Exploring the Design Process and Components of an Elementary Literacy Guide in an Ontario School Board Initiative

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Abstract

The skill to identify and use best practices in literacy to promote achievement for students of all abilities cannot be underestimated by elementary educators. This qualitative case study investigates 1 year of a literacy initiative for primary and junior educators organized by a southern Ontario school board. The goals of the initiative were to design a literacy guide for teachers while building teacher capacity with literacy practices. Data were culled and analyzed from an examination of the guide, the meetings’ field notes and artifacts, as well as interviews with the educators at the end of the year. Several themes from the results emerged. The educators perceived the design process as unclear but the collaborative components were deemed valuable. The guide’s incompletion led to mixed reactions from the educators about the guide and its structure. Overall, the first year of the 3-year initiative acted as a catalyst for professional learning on literacy. The findings of this study accentuated the value of training educators to use empirical research to support their practices and professional knowledge. Also, the significance of promoting strong leadership with a comprehensive layout consisting of coherent tangible goals for professional development is highlighted.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

“As we move towards a thorough understanding of literacy, we work together to motivate students to become critical and creative communicators and responsible and respectful participants in world communities” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 4).

This was a study of a southern Ontario school board initiative that focused on identifying exemplary literacy practices and resources. The product of the initiative was a guide referencing literacy practices and resources. This research tracked the design process, the creation of the guide, as well as the perceptions of the educators who designed the guide. In the context of this study, the term “educators” refers to teachers, resource teachers, literacy coaches, Reading Recovery leads, Early Years consultants, and literacy consultants. In Ontario, primary division teachers encompass the Early Learning Kindergarten Program (ELKP) to grade 3 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, 2011). Grade 4 to grade 6 teachers represent the junior division (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Resource teachers assist classroom teachers with planning, assessment, and identifying resources for specific students to promote success (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001). Literacy coaches are experienced teachers who guide classroom teachers through new teaching practices or curriculum in order to enhance the teacher’s professional knowledge in relation to literacy (Aubut et al., 2004; Laveault et al., 2003; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Walpole & Blamey, 2008). Reading Recovery leads are designated to work with the lowest achieving students on reading skills and strategies (Reading Recovery, 2014). Early years consultants specialize in supporting classroom teachers in kindergarten and the early primary grades (Aubut et al., 2004). Literacy
consultants are a part of the program support staff who “facilitate professional learning throughout the board by sharing good practices and by encouraging communication among schools” (Aubut et al., 2004, p. 98). Collectively, each position contributed to the diverse panel in this initiative.

**Background of the Problem**

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2013b) defines literacy as “the ability to use language and images in rich and varied forms to read, write, listen, speak, view, represent, discuss, and think critically about ideas . . . to share information and to interact with others” (p. 3). Literacy encompasses language components, such as reading, writing, speaking, as well as the interactions of language through text or oral communication. Aubut et al. (2004) defines a text as “a representation of ideas that can be shared over distance and time” (p. 6). Texts are represented in various print and electronic forms, such as a paper flyer and an online blog (Aubut et al., 2004). Literacy development is crucial for academic achievement as students rely on their language skills in other subject areas, such as mathematics, science, and social studies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006).

The impact of literacy development also extends outside the classroom. Within its *Statement for the United Nations Literacy Decade* found in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2006) language curriculum, the United Nations stated that “those who use literacy take it for granted—but those who cannot use it are excluded from much communication in today’s world. Indeed, is it the excluded who can best appreciate the notion of ‘literacy as freedom’” (p. 3). To be literate is to possess a sense of power because literacy fosters relationships, participation, accessibility, culture, and identity
It can be argued that language is the foundation to the education system as literacy promotes success in the personal, academic, and employment realms (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2006).

**Ontario’s Language Arts Curriculum**

Ontario’s language arts curriculum document outlines topics and skills that are expected to be taught by teachers for each grade in order to meet provincial standards (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). The ELKP language curriculum is separated from the language curriculum for grades 1 to 8 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, 2011). Both curriculum documents outline the significance of literacy, the roles of various educator positions, considerations for English language learners, notes for children with special needs, plus assessment methods (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006, 2011).

The ELKP curriculum document incorporates language development through multiple topics, including teaching approaches, the use of the school library, and curriculum planning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). The curriculum states that children will explore language through play-based centres and tasks (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). Teachers and early childhood educators develop centres and tasks in accordance to the children’s development and the curriculum focus (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). Reading, writing, and oral communication are addressed separately and integrated together (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). The intention of the ELKP’s language curriculum is to build a community of literate learners by using the children’s prior knowledge and ongoing formative assessment (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011).

By contrast, the Language Arts curriculum (grades 1 to 8) is segregated by each language component (reading, writing, and oral communication) and grade (Ontario
The overall expectations for oral communication are: (a) to listen and respond suitably in various contexts, (b) to use strategies to orally communicate with different audiences, and (c) to self-reflect on one’s oral communication learning progress (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Reading’s overall expectations include: (a) to read in order to comprehend texts, (b) to identify and read a variety of text forms, (c) to read fluently with related strategies, and (d) to self-reflect on one’s reading progress (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). The overall expectations for writing revolved around the writing process: (a) to create and organize ideas for purposeful writing, (b) to draft and revise writing with related strategies, (c) to edit and publish writing with affiliated strategies, and (d) to self-reflect on one’s writing progress (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). The overall expectations emphasize that students will develop and apply strategies in authentic contexts.

Similar to other curriculum documents, the Ontario Language Arts curriculum is premised on a progression of skill development throughout the grades (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). In the primary division, the curriculum focuses on building foundational language skills through the students’ prior knowledge, exposure, and direct teaching (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). By grade 3, there is an emphasis on applying skills and strategies individually and/or in a group (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). In the junior division, the curriculum highlights application through multimedia texts (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Designing authentic activities to utilize all three strands of language, allowing students to use their opinion, integrating cultural components, providing multiple text forms, and encouraging critical thinking strategies were also integrated in the junior division (Ontario Ministry of Education,
In general, the language arts curriculum promotes two key instructional practices to support the progression of skills: (a) to integrate literacy into other subjects as a method for students to practice literacy skills, and (b) to choose texts, strategies, and instructional methods to best accommodate their students’ abilities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006).

**Understanding the Levels of Ontario’s Education System**

An education system operates with designated roles and responsibilities at each level: the external level, the internal level, and the personal level (Goodson, 2014). The external level includes governmental institutions. In Canada, education-related powers are controlled provincially; however the Canadian government’s Minister of Education oversees the work of the provincial/territorial governments (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Both national and provincial educative government bodies represent the external level (Goodson, 2014). School board administrators reflect the internal level of responsibility and the educators (i.e., teachers and support staff) assemble the personal level (Goodson, 2014). All levels influence each other politically and socially, as demonstrated through Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (Goodson, 2014).

The interactions between the levels are reflective of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model with each level resembling a system that surrounds “the child” (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). The influence of historical context in the chronosystem is the largest system (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). The external level lies in the macrosystem that reflects society’s blueprint of attitudes, values, cultural customs, and government influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). The internal level is a part of the exosystem that connects indirect settings that are influential to the child, such as the parent’s workplace, mass
media organizations, and the school community (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). The personal level relates to the microsystem that immediately surrounds the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). The microsystem represents the direct physical, social, and culture structures the child interacts with, including teachers, family, friends, and cultural traditions (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). Each level of government is situated in a system from Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model.

The interconnection of the levels/systems demonstrates the political and social influences to impact a child’s life (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). For instance, if Ontario’s Ministry of Education (external level in the macrosystem) desires to improve language scores of grade 3 and grade 6 students on EQAO, then the government will set a budget for elementary school boards (internal level in the exosystem) to initiate language education professional development sessions and purchase resources for teachers (personal level in the microsystem) (Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2015). This decision puts an emphasis on language instructional time and teachers’ capacity for professional learning of language practices, thus theoretically enhancing student literacy achievement. This example illustrates the multi-directional act-react relationship each level/system has with each other within the Ontario education system.

**Teachers Within the Ontario Education System**

The roles and responsibilities of Ontario teachers are designated by the Ontario government (Goodson, 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). According to section 264.1 of Ontario’s Education Act, a teacher is responsible for preparing lessons with textbooks that are accepted by the Ministry, teaching, inspiring students to learn, establishing a healthy learning environment, co-operating with staff members, following
discipline protocol, respecting all forms of school property, and participating in professional activity or professional development days (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). To uphold this level of professionalism with the latest research and education techniques, educators use curriculum supports funded by the government (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Curriculum supports are kits, resources, workshops, or experts that assist a teacher in designing, implementing, and evaluating a lesson, unit or curriculum (Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009). The use of curriculum supports, such as the guide in this research study, enhance teachers’ practices and potentially may be a contributing factor to improved student achievement (Dyson, 2010; Laveault et al., 2003). In summary, educators are responsible for maintaining professional standards, teaching, and demonstrating accountability for student achievement.

**Statement of the Problem**

The importance of literacy education cannot be underestimated. Early literacy education is a predictor for future language achievement, therefore making literacy instruction crucial for educators to facilitate effectively (Dyson, 2010; Khan & Gorard, 2012; Laveault et al., 2003). Any class of students may have a wide range of literacy performances extending below and/or above grade level. It cannot be assumed that all primary and junior teachers have the capability to support below grade level and above grade level achieving students in literacy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). To target each student’s ability, educators need to have knowledge about best practices in literacy and related curriculum supports. Given the significance of literacy education, it is unjustified that exceptional literacy practices are not universally defined and effective...
literacy curriculum supports have not been identified. Implementing sound instructional and assessment literacy practices in addition to identifying valid resources are professional responsibilities of elementary educators. Not all educators may be equipped to make such informed judgments.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how primary-junior educators identify exemplary literacy practices. The design process to create a literacy guide for elementary teachers (i.e., the initiative’s structure) as well as the guide itself were the context used to understand the process of delineating literacy practices and resources. A subsection of the data targeted the educators’ perceptions of the design process and the guide for an in-depth analysis. As a primary-junior teacher, this research study allowed me to gain insight on the process of categorizing literacy practices, designing professional development initiatives, and resource construction.

**Research Questions**

This research project is structured by the following questions:

1. What is the process in which educators engaged to develop a guide to train other teachers in effective reading instruction?
2. What are the components of a guide to support educators in effective reading instruction?
3. What are educators’ perceptions of the process in which they engaged to develop the guide?
Rationale

The professional development project was initiated by the school board as a reaction to the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2013a) *Learning for All* document. The *Learning for All* document aligns Ontario standards with instructional and assessment practices for teachers to apply in order to promote student academic achievement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a). The initiative was also a response to the lack of teacher capacity to address all levels of literacy performance that were observed by the school board’s literacy coaches and Reading Recovery leads. Components of the design process, included the meetings to identify best literacy practices, classroom observations, and co-teaching sessions with marker students reflected characteristics of the *Learning for All* document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a). This was enacted as a preventive measure to equip teachers within the school board to support all students in the classrooms (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a). Ontario administrators, resource designers, and educators may be interested in this research study due to the rationale, the context of the guide’s design, the design process, and the summary of literacy practices.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided this study was social constructivism. Adams (2006) defined social constructivism as the “construction of knowledge is the product of social interaction, interpretation and understanding” (p. 245). When an individual actively participates in his/her environment through oral communication with other people, social constructivism is involved (Adams, 2006; Creswell, 2014; Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). Social constructivism is a branch of constructivism, in which an individual builds knowledge from experiences and environmental interactions to develop
a “truth” (Adams, 2006; Creswell, 2014). Unlike post-positivism, constructivism and social constructivism value the complexity of having multiple truths (Adams, 2006; Creswell, 2014; Liu & Matthews, 2005). Knowledge is contextual because “individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). The meanings that develop the truth are then accepted by a socio-cultural group (Adams, 2006; Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). Thus, qualitative research within social constructivism is dependent on the participants’ view to develop an understanding of the truth (Creswell, 2014).

Lev Vygotsky was an architect of social constructivism, who emphasized the importance of language, especially oral communication, due to its contribution to social and cognitive development (Adams, 2006; Jennings & Di, 1996; Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002; Liu & Matthews, 2005). Vygotsky postulated the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). The zone of proximal development is a model resembling “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 33). When working through the zone of proximal development, the adult must plan the tasks at the learner’s instructional level to challenge the learner to complete the tasks (Adams, 2006; Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002; Nuthall, 2002). Scaffolding—when an adult orally guides the learner through a task by prompting and questioning—occurs throughout the zone of proximal development for dependent learner to eventually be able to work independently on a specific task (Jennings & Di, 1996; Nuthall, 2002).
Social constructivism has principles to define itself theoretically within education. For instance, teachers are facilitators instead of lecturers to provide opportunities to work with students at their individualized zone of proximal development (Adams, 2006; Nuthall, 2002). Within this study, the teachers embodied the learners’ role to socially construct their knowledge through group discussions. Research by Grierson and Gallagher (2009) as well as Preciado-Babb and Liljedahl (2012) reflect this notion. In Grierson’s and Gallagher’s (2009) research, the main component of the professional development was the group debrief after observing the mentor teacher who modelled such strategies in the classroom. This discussion component was favoured by the participants (Grierson & Gallagher, 2009). Preciado-Babb and Liljedahl (2012) presented three scenarios of Alberta educators who jointly worked on designing and implementing teaching artifacts. Both research studies demonstrate the success of teachers learning from each other’s experience to achieve a final goal through social constructivism.

Social constructivism is reflective of this research study’s theoretical framework based on the structure of the school board’s literacy initiative and the procedure in which the educators engage in to create the guide. The educators were challenged to identify effective literacy practices, assessments, and resources when they met as a group at the meetings, observations, and co-teaching sessions. The K-12 literacy consultant facilitated discussions at the meetings; however the educators collectively drove the discussion at the meetings and the design process for the guide. Social constructivism was identified as theoretical foundation because the educators ultimately co-constructed their knowledge through oral communication within an authentic learning environment.
Scope and Limitations of the Study

The scope of this study is to understand the development of a guide for educators to implement effective literacy practices and resources. This bounded case study encompassed a school board’s initiative that was structured around predetermined goals that included designing a primary-junior literacy guide. Despite these specific goals, the process and end result were emergent (Creswell, 2014; Richards & Morse, 2013). Using qualitative data collection (i.e., field notes, observations, and interviews) captured the process and reflections of the design process for the guide (Creswell, 2014; Richards & Morse, 2013).

In general, qualitative research has limitations because it does not have a single answer to any question due to the complexity and subjectivity obtained from data (Creswell, 2014; Liu & Matthews, 2005). Accordingly, the results of this research cannot be generalized to the public community because the initiative was individualized to one Ontario school board (Creswell, 2014). Methodological countermeasures to enhance consistency and trustworthiness of the research were enacted (Creswell, 2014; Richards & Morse, 2013). Despite the limitations, this year-long professional development was an example of how educators collaborate to enhance their teaching practices. This initiative was a comprehensive opportunity to gather data on the knowledge building process.

