - lack of inclusion into PL (4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - topics of PL need to reflect the needs of their students (1) - sudden loss of what appeared to work troubles teachers and influences perceptions on PL (1) - induction program for new teachers not expressed overly positive in terms of the scope of this research (2) - when provided with a mentor working as expert at board level you see the influence this had on one teacher; but also the mentorship provided by one principal for CT1 (2) - has been an explicitly positive influence from one board expert; and one that is desired by OT1

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				<p>and OT2 at OES (SB3) (2)</p> <p>- related to a point in x-case RQ1 but the point is that there is not much PL on helping struggling readers (3)</p>
<p>Provincial level</p>	<p>- cycle system introduces some sharing opportunities and this could be especially helpful for teachers in small rural schools such as OES (1)</p> <p>- school network could be something that the province could help with (1)</p> <p>- perception that current reading focuses in curriculum are somewhat limiting in terms of what they will need, what is authentic for them and what is engaging (1)</p>		<p>-appreciate the professional learning funds but they go fast (4)</p>	<p>- cycle system alluded to especially at OES and BES. Leads to opportunities for within school collaboration</p>

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Table 6U

Answering Research Question 2 by Bringing Within- and Cross-Case Together

How do teachers perceive the relationships between (1) their professional learning, (2) their classroom early reading practices, and (c) student reading outcomes?			
OES Within-case	BES Within-case	CES Within-case	Cross-case
<p>- visits to a model D5 classroom is not perceived to reflect the needs of OES students, or more specifically teaching needs to meet needs of students (1)</p> <p>- program (D5) takes too long to learn, set up, apply in her class; at this stage of her career; so what would be beneficial for beginning teachers and could this need be met?; OT2 reflects this as well in terms of there being so much to do (1)</p> <p>- when teachers layer teaching with past learning it appears there is a related sense of confidence; i.e., OT1 layering smartboard, adapting program – so PL that shows how you could adapt to your particular context would be effective; finding a way for teachers to connect their skills/passions with their learning would likely enhance</p>	<p>- layering past professional learning is connected to perceptions of good teaching and student learning opportunities (1)</p> <p>- being open to new ways of providing reading instruction relates to perceived better teaching; need to be shown how to provide instruction that teachers might not be naturally or ideologically inclined to (BT2 and BT1 initially whole language based) (1)</p> <p>- has been influential and is important for shifting or expanding perspectives on how to provide what is perceived to be effective professional learning (1)</p> <p>- when sustained and connected with peers in the school is perceived as effective on instruction (1, 3)</p> <p>- learning code-based strategies is perceived</p>	<p>- early years a time for exploration but also leads to feelings of being overwhelmed – though this set foundation for generating knowledge in teaching reading; code-based, instructional approaches (1)</p> <p>- early professional learning choices not refined (1)</p> <p>- sustained PL over time provides opportunities for really getting to know and implement a program (1)</p> <p>- would like more professional learning to learn how to help the struggling readers (4)</p>	<p>- is a need for learning a lot of different elements of teaching reading early on (1)</p> <p>- specific ER PL is helpful in helping them connect to student need but also in opening up the world of reading instruction to teachers; e.g., code-based enhancing whole language background (1)</p> <p>- struggling readers are not being helped as much as they could it seems b/c there is a lack of professional learning to help teach struggling readers (3)</p>

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<p>learning and teaching (2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - collaborative learning with peers and led by an expert influenced OT1's instruction; also OT2 speaking to getting resources through interactions with other teachers (2) - being a representative can provide opportunities for being directly involved with something that otherwise wouldn't have been (2) 	<p>to have helped her help her struggling readers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is an ongoing journey and shifts and shapes practice but also, reading instruction is a challenge that needs to have a continued focus (2) - forming relationships is central to professional learning and change (3) - there isn't a lot of PL for students who are struggling to learn how to read; learning about student development and student attachment has helped in creating a learning environment that helps students connect to their learning (4) - on the other hand they are learning broad strategies (4) 		
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Idea dated 2019-09-09: So the plan:

Answer each research question and organize, especially the first one, by looking at levels within the system so school would have teachers, students and possibly admin as layers within the school; board would have structures provided which would include sustainability, expert and

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mentors, etc., and province would have anything that relates to province though there is not going to be too much in provincial.

These tables were then organized by research question to understand (a) how contextual variables at the school, board, and other levels are perceived to influence the planning, delivery and uptake of early reading professional learning and (b) how teachers perceive the relationship between their professional learning, their early reading practices and student reading outcomes. These tables were useful in generating how the main variables (teachers, students, school system) are influenced by varying factors. Taken together notions of self, the nature of teaching, empathy to the nature of the student, and the relationship to learning in a learning system paved a path for conceptualizing the complex interrelationships relating to teacher learning and change and student achievement.