Summary

This research study explored the process and perceptions of designing a literacy guide. Simultaneously, this research also investigated how exemplary literacy practices and resources were identified by educators. To accomplish this, there was an examination of the design process and final product of guide with consideration to the educators’
perceptions on both topics. This professional development initiative exemplified the influence of different levels of the education system on teachers’ practices, as reflected in Bronfenbrenner’s (1993) ecological model. Given the diversity of students’ needs (i.e., academic and non-academic), teachers’ content knowledge about subject-based knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and need for sound instructional resources is apparent. Selecting and utilizing evidence-based practices and resources can be daunting for teachers. This study was based on a southern Ontario school board that created a literacy initiative to bring elementary educators together to discuss, collaborate, design, and use practices as a reaction to Ontario’s Learning for All document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a).

Next, chapter 2 presents the literature on topics reflected in the research questions: professional learning, professional development, literacy resources, and effective literacy practices. Chapter 3 provides a detailed plan and explanation of the research design with expected limitations. The results from the qualitative data analysis are outlined in chapter 4. Lastly, chapter 5 includes a discussion with theoretical and practical implications based on this research study’s results.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Chapter 2 is a literature review of the topics reflected in the research questions. First, an overview of professional learning along with professional development in Ontario is summarized. Then, the use of and design of literacy resources are investigated with empirical studies in light of the initiative’s goal to produce a guide. Lastly, the literature related to effective literacy practices with an emphasis on reading practices are described.

Professional Learning in Education

Professional learning is referred to as “changes in the thinking, knowledge, skills, and approaches to instruction that form practicing teachers’ or administrators’ repertoire” (Knapp, 2003, p. 112). Similarly, the Ontario College of Teachers (2015) states that professional learning should be “informed by experience, research, collaboration and knowledge” (para. 7). Professional learning is the result of informal learning (e.g., discussions with colleagues) or formal learning (e.g., professional development). Professional development provides structure for professional learning that “involves workshops, courses, programs and related activities that are designed presumably to provide teachers with new ideas, skills, and competencies necessary” (Fullan, 2007, p. 35; Knapp, 2003). Professional learning and by affiliation, professional development theoretically result in higher student achievement (Borko, 2004; Gibson & Brooks, 2012; Hardy & Wagga, 2009; Ontario College of Teachers, 2000; Ransford et al., 2009; Van de Berg, Ros, & Beijaard, 2014). The purpose of professional learning, the design process of professional development, and the benefits of professional development are investigated
to gain insight on how to achieve higher quality professional learning in education (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007; Webster-Wright, 2009).

**Purpose of Professional Learning**

Originally, implementing professional development, as a form of professional learning was the government’s reaction to society’s perceived deficits of teacher performance in the United States (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Professional development originated in the 1940s with short lecture-like workshops (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Today, professional learning through professional development is an expectation in the workforce as a way to keep employees current with constant changes in their profession (Borko, 2004; Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013). Ontario’s Ministry of Education uses professional development as a method to update teachers on research-based practices; thus strengthening the accountability of classroom teaching (Ontario College of Teachers, 2000; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Accountability is often measured by standardized assessments written by students at the international, national, and provincial level that quantitatively ranks the educational systems. Examples of education assessments are The Programme for International Student Assessment (international level), Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (national level), and the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) in Ontario (provincial level) (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2015; Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2015; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015). The scores on assessments drive the frequency and content of professional development (Hardy & Wagga, 2009).
Each level of the education system, as outlined in chapter 1, plays a role in the professional development that teachers in the province receive. The Canadian and Ontario governments set budgets to offer professional development (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Each school board is responsible to organize resources with respect to professional development that is responsive to student achievement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). The school board’s superintendents are responsible for providing support by initiating specific professional development for staff in relation to research, policies and assessment data (Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Funding, resource allocation, board-wide initiatives, and creating a work environment supporting professional learning are also a part of the superintendents’ responsibilities (Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). At the school level, the principal organizes curriculum supports based on the site-based budget, promotes partnerships within the educational community, develops school goals with staff, and arranges scheduling time for staff to participate in professional development (Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Ultimately, funding and administrative support drive the enactment of professional learning through professional development.

Hardy and Wagga (2009) investigated Ontario administrators’ (i.e., Ministry officials and principals) perceptions of professional development. Participants were interviewed about the types of professional development provided to educators, the influence of the province’s literacy and numeracy scores on professional development content, as well as the progression of professional learning over time (Hardy & Wagga, 2009). Administrators exclaimed that professional development was a response to the government and public pressure for accountability (Hardy & Wagga, 2009).
Administrators stated that professional development reflects evidence-based literacy and numeracy practices targeted to increase student scores on the provincial standardized assessment as it dictates the quality of education in Ontario (Hardy & Wagga, 2009). This study outlines the disconnected relationship between administrators and educators, as the participants did not address the necessity of contextualizing professional development to the individual needs of teachers and/or students.

**Designing Professional Development**

To facilitate professional development requires a design process (Borko, 2004; Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003). This process begins with reasoning for a professional development on a particular topic, followed by clearance and funding (Borko, 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Professional development designers control the content, pedagogical strategies, location, duration, and incorporated media (Butler, Lauscher, Jarvis-Selinger, & Beckingham 2004; Fishman et al., 2003; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Penuel et al., 2007). Other structural features considered by the designers are the target audience (e.g., teachers in a specific grade or all educators in one school) and the format (Garet et al., 2001). It is recommended that professional developments comprise high-quality content over the quantity of information, in addition to meet a balance of administrators’ and teachers’ needs for the professional development to be deemed purposeful (Penuel et al., 2007; Webster-Wright, 2009). Penuel et al. (2007) summarized this balance as, “providers thus need to consider not only teachers’ own contexts but also the program’s demands on teachers and how those demands can be met within contexts” (p. 952). Next, complimentary resources, such as texts, kits, or websites are incorporated into the professional development design.
(Borko, 2004). The last steps are to implement, debrief/assess, and make alterations to the final professional development to enhance it for the future (Borko, 2004).

**Professional development formats.** Professional developments are offered in a variety of formats, including graduate education, additional qualification courses through the Ontario College of Teaching, workshops, webinars, conferences, and meetings (Hardy & Wagga, 2009; Ontario College of Teachers, 2000). School site-based teacher driven groups of learning on designated topics called professional learning communities (also known as learning communities) are also a form of professional development (Gersten, Dimino, Jayanthi, Kim, & Santoro, 2010; Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013). A similar concept to personal learning communities are teacher study groups that are collaborations of teachers working towards common goals using evidence-based practices and implementing innovative educational concepts (Gersten et al., 2010).

Differentiated professional learning provides choices for how and what the targeted educators will learn from the professional development.

As an example, Gersten et al.’s (2010) mixed methods research examined a grade 1 teacher study group whose members desired to enhance their vocabulary and comprehension language instruction. Eighty-one teachers from 19 schools comprised the experimental (new literacy instruction) and control (traditional literacy instruction) groups (Gersten et al., 2010). The experimental teacher study groups consisted of 16 literacy workshops throughout the year, small group meetings, and a vocabulary text resource, in comparison to the control group who only attended regular district assigned professional development (Gersten et al., 2010). The teacher study group showed a significant increase in teacher knowledge and student achievement, thus demonstrating
the effective professional learning through group-focused professional development (Gersten et al., 2010).

Coaching is a more recent alternative form of professional learning that Ontario introduced in 2003 (Laveault et al., 2003; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Instructional coaches and literacy coaches are examples of curriculum support that assist teachers informally through discussions (professional learning) and/or lead teachers through a formal personalized form of professional development (Laveault et al., 2003; Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Walpole and Blamey (2008) describe the primary role of instructional coaches as assisting “teachers through ongoing, comprehensive professional development consistent with a system of theory, demonstration, practice and feedback” (p. 222). Literacy coaches are similar to instructional coaches, except literacy coaches have a specific focus on language (Laveault et al., 2003). Responsibilities of coaches may extend to mentoring teachers, organizing professional development sessions or workshops, assisting administrators, and managing curriculum resources (Lynch & Ferguson, 2010; Walpole & Blamey, 2008). The explicit responsibilities of coaches are subjective in each school board (Lynch & Alsop, 2007; Walpole & Blamey, 2008). In general, coaches guide teachers through new teaching practices or curriculum to enhance the teacher’s professional knowledge.

**Designing professional development for educators.** Davis and Krajcik (2005) define teacher learning as constructing “one’s knowledge base about content, teaching, and learning; becoming able to apply that knowledge in real time to make instructional decisions; participating in the discovery of teaching; and becoming enculturated into (and engaging in) a range of teacher practices” (p. 3). Professional development design should
also take into account how teachers (adults) learn most efficiently (Borko, 2004; Webster-Wright, 2009). Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) emphasize the importance of delivery method(s) in professional development design:

If our professional development programs are to recognize the individuality of every teacher’s learning and practice, then we must employ a model of teacher growth that does not constrain teacher learning by characterizing it in a prescriptive linear fashion, but anticipates the possibility of multiple change sequences and a variety of possible teacher growth networks. (p. 965)

Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) discuss the Interconnected Model by Clarke and Peter (1993) to exemplify the complexity of understanding teacher learning. The Interconnected Model illustrates the multi-directional influence of personal and professional learning within four domains (i.e., personal domain, external domain, domain of practice, and domain of consequence) along with connections between the domains on action and reflection by the teacher (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). The variables and multiple pathways of teacher learning, as displayed in the Interconnected Model, are critical to understand to apply in the design of professional development (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).

There is not one most effective method for professional learning or professional development (Fishman et al., 2003). When considering the variety of purposes, design considerations, formats, learning styles, and teacher needs the possibilities are endless. This latitude is beneficial as Grierson and Gallagher (2009) note that “there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to professional development” (p. 569). The literature notes the gap between the delivery of professional development design to if or when educators
implement the concepts/skills from the professional development into the classroom (Van de Berg et al., 2014). This leads to the question: what are the characteristics that contribute to a successfully applied professional development?

**Effective Factors of Professional Development**

Butler et al. (2004) iterated that “teachers [need] evidence that the instructional approaches would actually work with their students” (p. 451). After reviewing literature on design, implementation, and assessment of professional development within education, multiple variables repeatedly arose. Each effective design factor from the literature is described, along with the overarching significance of incorporating each variable into professional development.

**Authentic learning.** There is a consensus within the literature to fuse authentic learning opportunities into educators’ professional development (Butler et al., 2004; Fishman et al., 2003; Gersten et al., 2010; Penuel et al., 2007; Van de Berg et al., 2014; Voogt et al., 2011; Webster-Wright, 2009). Authentic learning encompasses active learning (also known as hands on learning) through first-hand experiences and reflection (Penuel et al., 2007; Webster-Wright, 2009). Curriculum planning and practice teaching are examples of active learning (Penuel et al., 2007; Webster-Wright, 2009).

Fishman et al. (2003) compared two variations of professional development for elementary teachers. The first variation was a professional development presented as a traditional lecture style learning model (Fishman et al., 2003). The second form of professional development was an authentic learning framework consisting of a workshop with modeled and mocked activities from the curriculum (Fishman et al., 2003). The quantitative student achievement marks and qualitative data from teachers produced a
significant success rate for the professional development with active learning (Fishman et al., 2003). Effective authentic learning allows teachers to learn about the content or materials to be implemented in the classroom in advance with an opportunity for reflection (Fishman et al., 2003; Van de Berg et al., 2014).

**Long-term with goals and coherency.** For teachers to master a concept, it is essential to design longitudinal professional development with clear goals and coherence sustaining a topic with subconcepts (at least half an academic year) (Butler et al., 2004; Garet et al., 2001; Gersten et al., 2010; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000; Penuel et al., 2007; Van de Berg et al., 2014; Voogt et al., 2011). The time to model, practice, apply, reflect, and follow up the professional development’s overarching topic facilitates mastery (Butler et al., 2004; Garet et al., 2001; Gersten et al., 2010; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Newmann et al., 2000; Penuel et al., 2007; Van de Berg et al., 2014; Voogt et al., 2011). Providing time for educators to master the topic leads to a higher probability of educators implementing the concept in the classroom at full capacity (Penuel et al., 2007). Clear goals are essential for longitudinal professional development to ensure that the end goal is fulfilled (Butler et al., 2004; Van de Bergh et al., 2014). Furthermore, the goals and content of the professional development need to align to the curriculums’, administrators’, and educators’ expectations (Gersten, 2010; Penuel et al., 2007).

To identify these characteristics of effective professional development, Garet et al. (2001) sampled 1,027 teachers who participated previously in professional development. Teachers indicated a preference to professional development that was facilitated over a longer duration on a general topic to learn and apply the information
(Garet et al., 2001). Additionally, teachers stressed the need for alignment with their needs and the curriculum as a way to establish the professional development’s purpose (Garet et al., 2001). The results of Garet et al.’s (2001) study aligned with recent literature (e.g., Gersten et al., 2010; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Penuel et al., 2007; Van de Berg et al., 2014; Voogt et al., 2011).

**Differentiated learning.** Differentiated planning is an exemplary practice to use when designing professional development (Butler et al., 2004; Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). Similar to differentiated instruction, differentiated planning for professional development promotes individualized instruction to learners’ abilities and context, thus promoting achievement (Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013).

Grierson and Gallagher (2009) investigated the effectiveness of a year-long professional development design that merged workshops, observations in a demonstration classroom, and a learning community to support elementary teachers on literacy practices from Ontario Ministry of Education documents. Each component was purposefully prepared and facilitated to connect theory to practice in authentic environments, as well as to cater to different professional learning needs (Grierson & Gallagher, 2009). The findings supported the professional development due to the practicality of using an experienced mentor (who taught during the observations), cohesion of the professional development, variety of learning opportunities through the school year, and the support from community of teachers within the professional development (Grierson & Gallagher, 2009). This study offered a glimpse at the potential success of an organized professional development design involving differentiated learning.
Grierson and Woloshyn (2013) also discussed differentiation in the professional development design. Three elementary teachers in an Ontario school participated in the professional development to gain content and pedagogical knowledge to enhance their students’ reading abilities. The professional development consisted of learning community meetings twice a month, plus weekly coaching sessions for seven months in one school year (Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013). Findings suggested that the integration of two professional development formats balanced time for community dialogue and individualized training; thus meeting the contextual needs of each teacher (Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013). The teacher participants believed that the combination of learning communities and one-on-one coaching was an effective model of the professional development (Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013). Differentiated professional learning and professional development have the potential to provide teachers with the opportunity to intake and apply the new knowledge in various ways to ensure maximal achievement.

**Collaboration.** Another characteristic of professional development is promoting collaboration for designing professional development, as well as the time for collaboration amongst teachers during the professional development (Butler et al., 2004; Penuel et al., 2007; Voogt et al., 2011). Designing professional development with a variety of educational professionals blends different perspectives, utilizes different strengths of the design team, as well as blends the needs of educators and administration (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003; Voogt et al., 2011). Working on designing professional development with an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary group of professionals challenges educators to socially construct a product, which in itself is an alternative form of professional development (Voogt et al., 2011).
Educators who participate in professional development as a collective group (e.g., across the school board, schools, divisions or grades) may build a sense of trust and community (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003; Penuel et al., 2007). Truscott and Truscott (2004) engaged an experienced group of elementary teachers and special education teachers in a 2-year professional development program to learn teaching strategies for below grade achieving students in reading. The project included direct instruction in workshops, coaching, and demonstration lessons (e.g., observations). From the results, 89% of the participants stated that the collaborative components were most helpful for learning the content in the professional development; collaborative design promotes learning (Truscott & Truscott, 2004).

**Significance.** Professional learning through professional development has the potential to keep educators up-to-date with evidence-based practices and to provide accountability (Grierson, Gallagher, & Woloshyn, 2007). However, educators need to recognize the gap in their knowledge of content, pedagogy, attitudes, or beliefs to alter their practices (Fishman et al., 2003; Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013). Gaps in content knowledge and pedagogy may be indicated by poor student achievement. However, supporting teachers’ attitudinal needs requires support for their sense of empowerment and self-efficacy (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013). Self-efficacy is the belief that a person can do something based on that person’s behaviour and actions (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997). Teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to implement concepts from the professional development (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997). Designing and implementing effective professional development can potentially influences every aspect of school capacity (e.g., principal
leadership, teachers’ knowledge/skills, professional community, coherence of a program and instructional resources), leading to higher student achievement (Newmann et al., 2000). Incorporating the effective characteristics of professional development outlined in this chapter support teacher learning as long as the teachers are accepting to changing their practices and this may potentially lead to increased student achievement as well as school capacity.

**Literacy Resources**

Literacy resources encompass a variety of forms, such as commercial unit kits (e.g., *Handwriting Without Tears*), teacher guides (e.g., *The Continuum of Literacy Learning* by Pinnell and Fountas), technology program software (e.g., Reading Kingdom), government documents (e.g., *The Guide to Effective Instruction*), and class book sets (e.g., *Nelson Literacy*) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003; Ransford et al., 2009). Historically, North American teachers used textbooks as the primary external resource in the early 20th century (Sherin & Drake, 2009). Self-made supplementary materials by teachers were incorporated in the 1930s, leading to commercial resources in the 1950s (Sherin & Drake, 2009). Today, various forms of literacy resources, as noted above, are used in multiple contexts.

In this section of chapter 2, literacy resources are discussed in two ways. First, the use of commercial literacy resources are investigated. The value of educators’ ability to critically analyze commercial resources is deliberated. Then, the process of resource design, validating teachers as designers, and recommended components of resources are summarized. The literature on both contexts of the use of resources and resource design are integral to inform this study’s research questions.
Commercial Literacy Resources

Commercial resources can be a useful tool to guide educators in their planning and instruction. Initially commercialized products appeared to be a quick fix for teachers; however, findings from current research point to a concern that teachers do not critically analyze commercial resources to determine their quality and usefulness (Choppin, 2011; Grierson et al., 2007; Grossman & Thompson, 2008; Remillard & Bryans, 2004). Educators need professional learning experiences to evaluate the quality of resources (Choppin, 2011; Lovell & Phillips, 2009; Sherin & Drake, 2009). In order to evaluate a resource, educators need to validate the integration of empirical research, have knowledge of the curriculum, and an appreciation of students’ abilities to align the resource with classroom teaching (Choppin, 2011; Grierson et al., 2007; Grossman & Thompson, 2008; Remillard & Bryans, 2004). Three research studies accentuated the need to inform educators on evaluating commercial resources.

Grierson et al. (2007) investigated four experienced special education teachers in an Ontario school board, who worked with a commercial remedial reading intervention program for 1 year. The program claimed to be based on scientific research to deliver structured lessons for children with learning disabilities, dyslexia, and phonological awareness deficit (Grierson et al., 2007). The teachers took a one-time workshop on basic reading instruction to complement their use of the resource (Grierson et al., 2007). At the end of the year, the findings indicated that the teachers did not question the resource’s quality due to the manufacturer’s claim of success (Grierson et al., 2007). Moreover, the teachers assumed that the resource was high quality based on the fact that the resource was given to them from a school board personnel (i.e., they assumed that the school
board approved the resource) whether the resource was identified as high quality or not through research (Grierson et al., 2007). Grierson et al. (2007) remind educators of the importance of examining a resource, regardless of how the resource is obtained to ensure its usefulness in context. More importantly, Grierson et al. (2007) emphasized the need to train educators to critically analyze resources to evaluate its quality, regardless of the manufacturer’s statements.

Lovell and Phillips (2009) evaluated 13 commercial primary reading and writing technology programs used in Canada. Variables taken into consideration were design format, content, instructional approaches, claims for the program, and appropriateness of use (Lovell & Phillips, 2009). Findings suggested that literacy technology for the primary division were not purposeful because the programs’ content was out of date (Lovell & Phillips, 2009). Plus, the programs’ instructional approaches were limited because tracking student progress, feedback methods, and/or adaptations for student ability were rarely offered by the programs (Lovell & Phillips, 2009). Like the resource in Grierson et al.’s (2007) study, the manufacturers’ claims of programs were not sustained (Lovell & Phillips, 2009). Lovell and Phillips (2012) reiterate the necessity for teachers to determine the usefulness of commercial resources, even with programs provided by their province’s ministry or department of education.

Khan and Gorard (2012) compared a technological reading program for junior-intermediate students to a traditional teaching instruction program. The technological reading resource had many effective components, including differentiated sensory learning, varied instructional approaches (e.g., track student progress and opportunity for feedback), alignment with the curriculum, supplementary materials, and training (Khan &
Gorard, 2012). Student participants were separated into an experimental group (using the resource) or a control group (not using the resource) (Khan & Gorard, 2012). Findings proposed that both groups’ post-test student scores increased from the pre-test scores (Khan & Gorard, 2012). The experimental group’s scores were not significantly higher from the control group, meaning that the technological reading resource did not benefit nor hinder the students’ learning (Khan & Gorard, 2012). Khan’s and Gorard’s research is a reminder to consider the effectiveness of resources compared to instruction without the resource(s).

**Teachers’ use of commercial resources.** The curriculum strategy framework is “a way to investigate patterns of curriculum use among teachers” (Sherin & Drake, 2009, p. 468). Sherin and Drake (2009) explain that the curriculum strategy framework considers contexts that teachers hold as, “a teacher reads and interprets the materials, and this interpretation depends greatly on what the teacher knows, including his or her knowledge of the subject matter, and of the teacher’s and students’ beliefs about instruction” (p. 471). This is demonstrated by how teachers interact with commercial materials by adapting them (e.g., added material or omitted sections of resource), using specific parts of the material, and/or evaluating the material (Grierson et al., 2007; Sherin & Drake, 2009). In general, how teachers pick and use resources varies according to each teacher’s curriculum vision, pedagogical design capacity, and orientation (i.e., belief and ability) (Choppin, 2011; Remillard & Bryan, 2004).

Sherin and Drake’s (2009) study investigated 10 primary teachers from four schools who piloted a new elementary curriculum resource. The findings indicated that teachers read and referred to the resource before, during, and after instruction (Sherin &
Drake, 2009). The timing of when the teacher referred to the resource altered the purpose of reading the resource (Sherin & Drake, 2009). For example, teachers who read the resource prior to instruction focused on aligning the resource to the curriculum guidelines instead of adjusting the instruction to the students (Sherin & Drake, 2009). Also, teachers who evaluated the usefulness of the resource did so from different perspectives, such as the teacher for planning purposes, the students for ability, and administration for government approval (Sherin & Drake, 2009). Sherin and Drake (2009) illustrate the importance for educators to take a holistic approach when utilizing any resource.

Grossman and Thompson’s (2008) longitudinal qualitative research followed three English high school teachers for 4 years, who transitioned from novice to experienced teachers. Grossman and Thompson (2008) found that novice teachers spent a lot of time searching for the appropriate resource and then repeatedly using the same resource based on familiarity. With experience, teachers attempted to explore other resources (Grossman & Thompson, 2008). Grossman and Thompson’s (2008) study underscores the need for teachers to be educated and gain experience assessing and working with commercial resources from the beginning of their careers.

Designing Literacy Resources

The resource design process includes several steps that are similar to the construction of professional development (Davis et al., 2014; Preciado-Babb & Liljedahl, 2012; Voogt et al., 2011). The resource design process commences with identifying a need for a resource from educators and/or administrators (Voogt et al., 2011). Next, the resource designers identify the purpose of the resource to initiate the resource’s development (Preciado-Babb & Liljedahl, 2012; Voogt et al., 2011). Designers consider
coherency to the curriculum and ensure that evidence-based content is included (Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Davis et al., 2014; Sherin & Drake, 2009). Features of the resource are deliberately built with consideration to the students’ opportunities for learning (Davis et al., 2014). After a draft product is made, the resource is trialed with educators and students (Preciado-Babb & Liljedahl, 2012; Voogt et al., 2011). Then designers make alterations to the resource based on the feedback from educators(s), student(s), and administrator(s) (if applicable) (Preciado-Babb & Liljedahl, 2012; Voogt et al., 2011). Multiple trial sessions followed by immediate debriefing meetings is recommended to ensure the resource’s reliability, clarity, and efficiency prior to publishing (Preciado-Babb & Liljedahl, 2012).

Components of a literacy resource. As discussed earlier, resource designers make decisions about every aspect of a resource. There are common components of a resource that make it effective. First, the subject content needs to be detailed enough for the teacher to utilize in a lesson and to provide background knowledge to explain affiliated questions (Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Grossman & Thompson, 2008). Next, incorporating pedagogical frameworks, including instructional approaches, planning ideas, and student learning opportunities are recommended (Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Grossman & Thompson, 2008). If additional materials (e.g., DVDs) are used in the resource, it is important to include the supplementary material within the resource (Grierson et al., 2007; Grossman & Thompson, 2008). Merging recommendations and alternatives for instruction, activities, and assessments are useful for educators to diversify planning to meet their students’ needs (Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Grossman & Thompson, 2008). A continuous conflict that resource designers experience is
distinguishing a balance between remaining concise but providing enough detail for the reader to understand the content (Davis & Krajcik, 2005). Overall, the resource in its entirety should be able to meet the professional needs of the educator (Davis & Krajcik, 2005).

**Design teams.** It is suggested to design resources through an interdisciplinary team approach, which leads to a holistic design (Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Voogt et al., 2011). An interdisciplinary team includes professionals from two or more disciplines to collaborate using each discipline’s strengths, views, and resources (Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Voogt et al., 2011). Teachers from different divisions, specialities, years of experience, as well as other education staff, community service representatives, clinicians, and Ministry officials are examples of personnel that may comprise an interdisciplinary team. It is important for the interdisciplinary team to have a shared vision to reduce tensions and distractions (Huizinga, Handelzalts, Nieveen, & Voogt, 2014; International Reading Association, 2007).

The notion of including teachers in the resource design process was elaborated on within the literature (Preciado-Babb & Liljedahl, 2012; Sherin & Drake, 2009; Voogt et al., 2011). Providing teachers the opportunity to utilize their subject knowledge, pedagogical methods, and personal experiences in resource design places value on teachers beyond their traditional role within the classroom (Davis et al., 2014; Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Preciado-Babb & Liljedahl, 2012). Additionally, participating in this process is an active format of professional development, in which the experience often challenges the teachers’ beliefs and practices (Voogt et al., 2011). Teachers who immerse themselves in the design process often gain a sense of ownership of the final product,
leading to a higher probability of teachers using the resource in the classroom (Huizinga et al., 2014; McKenney & Voogt, 2012; Preciado-Babb & Liljedahl, 2012). Overall, it seems logical to incorporate teachers into the design process because teachers are the professionals using the final resource to assist their practice (Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Grossman & Thompson, 2008).

Two qualitative research studies illustrated the positive outcomes of teachers fulfilling the role of resource designer. McKenney and Voogt (2012) followed a Dutch teacher who was responsible for tailoring a technological program for elementary students learning emergent literacy. After the teacher finished designing the program, it was administered to an experimental group of primary students. The control group did not have access to the program (McKenney & Voogt, 2012). The program contributed to an increase in the students’ knowledge as indicated by the quantitative data analysis (McKenney & Voogt, 2012). The teacher also displayed a positive attitude and willingness to learn throughout the design process. The teacher was optimistic about the experience to act as a designer (McKenney & Voogt, 2012). The findings of this case study suggest that educators may not have all of the necessary knowledge, skills, or qualifications to be independent resource designers; however educators are a valuable asset in design teams (McKenney & Voogt, 2012).

A second study analyzed three different case studies of teacher designers in Canada and uncovered common successful elements from team-oriented design initiatives (Preciado-Babb & Liljedahl, 2012). The case studies represented were a lesson study, a workshop, and a school board initiative for mathematics (Preciado-Babb & Liljedahl, 2012). Preciado-Babb and Liljedahl’s (2012) results suggested that the benefits
of teacher involvement include: (a) teachers were able to refer to student cognitive ability as a framework for resources, (b) the final product (e.g., resource) impacted other teachers’ practices, and (c) administrative and related support was provided. Precaido-Babb and Liljedahl’s (2012) findings are consistent with those of McKenney and Voogt (2012) illustrating the positive contributions of teacher inclusion in resource design.

**Effective Literacy Practices**

The term “literacy practices” encompasses planning (e.g., instructional approaches and assessment) and environmental components of literacy education. Research delineates effective literacy practices from unproductive practices (Laveault et al., 2003). Current effective literacy practices are promoted by research-based Ontario’s Ministry of Education publications and literature, such as *The Guide to Effective Instruction* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2008). Effective practices are demanded from Ontario teachers to provide students the best chance of academic and personal success (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003).

**Why Are Effective Literacy Practices Important?**

The Matthew Effect demonstrates the significance of using effective practices to promote every student’s personal level of academic success. The Matthew Effect aligns with the phrase of “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer” (Walpole, Justice, & Invernizzi, 2004, p. 261). In regards to reading, a student with limited reading skills or strategies (the poor) falls further behind grade level each year (get poorer), resulting in a large grade-ability gap (Walpole et al., 2004). A student’s poor literacy development may be a result from a neurological dysfunction (e.g., learning disability), contextual variables (e.g., poverty) and/or an ineffective literacy education (Walpole et al., 2004). For
example, a grade 3 student who has a learning disability may have reading skills and strategies at an ELKP level because the student did not receive an adequate literacy education. Walpole et al. (2004) emphasize the necessity for elementary teachers to “understand scientific evidence about reading development and instruction, translate that evidence into the daily classroom routines and lives of children and teachers, and implement change in a cost-efficient manner” (Walpole et al., 2004, p. 262). To reduce the probability of the Matthew Effect, research emphasizes the necessity of using best literacy practices starting as soon as students enter the education system because early literacy exposure correlates with future literacy achievement (Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013; Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2013b; Walpole et al., 2004).

**Planning Literacy Instruction**

Planning for an effective literacy education requires consideration of foundational literacy concepts, pedagogical methods, instructional approaches, assessment, and collaborative planning (Aubut et al., 2004; Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2008, 2013). Identifying and applying the basic content of language to build the foundation of literacy is crucial for primary teachers (International Reading Association, 2007; Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). For instance, preliminary literacy knowledge, including the concept of print, letter-sound relationships, and phonemic awareness (to name and manipulate the smallest unit of oral language) are taught prior to reading and writing (Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Oral communication, an essential component of language learning, is continuously developed throughout primary
and junior grades (Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). The students at a primary level apply this preliminary knowledge to learn how to read. Learning to read comprises of decoding (the ability to sound out a word using phonemic awareness), fluency (reading aloud with appropriate strategies and accuracy), and comprehension (understanding the meaning of the text) (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Students who struggle to learn to read will have a difficult transition to the junior division when students read to learn (Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). This is when teachers strive to incorporate metacognition as a strategy of becoming a proficient reader (Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Given the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing, students learn to generate ideas and write at the same time as they learn to read (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006).