Appendix I: Outer Elementary Contextual Network Narrative

System, Cycle Teams and Learning Opportunities with Peers 1<5<11<14<21<24<23

This stream reflects the positive perceptions of participants at OES related to how the institutional variable through the cycle system (5) forces a form of collaboration (11) between at least two teachers in this small school. This guarantees that there are degrees of collaboration happening in the form of peer learning experiences (14). As remarked by both teachers they crave collaborative learning experiences and with the system running on a cycle system this is one way that teachers can have what they perceive as effective opportunities to develop, experience and accumulate reading resources and instructional strategies (21). OP2's presence in the small and isolated school as her cycle partner is perceived very positively as a peer that she can professionally develop with (24), because she has positively contributed to her teaching and her students' early reading outcome (23).

Leadership and Within School Networks of Learning 1<6<11<9<10<14<22<23

This stream reflects the influence of the principal on teachers' learning opportunities at the school level. It follows a path that is largely comprised of information from my interview with OP. For her the school professional growth is a collaborative process that is developed with her staff (6<11<9) and through a school focus the network sets school professional growth goals that reflect the local language needs of the OES students (10). Teachers work in peer teams (14) where they observe each other's classroom teaching, offer critical feedback, and are expected to complete reflections and share experiences in afterschool professional learning. A rationale behind this structure of professional learning is that it offers a learning community for the teachers (22) and is perceived to influence student reading achievement through a collective whole school approach to the students' early literacy needs (23).

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Location: Mercy to Centralized Populations

These causal networks are interrelated yet distinct enough for representing as four diverse paths influenced in the school's isolated location. Isolated and at the mercy of a school board with many larger and closer schools OES' location indicates particular barriers inhibiting this rural school's teachers' professional learning opportunities.

1<7<10

There were two main board supported (1) early reading initiatives (7) mentioned by OT1 and OT2. Though there were some elements of the programs that they thought were effective, OT1 and OT2, along with the principal OP believed that overall these programs did not supply a way to develop more knowledge and strategies for helping their students' with their particular early reading language needs (10).

1<3<8<17<19

At a provincial-institutional level (1) one obstacle to professional learning is reflected in the geographic isolation of OES (3), the scheduling of the professional learning days (8), and the costs that OT1 and OT2 incur by having to travel far out of their way to obtain professional learning (17 and 19).

1<8<17<19

For the most part the board and province (1) determine the schedule of professional learning (8) and often the scheduling presents obstacles to professional learning in terms of timing (17). Scheduling provides tensions between professional obligations and teachers' personal lives (19). Too often participants believed that their professional learning days were scheduled in times that made the choice to attend professional learning a difficult one (for example, professional learning was often scheduled near report writing, parent conferences or

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and near holidays). These variables reduced the likelihood teachers would leave to attend professional development.

1<3<4<11<12

From a decision standpoint the educational institution (1) determines the schools' locations. Geographical isolation particularly inhibited attending professional learning at school board headquarters (3) and both participants perceived to be excluded from accessing the professional learning other teachers in less isolated schools were able to (4). OP remarks how OES needs to find better ways to utilize web conferencing and both teachers noted how that due to their isolation that the board has set up web conferencing opportunities at the school (11). However their techno-collaborative learning has been perceived negatively and ineffective (12).

Collaborative Learning Opportunities Merged with Local-contextual Needs

2<11<10<15<14<21<24<23

This stream reflects the receptivity from both teachers (2) to learning collaboratively (11). When learning opportunities relate to the local contextual needs of their students (10), facilitated by an expert early reading mentor (15), and comprises a peer learning design (14) this is expressed to be a highly valued mode of professional learning that provides resources and reading strategies (21) and that is perceived to be influential early reading professional learning and relates to providing practices that improves student reading outcomes.

Tapping into Prior Professional Learning: The Value of Experience *2<25<10<13<22<23*

This stream speaks more to meeting the particular needs of students (10) by bringing in past learning experiences (13) and generating a positive classroom community (22) and that this positive environment contributes to improving student reading attitudes and outcomes (23). For example it took time for OT1 to realize she needed to take advice that she received in a prior

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learning experience about empathizing with her students' first language and to show them her vulnerability of using some French during the day with them. She also constantly uses her prior Smartboard training to enhance her literacy lessons and make learning experiences more authentic. For OT2 she developed a routine every Monday where she has her students share about their weekend in English to build community and allow them to practice English in a safe setting. This was something she learned when she volunteered in an intensive language arts setting. What these experiences reflect is the importance of ensuring that prior learning experiences can be connected to teachers' current practice.