Teachers in the junior division plan for students to use their foundational literacy skills developed in the primary grades to apply higher order thinking skills with texts (Aubut et al., 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Critical thinking, a form of higher order thinking is the “process of thinking about ideas or situations in order to understand them fully, identify their implications, and/or make a judgement about what is sensible or reasonable to believe or do” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 152). Other higher order thinking literary skills associated with critical thinking are critiquing, making connections, synthesizing, inferring, analyzing, predicting, and comparing (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Opportunities for student voice to initiate ownership of ideas and self-determination are also recommended in the junior grades (Aubut et al., 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008).
Experiences in the junior division focus on strengthening and applying literacy skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Both primary and junior language skills are reflected in Ontario’s language arts curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006).

**Pedagogy.** Considering pedagogical approaches is a part of the planning process (Aubut et al., 2004; Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2008, 2013a, 2013b). There are a few literacy pedagogical approaches that are considered effective for elementary students. First, purposefully integrating literacy components through cross-curricular planning increases the opportunities for exposure, practice, and application of language skills in different contexts (Aubut et al., 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2008). Secondly, creating authentic tasks within literacy instruction makes learning relevant to students’ lives; thus creating meaningful experiences (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, 2013). Thirdly, designing lesson structures based on the gradual release of responsibility and Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development ensures that the educator is delivering content at the students’ instructional level and the student is progressing from being dependent to independent (Aubut et al., 2004; Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2008, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). Lastly, differentiating instruction and tasks allow students to demonstrate their learning through different processes and in a variety of formats (Aubut et al., 2004; Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, 2011, 2013). Using Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences, in addition to balancing inquiry, problem solving and direct instruction lesson formats are ways to differentiate instruction (Aubut et al., 2004; Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013;

**Instructional approaches.** Effective literacy instructional approaches constitute a selection of whole group, small group, and independent practice. Whole group instruction refers to facilitating instruction to the entire class at one time (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Grierson et al., 2007; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Literacy based examples of whole group instruction are interactive read alouds (educator reads a text aloud with expression and discussion with students), shared reading (educator reads a text that students can see and invites students to read along), and modeling (educator exemplifies a skill or process) (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2006). Small group instruction occurs when an educator works with a group of students in a designated area of the room (Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2006). Literature studies (students interacting with text) and guided reading (educator purposefully introduces a text a students’ instructional level to teach a particular concept) are considered forms of small group instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Independent work allows students to practice particular skills and too demonstrate their knowledge, such as independent reading with an affiliated activity (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). Planning a balance of whole group, small group, and independent practice contribute to the learning, practice and application of language and literacy skills.

**Assessment.** Assessment may be considered the framework of planning because assessments illustrate students’ knowledge and ability that is followed by planning for literacy instruction (Aubut et al., 2004; Grierson et al., 2007; International Reading...
The Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2013a) Learning for All document outlines the three types of assessment: diagnostic, formative, and summative (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2008). Diagnostic assessment occurs before instruction to assess students’ prior knowledge and skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a). Diagnostic assessment allows the educator to plan to employ an appropriate pedagogical approach to support students’ learning needs. Examples of diagnostic assessment include whole group oral questioning, pre-tests, and interest inventories (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b). Formative assessment occurs in the context of a lesson or unit to ensure students are responding positively to the content, instructions and/or activity (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a, 2013b). Formative assessment illustrates if the students need support in a specific area to be successful in their learning. Observations, student-teacher conversations, and running records are forms of formative assessment (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a, 2013b). Summative assessment is an opportunity for students to demonstrate their learning progress, knowledge, and skills. This may take the form of a performance, conversation, visual aid, test, or portfolio (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2013a, 2013b). All three types of assessments should be intentionally conducted at different times and formatted in numerous ways to create a holistic account of each student’s progress (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, 2013a, 2013b). Valuing assessments as much as any other planning component is an effective literacy practice because assessment drives the instructional planning forward (International Reading Association, 2007).

**Collaborative planning.** Planning literacy instruction in collaboration with other
educators is highly recommended (Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2013). Collaborative planning is an opportunity for educators to share their expertise and/or to learn from colleagues to improve the quality of instruction and/or assessment. Through collaborative professional learning, educators can remain updated with the latest research and use each other’s areas of strength to plan effective literacy learning opportunities (Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). Overall, the aspects to consider when planning literacy instruction are concepts, pedagogy, instructional approaches, assessment, and collaborative planning (Grierson et al., 2007; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b).

**Classroom Environment**

Effective literacy practices also connect to the social, emotional, and physical attributes of the classroom environment (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013; Student Achievement Division, 2011). The social component of the classroom environment refers to the opportunities to communicate and collaborate from student to student or student to educator in the classroom (Student Achievement Division, 2011). Beyond enhancing oral communication and co-operation skills, a pro-social environment values student voice, builds self-efficacy, as well as encouraging students to take ownership of their work (Student Achievement Division, 2011). A social community empowers students “to take risks and explore new ideas” (Student Achievement Division, 2011, p. 3).

The emotional aspect of the classroom environment includes the educator’s attitudes and beliefs that set the level of expectation for the students (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2013b). For instance, an educator who believes that literacy development is not a priority will not encourage students to meet
academic literacy goals. Educators should support students to believe that they are good readers and that they can succeed (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b).

Additionally, the physical characteristics of the classroom environment contribute to the language and literacy learning of students. A classroom that is purposefully organized with a comfortable reading area, wall displays and accessibility to resources is recommended (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, 2013b; Student Achievement Division, 2011). It is beneficial to have high quality texts covering a variety of reading levels, genres, interests, and cultures to be representative of the students (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). A variety of print and digital texts in an organized classroom present students with the opportunity for leisure reading time or shared reading time to promote literacy development (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, 2013b; Student Achievement Division, 2011). Environmental variables cannot be underestimated with respect to their influence of students’ learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013; Student Achievement Division, 2011).

**Summary**

This literature review covered three broad topics to provide a background on the research questions. First, professional learning accompanied by professional development as forms of accountability were investigated (Fullan, 2007; Knapp, 2003). The literature outlined a process to design professional development for educators with considerations to four components that make professional development effective: authentic learning experiences, long-term design with goals coherent to the curriculum, differentiated
activities, and collaboration (Butler et al., 2004; Fishman et al., 2003; Garet et al., 2001; Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013; Penuel et al., 2007; Voogt et al., 2011). Next, the use of literacy resources was discussed. Research illustrates that educators have limited capacity to evaluate the quality of commercial resources, thus leading to poor classroom instructional application (Grierson et al., 2007; Lovell & Phillips, 2009; Sherin & Drake, 2009). The considerations of designing a resource, such as resource content and the design team were noted (Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Grossman & Thompson, 2008; Preciado-Babb & Liljedahl, 2012; Voogt et al., 2011). Also, the deliberation of including teachers on resource design teams was elaborated on (Preciado-Babb & Liljedahl, 2012; Sherin & Drake, 2009). Lastly, effective literacy practices from empirical research and Ontario Ministry of Education publications were provided.

In chapter 3, the methodology of the research study is explained. More explicitly, the reasoning for a qualitative research design is discussed, followed by information on the participants, data collection, and data analysis. Methodological assumptions and ethical considerations are stated. The results will be presented in chapter 4 with descriptions of emergent themes on the design process and the guide. Finally, chapter 5 outlines the significance of the research study with a discussion in addition to theoretical and practical implications.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This research study examined the guide’s design process and the educators’ perceptions of designing the guide in an Ontario school board literacy initiative. Data collection methods included field notes taken in meetings and individual interviews at the end of the year. These data were coded into categories and merged to themes to address the research questions. Limitations of the research design, research process, and ethical considerations are discussed.

The Project: The Reading and Writing Initiative

A school board in southern Ontario initiated a 3-year project in the 2014-2015 academic year entitled, The Reading and Writing Leads Initiative (hereafter referred to as “the initiative”). The overarching goal of this initiative was to develop capacity for all primary and junior teachers in the school board to effectively teach literacy to students of all ability levels by June 2017. The initiative’s mandate was in response to Ontario’s Learning for All document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a). Selected primary teachers, junior teachers, resource teachers, literacy coaches, Early Years consultants, Reading Recovery leads, and the school board’s literacy consultant participated in the initiative. The term “educators” accounts of all of these roles. The K-12 literacy consultant facilitated the initiative with assistance from the literacy coaches, Reading Recovery leads and Early Years consultants. The K-12 literacy consultant created annual objectives to direct the educators to achieve the end goal. By the end of the first year (June 2015), the aim was to have the following tasks completed: (a) to designate two teachers as reading and writing leads in each school, (b) to design a literacy resource package to support reading and writing leads, (c) to identify and use an assessment
tracking method, and (d) to have junior teachers pilot the commercial resource, *Words Their Way* (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2012). In the first year, the initiative incorporated plenary meetings with activities, cross-division observations, and co-teachings sessions. This research reported on a sub-set of data related to the educators’ perceptions of the process and result of designing a literacy guide during the first year of the initiative.

**Research Design**

This study was a qualitative research design. Qualitative research focuses on “exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2014, p.4). Richards and Morse (2013) state that the purpose of qualitative research is “to learn from the participants in a setting or a process the way they experience it, the meanings they put on it, and how they interpret what they experience” (p. 28). Qualitative data collection and analysis emphasize creating a holistic account of the educators’ experiences in the initiative (Creswell, 2014; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

Hatch (2002) describes this concept of qualitative research, “Qualitative research is as interested in inner states as outer expressions of human activity. Because these inner states are not directly observable, qualitative researchers must rely on subjective judgements to bring them to light” (p. 9). Unlike quantitative, qualitative data “cannot be reduced to numbers without distorting the essence of the social meanings they represent” (Hatch, 2002, p.9). The data are collected in natural settings (e.g., schools) with the researcher as the main instrument for documentation (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, qualitative research is an emergent design, forcing the data analysis to be inductive (Creswell, 2014; Hatch, 2002; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Richards & Morse, 2013). The initiative’s plan dictated
the research design process; however the process of achieving the annual goals were subjective and altered by the K-12 literacy consultant. The context of the educators’ involvement within the initiative provided an opportunity to capture the essence of their experiences with literacy resources.

The framework of this qualitative study is a case study. A case study is a description on an event, activity, or program that is “bounded by time and activity” (Creswell, 2014, p. 14). The restriction of the initiative (program) and its duration of the 2014-2015 academic year (time) made it a bounded system (Creswell, 2014; Moore, Lapan, & Quartaroli, 2011). Plus, data was collected from a small sample size to gain a thorough understanding of an issue (Richards & Morse, 2013). Twenty-two educators voluntarily consented to participate in the research. The form of case study reflected in this research study was an instrumental case study because the initiative was a case to learn about a broad concept of how educators identified best practices and resources in literacy education (Richards & Morse, 2013).

Selection of Participants

The participants in this research study were purposefully sampled educators by the school board (Moore et al., 2011; Richards & Morse, 2013). Purposeful sampling is when participants are chosen deliberately to meet a set of criteria (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Richards & Morse, 2013). The K-12 literacy consultant of the school board asked full time primary teachers, junior teachers, resource teachers, literacy coaches, Early Years consultants, as well as Reading Recovery leads within the school board to participate in the Reading and Writing Leads Initiative. The K-12 literacy consultant stated that these educators were asked to participate based on their exemplary literacy
practices within his/her classroom and/or experience in other roles (e.g., Reading Recovery leader). All educators were sent a letter of invitation in a sealed unidentifiable envelope and confidentially returned to the researcher.

From the 30 educators that were active in the initiative, 26 participated in the research; 12 were teachers, two were Reading Recovery leads, two were literacy coaches, eight were resource teachers, one was an Early Years/primary consultant, and one K-12 literacy consultant. The number of primary and junior teachers were almost equal. Twenty-six participants consented to an interview. Eighteen participants completed the interview. One participant typed his/her answers to the interview questions prior to taking a maturity leave. Other participant maturation was due to illness, lack of response via e-mail correspondence or unexpected inactivity in the initiative. Table 1 illustrates the demographic information of the participants who completed the interview.

Prior to the beginning of the initiative, educators were arranged into three teams by the K-12 literacy consultant. Each team consisted of one or two support staff (i.e., literacy coaches or Reading Recovery leads) along with primary teachers, junior teachers, and resource teachers to work with during group activities at the meetings. Some of the support staff were labelled as the team leaders to oversee the collaborative efforts of their selected team. In this research study, the term “facilitators” represent the support staff, regardless if they were a team leader or not.
Table 1

Demographic Information of Educators Who Were Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>Female $n$</th>
<th>Male $n$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average number of years of teaching experience</td>
<td>14.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in primary classroom placement</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers in junior classroom placement</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy coaches</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Recovery leads</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Years/primary consultant</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12 literacy consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $n$ represents number. A total of 18 participants completed the interview.
Instrumentation

Field notes and interviews were the two forms of data collection used to inform the case study approach (Richards & Morse, 2013). Field notes are a form of anecdotal notes with descriptions of time, location, event, and participants’ actions, behaviours, and statements relating to the research questions (Creswell, 2014; Richard & Morse, 2013). Field notes were collected with the researcher as an observer; meaning the researcher observed without participating in the situation (Creswell, 2014). The benefits of using field notes include documenting an event as it occurs, recording participants’ involvement, and observing concepts that may be not be brought up in interviews (Creswell, 2014). The presence of the researcher may alter participants’ behaviour, subjectivity of the field notes’ content, and the researcher’s inability to report all private information are limitations of using field notes (Creswell, 2014; Richards & Morse, 2013).

In this research study, field notes were documented from five meetings from October 2014 to May 2015 and an analysis was completed on the guide. The meeting in October 2014 consisted of commencing group discussion on literacy development and resources. Teachers were segregated into one of three groups to design a visual representation of a literacy development as a continuum. This visual representation provided an opportunity for the teachers to identify significant aspects of primary-junior literacy development. In November 2014, the meeting included a discussion on the linear/non-linear pathways of teaching reading and writing. The meeting in January showcased the new additions of the school board’s software program that will allow teachers to input anecdotal notes about students and to share those notes with educators. Discussions on literacy development, teaching pedagogy, and the guide centralized the
meeting in March 2015. At this time, the visual representations were photographed to supplement the field notes. The meeting in May consisted of 15 preselected educators who were also all participants in the research. The educators discussed and enacted on the guide’s format and content. The guide was compiled online via Google Drive in a chart format with resources and strategies to answer guiding questions in regards to facilitating reading instruction and assessment. The assembly in May was the final meeting of the initiative for the 2014-2015 academic year.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed by a third party transcriber (Creswell, 2014; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Richards & Morse, 2013). The advantages of using interviews are that the researcher can direct the types of questions as well as allowing the participant to share personal and contextual information for in-depth answers (Creswell, 2014). Disadvantages of conducting interviews are viewing data from the participants’ selective lens, possibility that not all participants can articulate their answers, and participants may skew their answers due to the researcher’s presence (Creswell, 2014). The interviews were a source of data to supplement the field notes for a holistic perspective.