Appendix J: Blending Elementary Contextual Network Narrative

Experience, Ownership and Instructional Paradigm Shifts 1<11<12<13<14<24<25

This stream represents the flow of learning based in participants' developing sense of awareness of their professional needs as they accumulate experience over time (1<11<12). BT1 and BT2 experienced a range of professional learning opportunities which were perceived to provide some broader ways to provide early reading instruction to meet their students' needs (13). Their varied early professional learning experiences related to shifts in their perspectives towards how they approached their early reading instruction (14). In particular both teachers have developed their understanding and appreciation for aspects of code-based (phonics, phonemic awareness) principles of early reading instruction. This ability to accept and merge these elements into their practice (24) has boosted their beliefs that they are offering an environment and instructional practices that are helping to develop student reading achievement (25).

Experience, Flexibility, Learning Networks and Community

1<10<9<13<18<22<21<20<24<25

Growth over time (1) also connects to the way in which BT1 and BT2 have made sense of the varied professional learning experiences that they have had over time by layering them into their early reading instruction (10). This represents a willingness and flexibility of teachers to incorporate different learning experiences and some not directly related to reading instruction to become a natural part of their practice (9<13). Participants spoke of the value of collaborative networking as memorable and influential upon impressing a deep understanding in relating professional learning to practice (18) and especially so when these networks comprise peers at OES (22). These multiple and collaborative professional learning networks establish

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relationships within and outside of their school for which they turn to for immediate feedback, answers and this network establishes lasting relationships which anchors a sense of community within the board and in the schools (20) and is perceived of as an extremely effective mode for professional learning (24) that improves their reading instruction and their students' reading outcomes (25).

Institutional Streamlining of the Learning Experience 4<6<18<19<20<24<25

Institutional variables (4) positively influence teachers' perceptions of their professional learning experiences when they include initiatives that are sustained over time and comprise specific foci (6). For example both participants have valued the early reading initiatives that the board has provided over close to the last decade. The variables that have influenced their positive perceptions relate to the collaborative networking (18) and the inclusion of a mentor that provided expertise and was regularly available to offer help and resources (19). In addition BT1 and BT2 remarked how effective the learning experiences were when they were held in their school and with their peers as this enhanced their learning experiences, was perceived to boost their practice and their students' reading outcomes (25) because of the direct relevance it had to their classrooms.

Top-down Professional Development Directions 3<16<18<22<20

This stream reflects the role of leadership perspective on the direction of the school's professional development goals. BP incorporates topics when she sees fit but for the most part has teachers develop their learning goals within small cycle group meetings (16). She values the collaborative learning process (18) and believes that learning teams helps generate a positive school climate (20) with teams focused on the needs of their students.

Top-down Leadership, Learning Opportunities and Student Readiness 3<2<7<15

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Though BP spoke about the freedom for cycle groups to work together in professional learning it appears valuable to consider her perspective on students that struggle to learn how to read (2). For the most part she believes that many of the students that are struggling to learn how to read just aren't ready but whose difficulties over time will dissipate (7). School growth when undertaken is currently focused on developing teachers' awareness and skills to help students develop their metacognition.

Board Limitations 4<5<17

Accessibility issues are a factor on perceptions of effectiveness of obtaining professional learning (5). A cluster of inhibitors represent the costs (17a) that fall on the shoulders of participants as they have to pay up front and the general lack of specific early reading instruction that focuses on students that struggle with learning how to read (17b); and the sense that there is a general reduction of available professional learning offered by the board compared to in years past (17c).

Tensions Between the Professional and Personal 1<11<23

A constraint to professional learning occurs overtime to teachers as they prioritize or make space and time for personal obligations (23) due to family needs or other personal circumstances that accumulate with growing life responsibilities.

Appendix K: Central Elementary Contextual Network Narrative

New Experiences, Learning and Change *1<9<11<10<24<23<31<30*

This stream or pathway reflects the frenzy of learning how to teach in the early years (9). It portrays the importance of these years to the two teacher participants at CES and relates being receptive (11) and open to a multitude of professional learning experiences. Though this is perceived as an overwhelming time both contribute many of these beginning experiences to developing their foundations to their early reading instruction here (10). This early learning provided the experiences that have informed the core early reading practices of both early reading teachers (24). For CT1 this is guided reading and for CT2 this is a balanced approach to reading instruction applying literacy stations that have been a part of the literacy initiative provided by the board over her eight years of teaching grade 1. The culmination of the range of early reading professional learning experiences along with underpinning reading instruction in core approaches have increased their efficacy (23). In turn these experiences are perceived to have been positive and have informed their early reading practice and is perceived to have improved their students' early reading achievement (30).