In this research study, participants who agreed to do an interview on their consent form were selected for an interview. The interview consisted of self-written semi-structured questions. Hesse-Bieber and Leavy (2006) described semi-structured interviews by stating “the researcher does try to ask each respondent a certain set of questions, he or she also allows the conversation to flow more naturally making room for the conversation to go in new and unexpected directions” (p. 126). Some flexibility for unplanned questions are allowed in order for the researcher to ensure clarity and/or
saturation of a question (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Richards & Morse, 2013). Semi-structured interviews also allow the researcher to gather data based on his/her research questions to find similarities and differences on topic(s) (Schensul, 2011). The interview questions were self-designed by the researcher to parallel the research questions. A mixture of sensitizing questions and theoretical questions were included (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Sensitizing questions examined the defining concepts of the resources, as well as the thoughts, and emotions of the educators (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The questions focusing on the process of developing the resource are theoretical questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). When using semi-structured interviews, it is imperative to design the questions to not inhibit possible answers but rather to allow depth in the participants’ response (Richards & Morse, 2013). The interview questions are found in Appendices A and B. The interview questions were a sub-set of the data collection.

Data Collection

Data collection of the field notes and interviews were gathered from October 2014 to May 2015. All information was kept confidential. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants. The field notes were saved on a password protected laptop. The interviews were conducted from April 2015 to May 2015 at the educators’ schools in a private room for approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by a third party. Once the transcripts were complete, the audio files were destroyed. Participants completed a member check with the transcription to allow the participant to modify or remove any of his/her statements (Creswell, 2014). The transcripts were saved on a password-protected laptop. The field notes and interview transcripts were culled for
data analysis. The field notes and transcripts will remain in a locked location for two years until the data are shredded in 2017.

**Data Analysis**

The field notes and interviews were analyzed to extract meaning in an effort to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2014). Both the field notes and interview transcripts were coded by the researcher. Coding is defined as “the analysis strategy many qualitative researchers employ in order to help them locate key themes, patterns, ideas, and concepts that may exist within their data” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 349). Initially, the data underwent open coding to extract all possible concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Richards & Morse, 2013). Concepts were then transferred into high and low levels of categories, such that a codebook that was used to code all data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Richards & Morse, 2013). The high level categories reflected topics from the research questions. Axial coding and interpretation of categories followed to produce themes that led to the generated research findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Peer debriefing was completed with Dr. Gallagher on the original open coding to increase validity of the data analysis (Creswell, 2014).

**Methodological Assumptions**

Qualitative research and in particular, this research design had limitations with regards to subjectivity. The process and format of the initiative were determined by the K-12 literacy consultant and educators; thus leading to emergent research (Creswell, 2014; Richards & Morse, 2013). For instance, the explicit design process, format, and accessibility of the guide were unknown to the educators and researchers prior to the last
meeting in May 2015. Therefore, having an open-perspective while observing the initiative ensured that I recorded all necessary data, such as conversations at a meeting. It was also assumed that the participants fully participated in the initiative by attending mandatory meetings and being intellectually invested because these participants were purposefully selected by the board as experienced and engaged literacy educators.

Steps were taken to reduce threats of consistency and trustworthiness. Consistency is the “means that the research checks for accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures” (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). A peer debrief with the researcher’s supervisor and use of a codebook with associated definitions for coding the data procedures was used to enhance consistency (Creswell, 2014). Trustworthiness “indicates the researchers’ approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects” (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). Member checks of the interview transcript and triangulation of the data were used to increase internal trustworthiness (Creswell, 2014; Moore et al., 2011; Richards & Morse, 2013; Schensul, 2011). It is significant to note that the results of this research study cannot be generalized to how educators define best practices in literacy and/or how teachers design guide because the initiative was an individualized form of professional learning facilitated in one school board in Ontario.

As the researcher of this qualitative study, I recognized that my personal background, values and biases may influence the data analysis; this may have contributed to researcher bias (Creswell, 2014; Richards & Morse, 2013). As a recent graduate of the Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Arts (i.e., Child and Youth Studies) programs, I value a comprehensive and balanced approach to literacy education to support the diverse abilities of students. Within my beginning teaching practice, I emphasize theoretical
frameworks and concepts within literacy practices and planning, such as differentiation, validity of resources, and implementation of government approved practices. I take a critical stance on the influence and operations of school board administration in relation to teacher development. I also understood the discourses referred to throughout the initiative from my education and experiences, which allowed me to make full interpretations of the data. Furthermore, I was not involved with any of the educators within the workplace that allowed me to use a clear perspective when collecting data.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical components were considered throughout the research study. Brock University’s Research Ethics Board granted clearance for this research (File number 14-081-GALLAGHER). The school board also provided clearance after receiving Brock University’s Research Ethics Board’s acceptance. Participation in the research study was voluntary and documented on the consent form. Participants were not at risk for deception, physical risk, psychological, or social risk. Pseudonyms were assigned for data collection. Participants may have felt obligated to participate because the Reading and Writing Leads Initiative was a part of their job responsibilities. It was clear on the consent form that participation in the initiative was distinct from participation in the data collection. The consent form made participants aware of their right to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty.

**Summary**

The methodology of this research study reflects a qualitative case study approach. Field notes with artifacts (i.e., photographs) and interviews were the forms of data instrumentation. Field notes were collected at each of the meetings. Interviews were
conducted at the end of the year with 18 of the 26 participants. In an attempt to answer the research questions, coding, and interpretation were completed with precautions taken to avoid threats to validity. All ethical components were taken into consideration in the research design.

Next, chapter 4 will exhibit the results from the qualitative data analysis. The results on the design process, the resource, and finally the educators’ perceptions on the experience are described with supporting evidence. Following chapter 4 are the discussions and implications of this research study in chapter 5.
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the design process, the guide itself, and the educators’ perceptions in an Ontario school board literacy initiative. The components of the guide are explored to determine what the educators chose to identify as best practices for reading assessment and instruction. The guide was developed based on the educators’ professional experiences, as well as the dialogue and activities from the year-long initiative. This research study utilized qualitative research methods to present a holistic and in-depth account (Creswell, 2014). The sources of data collection were the field notes with artifacts from the meetings and the end of the year interviews with the educators. These data were culled for qualitative analysis. Chapter 4 presents the results from the data analysis to address each research question. First, the process of the guide design is described through four components of the initiative (i.e., meetings, observations, co-teaching sessions, and constructing a visual representation). Next, the guide is described in respect to its format and content. Lastly, the educators’ perceptions of the design process, the guide, the guide’s format, and the guide’s content are discussed.

The Design Process for the Guide

The guide’s design process included: five meetings, team design of the visual representations of literacy development, two observation sessions (i.e., one observation in each teacher’s classroom), and at least two co-teaching sessions throughout the 2014-2015 academic year. Each component contributed to the design process, as explained by Grace, a literacy coach in the initiative:

The purpose of this reading initiative K-6 is to develop a guide for teachers in effective reading and writing instruction. This is no easy task, and the idea seems
daunting as we ask teachers to work collaboratively to create a guide with primary and junior teachers focusing on the reading continuum of learning to read and reading to learn. As teachers observe, co-plan and co-teach they are learning, adding and modifying to their guides (Grace, Interview, p. 1 of 4). The procedure of the meetings, observations, and co-teaching sessions will be explained next; in addition to shedding insight on the educator’s perceptions of this process later in chapter 4.

The Meetings

The first meeting was held in October 2014 to introduce the initiative. The discussions and activities were grounded on theoretical structures of literacy development and literacy practices to build foundational knowledge in preparation for designing the guide. For example, Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) asked the teachers to record their personal theory of teaching reading and writing as a catalyst. Later, the teachers reviewed concepts with an activity to match literacy terms (e.g., morphology) to their definitions. Additionally, there was a brief attempt for educators to apply their literacy assessment and instructional knowledge. Emma, a Reading Recovery lead challenged the educators to view a package of literacy assessments for a primary and junior student to determine the students’ strengths, areas of need, and next steps for instruction. This activity emphasized the importance of pedagogical documentation and balanced assessments. The meeting in October 2014 commenced ongoing discussion of best practices in literacy.

The meeting in November 2014 focused on the progression of literacy development in the primary and junior divisions. To start, Grace (literacy coach) facilitated an activity in which teachers chose to agree or disagree with the following
statement: “Reading and writing are developed from a part of the whole (letters – words – sentences – paragraphs – stories)” (Meeting, November 2015, p. 2 of 5). The majority of the teachers disagreed, while some teachers strongly disagreed or agreed. Conclusively, the teachers decided that literacy has foundational skills, however the progression of literacy development is not linear. To continue on the topic of literacy progression, Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) and Grace (literacy coach) segregated the primary and junior teachers to record the most valuable components of literacy for their division, as well as questions for the opposing division. The primary teachers valued guided reading and individualized goal cards, while their questions were framed around the integration of technology. The junior teachers emphasized the importance of observation and their questions focused on identifying best practices within both divisions. Overall, the notion of junior teachers using primary strategies and vice versa to support all student achievement levels which reflect the concept of non-linear literacy development was indirectly supported.

The purpose of the meeting in January 2015 was to introduce the educators to the latest additions of the school board’s technological program. The additions that were being discussed would allow teachers to input assessment data (e.g., marks and anecdotal notes) into the online program, which then can be shared with other educators and parents. The teachers were asked to provide constructive feedback on the structure of the program. The teachers’ advice emphasized on accessibility, visual appeal of the web pages as well as the transition from paper to electronic documentation. This meeting did not contribute to the guide explicitly but the meeting was informative to the initiative’s process.
The meeting in March 2015 put a greater focus on the application of literacy theory. For instance, Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) presented two case studies of improper spelling and grammar use to facilitate dialogue on identifying students’ possible problems and next steps for literacy instruction. Next, Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) questioned the educators on how teachers, resource teachers, and other support staff (e.g., Reading Recovery leads) can work together to support students who require heavy support. Discussions on the inappropriateness of labelling students by their reading level and the significance of formative assessment also dominated the meeting. The three main meetings (i.e., October 2014, November 2014, and March 2015) were supposed to foster dialogue on theory and practices in preparation for the guide construction at the meeting in May 2015.

The meeting in May 2015 was reserved to construct the guide as a product of the educators’ knowledge from the first year of the initiative. Only eight teachers, two resource teachers, four facilitators, and the K-12 literacy consultant participated in the meeting due to financial constraints (i.e., paid teacher release time). Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) reminded the educators that the guide was to solely focus on reading, as other literacy components could be added to the guide in the following years of the initiative. Decisions on the structure, format, content, and presentation of the guide were made through the teacher’s dialogue. The facilitators and the K-12 literacy consultant contributed minimal input. A description of the guide that the teachers produced through these discussions is provided later in chapter 4. This gathering in May was the last meeting for the initiative of the 2014-2015 academic year. Connections between the meetings and the entire design process are made in chapter five.
Observations and Co-teaching Sessions

The observations and co-teaching sessions allowed teachers to act upon literacy theory from the meetings. Observations occurred from October 2014 to December 2014 and the co-teaching sessions were from December 2014 to March 2015. Teachers observed and co-taught in their dyad partner’s classroom for a cross-divisional experience. Not all dyads consisted of a cross-divisional partnership due to the uneven number of primary and junior teachers in each team. The observation and co-teaching sessions allotted time to review, learn, and consult about literacy instructional practices, assessment practices, and resources. The co-teaching sessions revolved on designing lessons for the marker students, who were identified as achieving below grade average and above grade average. The marker students’ achievements from the co-teaching sessions were documented with a group activity at the meeting in March 2015. The educators labeled the achievements of each marker student with evidence illustrating how the teachers documented the students’ achievement. Besides having an application component in the initiative, the observations and co-teaching sessions sparked discussions in the meeting on various literacy based topics, thus contributing to the wealth of knowledge for the guide’s design in May 2015. The observations and co-teaching sessions are connected to the entire design process in chapter five.

Creating a Visual Representation of Literacy

In an attempt to capture the existing understandings and new professional learning on literacy assessment and instruction, the teachers were challenged to depict their theoretical and conceptual knowledge in a visual representation of literacy development at the meetings. The purpose of the visual representations was to record the teachers’
learning to assist with the guide’s construction. This activity commenced at the meeting in October 2014 with the teachers divided into three teams. Each team designed a visual presentation using images and words. Teachers received time to elaborate on their designs at the meetings in November 2014 and March 2015. The following questions were posed by Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) to guide the teachers’ designs: “(1) What are specific skills, strategies, behaviours and concepts that students need to know and be able to do?, (2) Is there an order to teaching these skills, strategies, behaviours and concepts in reading and writing?, (3) Are these skills grade specific?, and (4) Are they connected?” (Meeting, October 2014, p. 3 of 9). At the final plenary session in March, Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) posted an additional question to encourage reflective thinking: “What essential components of teaching are needed in order to ensure students are learning the necessary skills on your continuum (e.g., assessments, instructional strategies, resources, and collaborative partnerships)?” (Meeting, March 2015, p. 5 of 6). Each of the three teams created visual representations that differed from each other, yet they addressed some similar concepts. Themes that arose from the visual representations are presented with photos.

**The non-linear progression of literacy development.** The three teams portrayed the non-linear progression of literacy development through metaphors and words. Natalie, a junior teacher in Team Two, described her team’s challenge of depicting literacy development with an image:

My group, we had originally come up with a road that we thought was going to be our method and then we didn’t like [the road] because we thought [the road] was
very linear and we didn’t want people to think [literacy] had to be one thing after another. We tried to have exits to get off at and learn something, that didn’t really work either. Then we started to go with a blender approach which I think is a lot better just because we realize that you are just going to be throwing in ingredients and mixing them together and the more things you add the better it will taste, hopefully, was what we were kind of going for. Then we talked about how the energy was like the power, like the effort the kids were willing to put in, the home-school connection, the quality of the teaching and that kind of stuff. We also talked about how you would have different settings. Sometimes your setting is just guided and sometimes it’s independent, sometimes you have to ramp it up, frequently like we are right now. There are different things like that, but I think that was sort of our idea and I feel that for me the blender sort of best described [literacy]. (Natalie, Interview, p. 4 of 9)

Team Two’s visual representation of a road and a blender as the progression of literacy is illustrated in Figure 1. For Team One, the metaphor of a tree with several branches and roots illustrated the multiple paths considered for literacy development, as seen in Figure 2. In Figure 3, Team Three used a mind map approach instead of metaphor or list to illustrate the complex non-linear progression of literacy development.

The graphics created by the three teams were a powerful framework for their visual representations that lead to the incorporation of words to support their images.
Figure 1. Team Two’s visual representation of literacy development.
Figure 2. The visual representation designed by Team One.
Figure 3. The inside portion of Team Three’s visual representation.
Words and phrases were also used to show a non-linear literacy development. Most evidently, Team Two and Team Three entitled this progression as, “learning to read - reading to learn” (see Figures 1 and 3). Team One’s phrase within the cycle, “it is ok to go back to relearn or refresh when in different stages of reading/writing learning” referred to Team One’s belief in non-linear literacy instruction (see Figure 2). The inclusion of mediating factors of the non-linear literacy development were portrayed by all three teams. In different ways, all three visual representations depicted the complex progression of literacy development due to mediating factors that influence students’ literacy development.

**Planning literacy instruction with the student in mind.** The three teams portrayed the value of planning literacy instruction with the student in mind. As depicted in Figure 4, Team Two’s use of the phrase “start with what they [students] know and build on that” in the middle of the road displayed evidence of this premise.

The students’ abilities and other mediating factors, such as home environment, were acknowledge amongst the three teams. Team Two demonstrated this notion with the words “schema before coming to school,” “metacognition,” and “home” as seen in Figure 1. Figure 2 displays Team One’s phrases of “support from home,” “support within school,” “exposure,” and “schema” in the branches to recognize a students’ influences. As seen in Figure 3, Team Three utilized the phrases, “schema building impacts learning at all stages,” “teacher mindset affects learning,” and “metacognition” to show some possible mediating factors of a student’s literacy development. Two teams connect this notion to the use of assessments to individualize instruction. As displayed in Figure 5, Team One recorded “observational survey,” “PM benchmarks,” “DRAs [developmental reading assessment],” and “self-assessment” in the tree roots.
Figure 4. The upper left portion of Team Two’s visual representation.
Figure 5. The bottom portion of Team One’s visual representation.
Team Two used “assessment” and “observational survey” to make the connection as displayed in Figure 4. The teachers documented the unique progression of literacy that is dependent on the child’s mediating factors using assessments.

**Familiarity with foundational literacy concepts.** Collaboratively, the teachers acknowledged foundational concepts of literacy in their visual representations. From Figures 3-7, repeated concepts that were documented on all of the visual representations were the “concept of print,” “letter-sound relationships,” “one-to-one matching,” “decoding skills,” “comprehension,” and “fine motor skills.”

There were a few distinctions among the three teams’ visual representations of the foundational literacy concepts. Team One included “natural curiosity,” “DI [differentiated instruction],” “positivity,” and “media/technology” portrayed in Figure 2. Team Two noted “ERT [educational resource teacher]” specifically as an influential personal, as seen in Figure 1. Team Three documented “listening” and “word study is not spelling” as part of their representation. The similarities and their visual representations were assuring and the differences in images and words were interesting to note. Connections to the visual representations within the design process are discussed in chapter five.

**Summary of the Design Process**

The initiative consisted of four components that contributed to the guide’s design process. The first component included the five meetings. The meeting in October 2014 emphasized literacy’s theoretical foundation, while the non-linear progression of literacy was the focus at the meeting in November 2014. In January 2015, the educators received an advanced viewing of the school board’s future technological assessment system.
Figure 6. The upper right portion of Team Two’s visual representation.
Figure 7. The outside portion of Team Three’s visual representation.
Activities that emphasized literacy application were a part of the meeting in March 2015. The meeting in May 2015 was reserved for a smaller group of educators to construct the guide. The next two components were the observations and co-teaching sessions that occurred through the academic year in teacher dyads. Most dyads consisted of teachers from opposing divisions. The fourth component of the initiative was the visual representation designed during the meetings by teachers within three teams. The themes that arose from the visual representations were a non-linear literacy progression, planning with the student in mind, and documenting familiar foundational literacy concepts. The challenges that teachers incurred designing a graphic form of literacy development promoted collaborative discussion and consolidated teachers’ professional knowledge. Each of the four components facilitated professional learning that contributed to the body of knowledge for the guide.

**The Guide and Its Components**

As noted above, the meeting in May 2015 served to build the guide with a selective group of active educators in the initiative. At the meeting, every aspect of the guide’s design was decided through dialogue amongst the teachers with the facilitators and the K-12 literacy consultant as advisors. Topics that the educators mutually agreed upon were the guide being online, addressing the “how” of teaching, incorporating contact information for support staff, integration of videos as supplement material, and the importance of designing the guide to be teacher friendly. Some topics that the educators questioned were: (a) whether they should do a teacher survey in the school board to generate framing questions for the guide, (b) the amount of supplemental resources to should be provided in each section, (c) how to integrate information related
to special education, and (c) who will judge the content’s quality? These points were not brought to a close due to time constraints. It is assumed that these points will be re-addressed in the following academic year when the guide development resumes. A list of topics were generated through discussion to structure the guide’s content. These topics became the categories in the guide. At the end of the meeting, the educators consented to design the guide on Google Drive in order to access the document for 7 days after the meeting to add information. The guide as of May 24, 2015, which was the initial deadline to add information to the Google Drive, is in Appendix C.

**Format and Content**

The guide was formatted in a table with four columns: “Category,” “Questions,” “Resources,” and “Strategies”. The subcategories in the Category column of the table consisted of “Assessment,” “Conferencing,” “Teaching Reading,” “Technology,” “Home Support,” “Word Study,” “Mentorship,” “Role of the Principal,” “School Support,” “Documentation,” “Learning Concerns,” and “EQAO Skills”. Each subcategory had up to two questions with up to six resources. Educators decided to include resources that were published, especially resources from the Ontario Ministry of Education. Forms of resources varied from books (e.g., *Knowing What Counts* by Davis, Herbst, and Augusta), websites (e.g., online teaching resource from Ontario’s Ministry of Education), school board programs (e.g., LinguiSystems), and program support staff (e.g., resource teachers). Some educators volunteered to make video recordings to show instructional strategies as additional resources. These videos were not uploaded as of May 24, 2015. In the Strategies column, up to seven recommendations were presented for each category.
with/or brief explanations. Information was shared in point form as well as in full sentence structure.

As of May 24, 2015, the educators had not fully populated all subcategories within the guide. Some categories were more complete than others. For example, the Word Study category demonstrated content alignment amongst all columns; meaning that the resources and strategies answered the category’s guiding question(s). Content alignment does not mean that the category was complete with all necessary information but that the posted guiding questions were answered. In addition to Word Study, Time Management for Conferencing, Role of the Principal, System/School Supports, and EQAO Skills display content alignment. Alternatively, the Assessment, How to Teach Reading, Use of Technology, Home Support, Mentorship, Documentation, and Learning Concerns categories had incomplete columns or the responses did not answer the guiding questions. Overall, the guide was not complete and its development will be continued in the 2015-2016 academic year.

Summary of the Guide

The product of the initiative’s first year was a guide designed and constructed by educators. The purpose of the guide was to amalgamate the wealth of knowledge and best practices into one product to support primary and junior teachers with literacy assessment and instruction. The half-day meeting in May with 15 educators was set to develop the guide. Every aspect of the guide thus far was discussed and somewhat agreed upon during the meeting. A list of most influential topics to inform other teachers on how to teach reading structured the guide, as seen in Appendix C. In the end, the guide produced was in question-answer format and presented in a chart. Not all aspects of the guide were complete;
however the construction of the guide will resume in the following academic year.

**Educators’ Perceptions of the Design Process and the Guide**

The educators’ perceptions of the design process and the guide were the target of the interview questions. In regards to the design process, the components (i.e., meetings, visual representation, observations, and co-teaching sessions), and the time line were analyzed with collaboration being a key theme. The educators’ opinions about the guide’s utility, format, and content were exposed to emerge subthemes about each aspect of the guide. Lastly, the educators’ reflections on the initiative’s (i.e., design process and the guide) impact on their professional knowledge and teaching practices were briefly described.

**The Open-Ended Design Process**

Most educators were critical of the design process (meetings, observations, co-teaching sessions, and visual representation) and specified their feelings of uncertainty. Some teachers, resource teachers, and Reading Recovery leads spoke about the open-ended process being unclear, which led to them feeling overwhelmed. For example, at the end of the meeting in March 2015, after little progress was made towards creating the guide, a group of teachers, a Reading Recovery lead (Emma), and a literacy coach (Kaitlyn) questioned what necessary preparations were needed for the guide’s design meeting in May since no direct statements were made from the K-12 literacy consultant or any facilitators about the process. A primary teacher, Sophia asked, “Why is this not our homework?” at the end this conversation because she was puzzled by the lack of direction and overt organization (Meeting, March 2015, p.6 of 6). In an interview, Sophia (primary teacher) summarized her reflection on the design process:
I think the purpose of this was unclear at the beginning, so I knew that they wanted to create some sort of manual, but I think some people I knew had something else in mind. I think we spent the whole year talking about it and now it’s May and we got to do this by September so I am feeling a little bit of pressure.

(Sophia, Interview, p. 6 of 8)

Emma, a Reading Recovery lead addressed her concern, “I get a sense that they [teachers] don’t know where it is going. I get that sense” (Emma, Interview, p. 12 of 14).

Three educators exclaimed that they did not see the vision for the guide until the guide’s framework was presented on Google Drive for educators to fill in after the meeting in May. David (resource teacher/vice principal) explained his confusion during this process:

I find that what [Rodney] has shared with us recently in terms of the categories for literacy, provided in a live document with headings of categories, questions, resources, strategies and then listing several categories in which to kind of support teachers and their instruction [was helpful]. I find that what he sent to us for our input and assistance was much easier for me to understand than the activity [that] was done, that we were building on through several sessions. (David, Interview, p. 5 of 11)

It appeared that there was a disconnection and lack of communication between the K-12 literacy consultant and other educators about the guide’s design process throughout the year.

Collaboration among educators. The majority of the educators articulated that they valued the collaboration during the initiative. Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) believed that the initiative effectively reflected a form of collaborative inquiry. Rodney
chose the collaborative inquiry framework to promote teacher agency. Collaboration occurred in dialogue during meetings and the design of visual representation in teams. Abigail (primary teacher) expressed her positive views about the collaborative discussions:

Certainly the dialogue with other teachers, I think would be the biggest part of the process. I think to have to do this on your own you would be missing so many key components, so I think you needed that large group [of educators] as part of the process. I think there was a lot of positive [outcomes] that came out of the conversations that went into resources or the resources we are currently working on. I also think at times there were some disagreements because everybody does something differently I think in some way, shape or form, so I think part of the process was that agreeing and disagreeing. (Abigail, Interview, p. 3 of 7)

Abigail (primary teacher), Natalie, (junior teacher) and Lily (primary-junior teacher) regarded the experience of collaboratively constructing visual representation within their teams as rewarding yet challenging. Samantha, a junior teacher, summarized the significance of collaboration: “I think anytime a group of teachers get together and work passionately and share their ideas. [It is] like you soak up what everyone is saying so it’s, it’s the best PD you can have in this program” (Samantha, Interview, p. 9 of 10). Emma, a Reading Recovery lead, also abbreviated her thoughts on collaboration: “The best resource is the teacher” (Emma, Interview, p. 8 of 14). The collaboration during the discussions and visual representation design stimulated professional learning.

The observations and co-teaching sessions were another example of collaboration. Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) explained why this form of collaboration was included
into the design process, “It is easy to talk about something and say, ‘Okay. We are going to do this but I would love to see someone that has done it a lot’…I do not think there is [sic] enough opportunities for that [observation]” (Rodney, Interview, p. 15 of 19).

Observations and co-teaching sessions were supported in many of the interviews. Mia (primary teacher) described her positive experience observing and co-teaching in another teacher’s classroom:

> Definitely, the most important thing for me was to be able to sit and watch her do, a running record and one-on-one reading. I can read it from a book how to do it but I needed to see someone do it; the teacher that I saw. She was excellent at telling them, “Okay let’s try this again” without making them feel like they made a mistake. I found that very helpful. (Mia, Interview, p. 3 of 10)

Claire (literacy coach) believed that these sessions provided another form of professional learning for the teachers:

> I think that when they went into each other’s classrooms and got to observe and be part of a lesson that was outside of their comfort zone or a little different from the way they would have presented the material. I think that inspired them to try something different and to present the material in a different way. (Claire, Interview, p. 5 of 7)

Madelyn (primary teacher) elaborated on Claire’s (literacy coach) thoughts:

> I like having the opportunity to go into other classrooms and see how people are doing things because I think you, you can get so stuck in your own ways that you forget that there are other ideas out there. You have to challenge yourself. You
have to get out there and try new things and see new things. (Madelyn, Interview, p. 3 of 8)

Sophia (primary teacher) believed that her positive teacher dyad experience because her partner was in the same school; thus allowing a culture of collaboration grow between the two teachers and their classroom communities. Multiple educators described the observation and co-teaching sessions as effective because these were opportunities to share strategies, verify practices, and to be exposed to a different division (i.e., primary or junior).

Two educators mentioned ambiguities between the observations and co-teaching sessions. Not all teachers had a cross-divisional dyad. Abigail, a primary teacher, described her lack of professional learning and frustration about her dyad:

Observation wise, I think I would’ve preferred to observe someone outside of my grade level. The person I was paired with is the same grade as me, so I didn’t find I got a lot out of that to be perfectly honest. Or I would have really loved to see ELKP in action because that is something I am eventually interested in teaching. So I would have liked a little bit more say in what grade level I was paired with and what types of things I got to see. So unfortunately in the terms of the observations I didn’t feel I got a lot out of that. In terms of co-planning, same thing because I was paired with someone who was my same grade and it was not very different from what I already do. (Abigail, Interview p. 6 of 7)

Secondly, Emma (Reading Recovery lead) emphasized that the dyads must comprise of teachers who embrace updated practices because she observed a teacher using outdated practices who was volunteered to be in the initiative. Overall, observations and co-
teaching sessions received a positive response due to the collaborative opportunities, keeping in mind the importance of using effective teachers in cross-divisional dyads.

A unique characteristic of the collaborative work during the design process was the presence of several educator positions (i.e., teachers, literacy coaches, Reading Recovery leads, Early Years consultants, and a literacy consultant). Grace (literacy coach) believed that having a variety of experts offered “a wealth of knowledge” (Grace, Interview, p. 2 of 4). David (resource teacher/vice principal) also agreed about the richness of the collaboration among educators with various roles: “It was [a] valuable experience to dialogue with colleagues from across the system that have different experiences with different communities, different administration and so on” (David, Interview, p. 5 of 11). Natalie (junior teacher) described a positive co-teaching experience with a literacy coach and the K-12 literacy consultant:

I’m a big fan of this [observation/co-planning]. I really think it is important to see how other people do things and to have people watch you do things. I found it really beneficial even when Kaitlyn and Rodney came to my classroom (Natalie, Interview, p.5 of 7).

Claire, a literacy coach elaborated on her positive view of collaboration by sharing the benefits of having teachers from different schools across the school board:

I think that [it] was so great in terms of collaboration. It was really amazing to see some of these really great teachers share strategies that other really great teachers hadn’t thought about, so it really increased everybody’s competency. They all learned from each other and then when we came together to share in those sessions you got to hear other people’s experiences and they got to learn from that
and take a lot away from that. And definitely the schools that these teachers are in
I think are going to benefit too because they now have somebody that can share
that within and among their staff and then eventually, hopefully other staffs
(Claire, Interview, p.3 of 7).

The various forms of educational professionals allowed many perspectives to be
considered throughout the design process.

Other educators spoke about the conflicts that arose during collaboration. The main
concern expressed by some literacy coaches and teachers was the inability to challenge
some educators’ beliefs about their practices. Kaitlyn (literacy coach) explained, “I think
some mind sets were challenging from different teachers that we encountered, in that they
have a certain way of doing things and not necessarily being open to other ideas”
(Kaitlyn, Interview, p. 2 of 5). Madelyn (primary teacher) suggested a reason for this
resistance:

We are not always honest. We don’t want to admit defeat or that we do not know
something but we can’t know everything all the time. And we have to have that
understanding that they are not there to judge you, they are there to just help you
because we have to be a team—it has to be a team effort. … It’s shifting in the
thinking and I think that is the hard part. (Madelyn, Interview, p. 5 of 8)

A large number of educators involved in the initiative may have caused a challenge.
Claire, a literacy coach stated that the size of the group in the initiative may have made it
difficult for every individual’s voice to be heard during the meetings and guide’s
construction:

I think because we had so many great teachers that were involved, it was really
just a matter of trying to have everyone’s voice and opinion be validated and be heard and be present and really trying to get information from everybody and consolidate it. (Claire, Interview, p. 2 of 7)

Moreover, Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) stated that he struggled being present at all collaborations, whether it be team discussions in the meetings or co-teaching sessions; therefore Rodney relied on the literacy coaches and reading recovery leads to communicate progress to him. Conclusively, educators positively perceived collaboration as a means to inform professional learning; however tensions were also present due to the number of individuals participating in the design process.