Professional Maturation and Considering the Local Context

1<9<11<10<24<8<12<21<22<25<26<30

This path extends upon the linear like path described above. As CT1 and CT2 gained experience and efficacy of early reading instruction and had confidence in the type of programs they used to ground their early reading instruction (10<24) they appear to have considered local and unique needs that they believed were impacting their students' opportunities for early reading success (8) and were dedicated to infusing their instruction to meet certain needs (12). Their focus on developing relationships and social-emotional skills (21<22) is perceived by them

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as essential and helpful in settling their students into their classrooms early in the year. They perceive they have developed skills and the resources to add a social-emotional element into their teaching and that this is helpful in their early reading instruction and is essential for instilling a positive classroom environment or community (25<26). Maturation, inclusion of social-emotional elements to learning and a focus on meeting the relational needs of their students is perceived as important in helping students' improve their early reading outcomes (30).

Leadership and the Local Communities 2<6<7<12<13<21<22<26<30

This pathway reflects the contextual influence of the school principal upon the nature of professional learning directions at the school. It follows two pathways but both stem from his beliefs on the current nature of society and how his students appear to be particularly impacted (2<6<7<12). CP perceives that the urban, transitory and low socio-economic nature of many of the parents have negatively influenced the attachment levels of the students and that they are not prepared for school when they encounter a more traditional curriculum in grade 1 (13<21). He has guided much of the school development goals in his time as the principal to get teachers to develop their awareness and ability to develop relationship building skills with the students (22). His goal is to re-develop an understanding of school as a community hub (26) and sees calm, attached students as better ready for improving their academic outcomes (30).

Leadership and Learning Restraints 2<6<7<5<15<17

As noted above much of the professional learning goals for CES are based in CP's priorities (6<7<5) to develop a better connected school community that helps its needy young students decrease their detachment from school. There wasn't discussion from participants on professional learning at the school level that was focused on their early reading professional

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development. CT1 commented on the need to have teachers make more decisions and that some teachers at the school were sick of the focus on attachment. With CP's top-down (15) prioritizing of attachment and relationship development other forms of learning are excluded and there is a sense that there is some professional disinterest in this which is impeding other opportunities for their professional learning (17).

An Essential Nudge 2<32<19<25<23<31<30

This pathway represents a moment in a CT1's early career that she believes defined and changed her career due to the empathy of the principal at the time (2<32). After contemplating leaving CT1 was provided with a mentor (19) all day for one week and this provided her resources and skills (25) needed to ground herself, influence her planning (25) and provide needed efficacy and confidence for her teaching. She attributes this kind of professional learning as integral on her overall instruction (31) and an important part of helping her practices for improving her students' outcomes.

Fluid Structures Supporting Early Reading Professional Learning

3<5<14<19<20<22<25<23<31<30

This pathway appears to represent a formula that CT2 was extremely receptive of. In a sense it reflects a group of ingredients leading to teacher learning and perceived effectiveness of practice and student reading outcomes that are generated at the school board level. Two specific early reading initiatives (5) have occurred over approximately the last decade. With a board-level mentor (19) these sustained learning opportunities (20) have resulted in professional relationships that have developed between CT2 and the reading specialist (22). This has led to an accumulation of resources to help implement the programs and a strong sense of efficacy for setting up the program and helping others learn it (23). This then is perceived to be an effective

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way for learning how to implement early reading instruction (31) and is perceived to improve practices and students' reading outcomes (30).

Delimiting Variable Streams

3<4<16

This pathway reflects the perception of the challenges of financial costs related to obtaining professional learning.

3<4<15<(18<[27, 28], 17, 29)

Multifaceted compared to the accessibility issues discussed above. The top-down (15) directive of professional learning can also restrain teacher learning three ways as discussed by CT1 and CT2. First relates to participation (18) and exclusion (27). Both teachers noted the exclusionary nature of any of the professional learning networks and groups. They didn't know how to personally access learning grants and noted that there were only limited numbers of teachers selected. Second, participation in professional learning appears to be dropping because it appears that less professional learning is available (28). Though CT2 has enjoyed her board supported early reading professional learning opportunities CT1 noted a sense of disinterest in them (17) and therefore has not had the same learning opportunities as CT2. Third the priorities from the board do not appear to provide teachers with opportunities to learn how to improve their instruction for students with reading difficulties (29).