**Insufficient time for design.** Several educators identified the inadequate amount of time to complete the guide as a challenge. A primary teacher, Abigail, condensed the insights of many educators who spoke of this barrier:

Certainly challenges, I think all of us are still going to have challenges in how we put together all of these pieces that we are looking at. There is so much still to consider and how this guide or this continuum is going to look. I honestly don’t think we have had enough time to spend together. I think time has been a huge challenge. I think we need, like, a week together, just a straight week where we can really hash this out and create it and say here it is. I think everyone doing their own little thing at different times because that is the point we are at now, I’m thinking it’s a challenge for it to all come together, I think it will, but I think it will not be an easy road to get this out there. (Abigail, Interview, p. 4 of 7)

Another primary teacher, Madelyn, commented on the delicate balance of time: “Four days in one year [reference to the meetings] is not enough to do it justice…I’m a little
nervous about just being too quick to get anything out but if you wait too long then nothing happens” (Madelyn, Interview, p. 6 of 8). Even with the time constraint, Abigail suggested the need to pilot the guide to solidify its quality:

So let’s compile it, let’s all sort of pilot it and let’s say this is what is great, this is what needs to be improved upon, let’s fine tune and then roll it out the year after next. I think we are just really on time crunch right now and I’d rather have a good product than a mediocre product that is being rolled out to the other teachers. (Abigail, Interview, p. 7 of 7)

The time allotment for the guide’s design versus the desired quality of the guide was not obvious. It was unclear if the K-12 literacy consultant underestimated the time needed to create the guide or if this objective of the initiative was poorly defined.

**The Perceived Value of the Guide**

The overall consensus about the guide from the educators was mixed. Some educators mentioned the future potential that the guide has to assist teachers with literacy. These educators believed that the guide was applicable to teachers and the guide will assist teachers to be current in their practices, as explained by a junior teacher, Natalie:

I’m hoping our resource will basically bring all those things together because a lot of people say, “Well I don’t even know about *Words their Way*. How do you know about the resource?” I only know about it because I was in the reading/writing [initiative] and even when I was in the Arts [initiative] or when I went to my maternity leave, new resources are added to your school and no-one follows up with you and tells you that they these are the workshops that I went to that you missed or this what I learned. You are just expected to know that and are
shocked when you don’t. I think hopefully if we put everything here people will have one common place to go and learn what they need to know. (Natalie, Interview, p. 5 of 7)

Moreover, Sarah, another junior teacher, believed that the guide could act as a starting point for intervention:

If you were an elementary primary teacher [with] some [students with] learning difficulties you think, “Okay they’re just learning to read.” When you get to my grade [grade 5/6], then there’s really things you need to start looking at [such as] is there something going on that we need to look at testing wise? I think it’s good for people to be able to look at this, and then, say, “Okay, these are things I can try as part of helping my student,” and then being able to say at some point confidentially to the parents or to the resource teacher, “You know these are things I’m trying… maybe there’s something else going on.” (Sarah, Interview, p. 6 of 10)

David (resource teacher/vice principal) stated that another benefit of the final product is that the guide may act as a quick source for teachers to find answers, therefore allowing more time for much needed teacher-student interactions:

It [may] provide the teacher more time with what is needed to assess and evaluate to help students move forward if you don’t have to spend so much time going back to find the pieces, researching pieces and maybe editing them, like I did previously with the stories I was working with intermediate students on. Just like the publisher had done a lot of work to help a teacher to spend more time with the students and this does the same thing. [The fact] that the literacy team has been
working together provides educators with that same opportunity they can take the information that has been brainstormed in sessions, categorized it, simplified it, provided structure so that an individual classroom teacher does not have to go through this long research process. They can quickly find some pieces to help them right away and spend more time with their students, which is really [what we] want from all of our teachers: to spend as much time with their students as possible. (David, Interview, p. 5 of 11)

David (resource teacher/vice principal), Emma (Reading Recovery lead), and Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) iterated the importance of forcing teachers to use parts of resources (e.g., text books) that they need, instead of teachers using an entire resource as substitute for curriculum planning. Some educators see the prospective use of the guide and look forward to sharing it.

Other educators fixated on the fact that the guide was not complete; leading these educators to be uncertain about the composition and utility of the final product. As Madelyn (primary teacher) exclaimed, “It has to be more authentic. It needs a little bit more time. It is a work in process, definitely” (Madelyn, Interview, p. 5 of 8). Natalie (junior teacher) questioned the loosely constructed guide: “I think the challenges, as I told you are the parts were I’m really not sure. If I know what to contribute or if I’m understanding how it [the guide] is going to evolve” (Natalie, Interview, p. 4 of 7). Emma (Reading Recovery lead) emphasized her confusion about the guide: “As a teacher, I’d never look at that. I opened it and thought ‘Oh’ I haven’t even read it because to me that is not something a resource that I would use. I don’t understand it” (Emma, Interview, p. 7 of 14). In the meetings and interviews, Rodney and a few educators reiterated that the
guide was a working document, meaning that the guide’s development will continue in the 2015-2016 academic year. The collaboratively designed guide was not complete and opinions on the guide were not cohesive.

The guide’s format: Organization and accessibility. Educators spoke about the guide’s format with respect to how the guide reflects pedagogy, organization and online accessibility. Several educators emphasized the guide’s format reflecting effective reading pedagogies. Grace, a literacy coach, stated:

I hope it will be useful for all teachers, providing a plethora of knowledge, skills, strategies and supports for teachers, created by teachers. There isn’t just one way for students to learn to read and write and hopefully the guide will shed light on this. (Grace, Interview, p. 2 of 4)

Mia (primary teacher) connected the format to the non-linear progression of literacy development:

[It is] kind of interesting to see that, it [the guide] doesn’t necessarily start in one place there’s all these little things that contribute, to the beginning reading because there’s things in there from home even, all the things that students come with or that they don’t come with, I kind of, like how it [the guide] could address different, missing pieces, and, maybe what you’re not seeing [too]. (Mia, Interview, p. 3 of 8)

Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) stated that he hoped for a continuum aspect as part of the guide for teachers to place students on as a method of tracking student success; however this was not included as a part of the guide at the end of this year. The guide’s format mirrored the complexity of teaching reading.
The format of a question-answer chart to organize the guide was approved by many educators. Charlotte (resource teacher) believed that the online chart allowed a large amount of information to be displayed in a convenient and accessible way:

And these are the things [literacy practices and resources] you need to know, these are the things you need to do but this is the bulk [of information] and to have a guide I think would be very helpful. But I think [what] was said in our last meeting, it would need to be where you have questions that brings you, to another page where you have, your strategies, your assessment, a video that someone watched because it [the guide] is just so large. (Charlotte, Interview, p. 4 of 7)

Madelyn (primary teacher) expressed her approval for the format, “I like this [question-answer model] because if you are able to get those exact questions, those things [that] are really pressing. [The] things that teachers do not know how to attack” (Madelyn, Interview, p. 4 of 8). Sophia, another primary teacher, preferred to remove the Category column and to solely focus the guide through a question-answer format. This question-answer format was proposed at the guide development meeting in May 2015.

A few educators expressed their dislike for the question-answer chart and expressed their thoughts during the interviews. Emma (Reading Recovery lead) exclaimed that a commercial resource might be better due to the fact that the guide’s current format takes time to navigate through. Taylor (resource teacher) expressed that she preferred a backward design approach to develop a plan for the guide and the guide’s format:

Cause it makes [the guide] more to the point. That’s my perspective. … Yeah that’s my way of thinking. Other people tend to be global and then they bring it
[the ideas] in. I tend to start with the basics and then try to bring it [the ideas] out as you need it. (Taylor, Interview, p. 5 of 9)

On the whole, the question-answer chart was not unanimously favoured by all educators. Educators who both approved and disapproved of the question-answer chart format expressed concern about the nature of the questions in the guide. Taylor (resource teacher) reflected the need to create concise questions and answers:

But there’s so much out there, there’s so many resources, there’s so many ways to do things. I want teachers to find it useful and I don’t think they’re necessarily going to find it useful, because they’re big broad open-ended questions, I think they need to be more specific. (Taylor, Interview, p. 9 of 9)

Sophia (primary teacher) articulated a view that was similar to many of her educator colleagues about designing specific teacher-friendly questions:

But if they don’t know what they don’t know, then it’s going to be hard for them to have a starting point. You know what I mean? I think we need to break it down even further saying, “Ok if I have a child—like one of our guiding questions—if I have a child that is having difficulty dropping or adding a consonants, dropping -e- and adding the -ing, this is where you can go.” So the questions need, I think to be very specific. (Sophia, Interview, p. 5 of 8)

Additionally, Madison (primary teacher) discussed the necessity to have teacher-friendly language as well as questions to enhance the overall quality and accessibility of the guide:

Again, I was surprised by the questions because I felt, when we left last week that they [the questions] were sort of different or more open, more teacher-friendly,
the language of them. I thought that was the point to make it really easy and accessible for teachers to have a problem to go to and look and find it [the answer]. I was kind of surprised by the questions that were written. They do vary and I just thought I don’t know if I, if I was a struggling teacher, if I would even understand what that question was I wouldn’t know which one to look to try to find the answer. (Madison, Interview, p. 5 of 10)

To enhance the questions included in the guide, at the meeting in May, Abigail (primary teacher) suggested that Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) create and send out a teacher survey to investigate teachers’ reading-based questions. Madelyn (primary teacher) agreed with this thought and spoke of the survey in her interview, along with the possible challenges of implementing such a survey:

It [the questions] has to come from the teachers themselves. As we were sitting in the last session, I’m thinking it’s great that we have questions and some of them [other teachers] will come up with however, I feel like it has to come from the teachers to be more authentic. We already know the answers to these questions right? So it’s a little harder to come up with those problems. So I know we talked about the idea of sending out a survey but it would be nice to get out there and ask the teachers, “What is that thing that is really holding you back? What are you …”. And I think that is a big problem too. We are not always honest. We don’t want to admit defeat or that we do not know something but we can’t know everything all the time. And we have to have that understanding that they are not there to judge you, they are there to just help you because we have to be a team—it has to be a team effort. (Madelyn, Interview, p. 4 of 8)
The question-answer format was generally supported but the need to specify the questions with teacher-friendly language was mutually agreed upon by most educators.

Lastly, the online accessibility of the guide was addressed in the interviews. From the educators who spoke to this topic, half approved of the online guide because of its instantaneous accessibility. The other half of the educators were worried that teachers will not be able to use the guide due to the inconsistent internet connectivity at some schools and that some teachers are not comfortable using technology. Furthermore, two recommendations were made to enhance the guide. Mia (primary teacher) suggested adding an online live blog component to the guide:

It would be nice if there was an online forum that was, continued and, if teachers don’t find the answers on the chart looking through it, they can, can kind of blog on some questions and see if they can get answers. (Mia, Interview, p. 4 of 8)

Madelyn (primary teacher) advised to keep the guide a working document with the access to be continuously updated:

It is not something that can be done once and that is it. Doing it like this where you can continuously add stuff is a good way to doing it because then you are not giving [teachers] one document. Having it online like that is much more beneficial [as there are changes in practices over time] because as we start changes, then we need to incorporate it. As your knowledge changes then we need to incorporate it. (Madelyn, Interview, p. 7 of 8)

Ideally, the guide’s accessibility through Google Drive should be able to facilitate the working document capacity of the guide. Overall, the educators recognized that there
were positive attributes to the guide’s format and other characteristics that they wish to address to improve the guide in the next academic year.

**The guide’s content: Comprehensiveness and conciseness.** The few educators who expressed their thoughts about the content in the guide stated that there was not enough information on reading to support teachers. Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) expressed his desire to have more integration of knowledge relating to special education to promote inclusive instruction. Additionally, Sophia (primary teacher) pointed out the necessity for a blend of information on reading processes and reading pedagogy. Conclusively, the educators explicitly noted that the resource was still a work in progress.

Many educators supported the inclusion of supplementary resources in the guide to support teachers’ learning. The incorporation of multiple forms of resources (e.g., websites, videos, books, etc.) was favoured by several educators. Abigail (primary teacher) explained, “And I think that what’s nice is that we are trying to get lots of different pieces within that as well; maybe lesson plans and professional resources and the videos and so on” (Abigail, Interview, p. 5 of 7). The educators also approved of utilizing resources that already exist, such as videos and documents from the Ontario Ministry of Education. Natalie (junior teacher) elaborated on the notion of recycling applicable resources:

I don’t think there is any reason to reinvent the wheel. We already have these resources, we don’t need to make our own up but maybe just streamlining the resources so that they are all in one place would be really, really helpful for teachers. (Natalie, Interview, p. 5 of 7)

Kaitlyn’s (literacy coach) statement connected to Natalie’s comment:
I think with the focus being [on] what are some of the key concepts with the fact that our board already has a lot of resources in play, we’re going to be taking a look at what do we have, what can we use and what else is [it] that we need, which might make this resource we are trying to create a little bit more manageable. (Kaitlyn, Interview, p. 2 of 5)

Samantha (junior teacher), along with other educators, appreciated the inclusion of videos as it replaces observation sessions:

I think the videos that we are going to post will be a good place for people – a safe place to be able to go and get information….I think they need to see it. They can read about it all you want but until you see it happening, you then might pick up one thing. (Samantha, Interview, p. 6 of 10)

Abigail (primary teacher) and Claire (literacy coach) mentioned that some educators were in the process of filming and creating videos in their classrooms of reading practices to include in the guide. The integration of multi-media resources was approved by the educators as a supplementary tool within the guide to support teachers.

Despite the need for more content knowledge and resources in the guide, many educators emphasized the significance for the guide to also be concise. Kaitlyn (literacy coach) spoke of the realistic nature of teachers using the guide:

I think that some of the challenges are that it is such a big topic and there are so many different variables that it is hard to make it kind of something that is tangible or simple for teachers to have as a take away. (Kaitlyn, Interview, p. 2 of 5)

The educators believed that the content needs to be direct and yet elaborate enough for teachers to understand. Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) spoke to this concept of being
concise and aligned to the values of the initiative:

It’s important that, this doesn’t get too big and too clunky and have too much in it. That’s why another thing we sort of missed that last session that, makes me angry is that. I think we need to go back to sort of the core principles of this guide. (Rodney, Interview, p.11 of 19)

Sophia (primary teacher) explained why a succinct guide is noteworthy: “If it is not short, [teachers] are not going to read it” (Sophia, Interview, p. 5 of 8). Sophia (primary teacher) also questioned how the guide is going to be edited to be deemed valid and concise, “Who is going to maul this out?” (Sophia, Interview, p. 7 of 8). The design process concluded with recognition that there needs to be a balance between including enough content with supplemental resources and a concise presentation of the comprehensive guide.

**Authenticity within the school board.** Four educators noted the value of the guide because it was constructed by educators in the school board where it will eventually be used. Sarah (junior teacher) exclaimed:

To have it [the guide] right in our board and have people attached to it and associate with it, and then, the experts in my board with reading pulling out “this is what you should look at.” I think we’re on the right track (Sarah, Interview, p. 5 of 10)

Natalie (junior teacher) said that constructing and sharing the guide with educators within the same school board benefits the school community. Lily (primary-junior teacher) elaborated on the benefits of producing the guide:

I think the value of having teachers in the board come together is that um, they
know what it is like in [the school board] to teach our cliental and our limitations due to resources and time. … So in some of the commercial curriculums they are working in different boards, working with different kids, working at a different place than what we are at. So, these are teachers dealing with kids that I dealing with, time restraints that I’m dealing with, resources that I’m currently dealing with and they um, can give you some really great ideas to work within those parameters. That’s why I think it is valuable to have the chance to get ideas from them because that is the most effective [resource] that you can use. (Natalie, Interview, p. 6 of 8)

Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) believed that the guide would promote inclusion and success for students within the school board.

**Overall Impact of the Initiative**

Educators expressed the impact of the initiative (i.e., design process and guide development) on their professional knowledge and teaching practices. Many educators stated that they did not gain any knowledge due to their prior professional learning or professional development. For these educators, their professional knowledge was solidified. Other educators enhanced their professional knowledge, as reflected by Natalie (junior teacher):

I did learn a lot and I now know what I need to learn to become a better teacher of reading specifically and writing, but reading is my bigger concern. I have a better sense of where my areas of growth need to happen. … I think for me I find that sometimes it’s just awesome because I learn so much but equally frustrating because I feel incompetent as an educator and I think how could I have been in
education so long and still feel like I don’t know what I am doing sometimes.

(Natalie, Interview, p. 3 of 7)

Another junior teacher, Sarah explained the challenge of breaking down automatic instructional and assessment practices to re-teach within activities and document in the guide’s design:

I thought it was interesting that a lot of people have the knowledge but they don’t know what the questions [for the guide] are, so, it’s really hard. It’s like teaching reading: you know how to do it how do you break it down to people that don’t know. So I’m looking forward to this because I really appreciate being able to, go to the questions that I had, like just a year ago. (Sarah, Interview, p. 5 of 10)

Most educators whether they gained new knowledge or not, were inspired to try new strategies. For example, Sarah (junior teacher) stated, “It’s given me permission to use a lot of the really good strategies that primary teachers use and just adapt it to my junior program” (Sarah, Interview, p. 2 of 10). David (resource teacher/vice principal) described the moment when he made the connection from his professional knowledge to practice:

I guess my aha moment was even though at the beginning of the year I was a primary teacher, the strategies I was using in primary now and the methods were evidence in front of me, being effectively being used in a junior capacity. Again that [observation] helped [me to] break down that idea that the divisions were distinct. (David, Interview, p. 9 of 11)

Other educators stated that they tried a new strategy, such as completing a reading conference with one student instead of guided reading in a small group for more accurate
assessments while maintaining control over the classroom. Many educators spoke about the positive impact on their professional knowledge or practices in some way.

**Summary of the Educators’ Perceptions on the Design Process and the Guide**

The educators’ perspective on the design process, the guide, and the overall initiative’s impact on their teaching was mixed. Starting with the design process, most educators felt that the design process (i.e., the components of the initiative leading to the guide’s construction) was unclear and disorganized due to the possible lack of communication from the K-12 literacy consultant to the rest of the educators. The collaboration aspects of the process were highly valued as opportunities to be exposed to another grade division, strategies and resources. The observation and co-teaching sessions sparked interest in some teachers to try new practices. Overall, the design process did not provide enough time to complete the guide, which left some educators overwhelmed and frustrated. The guide’s design received mixed responses. Some educators envisioned its potential use, while the other educators noted the guide’s incompletion. The online question-answer chart format for the guide was approved by most educators. The challenge of providing enough content with supplemental resources yet remaining concise at the same time still remained. The guide was valued as a contribution to the school board’s community because it was made by its educators for teachers of the community—it is context specific. Lastly, the overall initiative (i.e., design process and guide development) led to some of the educators gaining professional knowledge. The initiative did make small impacts on teachers’ practice as they tried a new strategy or were self-reflective about personal areas of improvement in teaching.
Summary

From the qualitative data analysis, themes and subthemes emerged to address each research question. Chapter 4 presented the findings from this research study. The results were categorized into three parts: the design process, the guide, and the educators’ perceptions. First, the design process covered four components: the meetings, the design of the visual representation, the observations, and the co-teaching sessions. Each meeting was dedicated to discussion of a concept, such as theory or practical application of literacy. The visual representations were designed by the teachers who were placed into one of three teams to design a graphic illustration of literacy development. The visual representations were constructed during three of the five meetings. The non-linear progression of literacy, planning with the student in mind, and identifying familiar literacy concepts were the themes of the three visual representations.

The observations and co-teaching sessions occurred throughout the year in teacher dyads. Most dyads consisted of teachers from different divisions that was designated as such to create a diverse professional learning experience. Next, the meeting in May 2015 was designated to construct the guide with preselected educators. Every characteristic of the guide was decided upon through dialogue at the meeting. The guide’s format was a question-answer chart model on Google Drive. Strategies and supplementary resources were incorporated into the chart. The guide was not complete as of May 24, 2015. Lastly, the data about educators’ perceptions were segregated to the design process, the guide, and the impact of the initiative. Many educators agreed that the design process that led to the construction of the guide was unclear and disorganized, especially with the limited time allotment. The collaboration aspects of the design process were valued by the
majority of the educators. The educators demonstrated mixed reactions about the guide. Some educators envisioned its possible future usefulness, while other educators fixated on the fact that the guide was not complete. The format (i.e., organization and accessibility) and content of the guide also had mixed receptions that needs to be addressed in the following academic year when work on the guide resumes. Overall, the educators felt that the initiative (design process plus guide construction) solidified their professional knowledge and/or enhanced their practices (e.g. piloting new strategies).

Chapter 5 concludes the report of this research study. A summary of the study with details on the methodology and results will be presented. Then a discussion will place the findings of this study in relation to the literature. Lastly, implications on theory, practice and future research will be elaborated on.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter 5 consists of a summary and explores the significance of this study’s findings in relation to the literature, along with implications. This research documented the work of educators who sought to identify exemplary literacy practices through the process of creating a guide for elementary teachers to support their reading practices. In any classroom, students’ literacy abilities range on continuum from below their grade level placement to above grade level (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Teachers are expected to use current best practices and curriculum support (e.g., resources) to meet each student’s individualized needs. Since the best practices and resources in literacy are not universally defined, it cannot be assumed that all elementary teachers can integrate the effective practices and resources. With the literature enforcing the significance of effective early literacy exposure to future literacy achievement, it is difficult to argue against the necessity of prioritizing professional development of literacy instruction and assessment practices for teachers (Dyson, 2010; Khan & Gorard, 2012; Laveault et al., 2003).

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate how a group of educators (ELKP to grade 6 teachers and support staff) identify exemplary practices and resources in literacy. To do this, a case study research approach was used during 1 year of the literacy initiative within a southern Ontario school board. The ultimate goal of the initiative was to build capacity for elementary teachers’ literacy instructional and assessment practices. By the end of the first year of the 3-year initiative, the outcome was to create a guide on how to teach reading. Documenting the initiative’s structure (i.e.,
design process) along with the literacy guide were targeted in the research questions and data collection.

Next, a summary of the research study with details about the methodology and results in response to the research questions are presented. A discussion highlighting the results of the research and comparing the findings to the literature follow the summary. Implications on theory, practice, and future research are then described with regards to this research study’s findings. Finally, a conclusion will complete chapter 5 accenting the significance of this research study.

**Summary of the Study**

A qualitative case study approach was used for this research study (Creswell, 2014). The two characteristics of a case study were fulfilled. First, the research was restricted to a single project: the literacy initiative hosted by one school board in Ontario with 26 educators (primary teachers, junior teachers, resource teachers, literacy coaches, Reading Recovery leads, and a K-12 literacy consultant) (Creswell, 2014). Data collection was constricted to one academic year (October 2014-May 2015) fulfilling the second component of a case study (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative framework of the research promoted an emergent design (Creswell, 2014). A holistic account of the case study derived from two forms of data collection: (a) field notes with artifacts (i.e., photographs) from the five meetings and (b) individual interviews with 18 educators at the end of the year (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2014). The data were culled for qualitative data analysis that consisted of coding, developing high and low categories with a code book, axial coding, and an interpretation of the categories to produce the findings for this study (Creswell, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Richard & Morse,
2013). The results of the research were divided by the guide’s design process, the composition of the guide, as well as the educators’ perspectives about the initiative. This presentation of the results responds to the three research questions: (a) What is the process that educators engaged in to develop a guide to train other teachers in effective reading instruction? (b) What are the components of a guide to support educators in effective reading instruction? (c) What are the educators’ perceptions of the process in which they engaged to develop the guide?

The Guide’s Design Process

The guide’s design process consisted of the educators participating in meetings, observing in colleagues’ classrooms, and contributing to co-teaching sessions. Each of the five meetings embraced a topic that was fulfilled through activities and discussions. The topics of the meetings in chronological order were: theoretical foundations of literacy (October 2014), complex progression of literacy development (November 2014), technological advancement with assessment (January 2015), theoretical applications (March 2015), and the construction of the guide (May 2015). During the meetings in October 2014, November 2014, and March 2015, the teachers in the initiative were assigned to one of three teams to design a visual representation of the progression of literacy in order to capture the professional knowledge and experience. Three themes emerged from the visual representations: (a) non-linear progression of literacy due to mediating factors (e.g., home environment), (b) planning literacy instruction with the student in mind to direct instruction towards the student’s area(s) of need, and (c) familiarity with foundational literacy concepts. Observations and co-teaching sessions were completed throughout the academic year in teacher dyads as an opportunity to learn
and solidify literacy practices. Most dyads comprised of teachers from each of the primary and junior divisions. Each characteristic of the design process was implemented to enhance the teachers’ professional knowledge; ultimately contributing to the guide’s content.

The educators’ perceptions about the design process were mixed. Most educators stated their feelings of uncertainty because the open-ended design process was unclear. The reactions to the design process from the teachers and facilitators compared to the K-12 literacy consultant identified miscommunications among the educators. Despite the vagueness of the design process, the K-12 literacy consultant consciously structured the design process around collaborative inquiry to facilitate teacher agency. The majority of the educators articulated the value of collaboration (e.g., group discussion in the meetings, etc.) amongst various educators (e.g., Reading Recovery leads, etc.) that contributed to their professional learning. The large group size, the need for equal number of primary, and junior teachers for the dyads and resistance from educators to changing their practices were the challenges to collaboration that a few educators endured. The inadequate amount of time to design and build the guide at the last meeting was acknowledged by the educators as a significant barrier. It was unclear if the time to develop the guide was underestimated or if the objective of the initiative was poorly defined by the consultant. Overall, the design process was perceived to be ambiguous with a tight timeframe; however the collaborative components were educational.

The Guide

The literacy guide was fabricated during the half-day meeting in May with a preselected subgroup of 15 educators in the initiative. The guide’s intent was to act as a
reading resource for other primary and junior teachers in the school board to support student’s literacy needs in the classroom. The characteristics of the guide’s design were decided through dialogue amongst the teachers. The facilitators and K-12 literacy consultant posed as advisors during this process. The guide was formatted into a question-answer chart. The chart was organized by columns of Categories, Questions, Resources, and Strategies. As of May 24, 2015, the educators had not fully populated all areas of the chart; however the construction of the guide will resume in the 2015-2016 academic year.

The educators displayed mixed opinions on the use of the resource, its format, and its content. Some educators believed that once the guide is finished, it will be helpful for teachers as a reference or as a starting point for intervention. The incompleteness of the guide led the other educators to feel uncertain about the guide’s use because these educators could not envision the final product. With regards to the format, the educators had synchronized answers about how the guide reflected the non-linear progression of literacy pedagogy. The question-answer chart format was approved by many educators because it allowed a large amount of data to be displayed in an organized manner. The opposing educators alleged that the question-answer chart format was time consuming to navigate through. Regardless of the approval or disapproval of the format, most of the educators expressed concern that the questions were not teacher friendly. The online accessibility of the guide via Google Drive was positively received by several educators. The other educators were concerned about the schools’ poor Internet connectivity and minimal usage with teachers who are not familiar with Google Drive. Pertaining to the guide’s content, the educators discussed the balance of having enough information versus
being concise. Educators approved of the inclusion of multiple forms of supplementary resource, such as videos in the guide. The guide’s benefit for the school community was unanimously agreed upon by the educators. Conclusively, the educators’ differed on their perceptions about most aspects of the guide; however the guide is still a work in progress.

**The Impact of the Initiative on the Educators and Their Practices**

The initiative (the design process and the guide) impacted the educators in different ways. Many educators stated that their professional knowledge was solidified because the literacy concepts discussed during the initiative were familiar to them from previous professional development activities. The other educators expressed gains in their professional learning, especially being self-reflective of their literacy practices. The majority of the educators were inspired to try new strategies discussed at the meetings or modelled in the co-teaching sessions, such as conducting a reading conversation with students individually instead of as a guided reading group. Regardless of the intensity of the impact, the first year of the initiative was a catalyst for professional learning to enhance teachers’ capability to effectively teach literacy.

**Discussion**

Discussion situates the results of this research study within the literature. First, the overall design process’ framework will be compared to the literature. The missing attribute of the design process as well as the incompleteness of the guide will be questioned. Then, the guide will be contrasted to the literature. Particular foci on the guide’s content and minimal connection to the literacy visual representations will be explored. The researcher’s conjectures about the design process and the guide are offered.
The Guide’s Design Process

Multiple characteristics of the design process were reflected the literature. The ultimate purpose of professional learning and/or professional development is accountability, which was evident in the initiative (Ontario College of Teachers, 2000; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). As supported by Hardy and Wagga (2009), professional developments in Ontario usually align with literacy and/or mathematics to support student achievement on the Educational Quality and Accountability Office’s standardized assessments (Educational Quality and Accountability Office, 2015). The initiative’s overarching goal of building the school board’s elementary teachers’ capacity in literacy assessment and instruction practices were well connected to the accountability of the education system (Educational Quality and Accountability Office, 2015).

Components of the design process. This study calls on the existing understandings of professional developments by examining the traits that contribute to productive professional learning (Butler et al., 2004). All of the characteristics of effective professional developments for educators were evident in the guide’s design process. First, authentic learning opportunities provided with educators hands-on experiences with content and/or products that they will be implementing in their classroom; therefore enhancing the value of the professional development to the educator (Butler et al., 2004; Fishman et al., 2003; Gersten et al., 2010; Penuel et al., 2007; Van de Berg et al., 2014; Voogt et al., 2011; Webster-Wright, 2009). Observations, co-teaching sessions, and constructing the literacy guide were examples of authentic learning tasks in the initiative. Fishman et al. (2003) state that these types of tasks in the design process
challenged teachers to apply their theoretical knowledge in meaningful ways; in contrast to passively taking in information through a lecture format.

Next, the literature on professional development emphasize the need to delineate long duration (at least half an academic year) professional developments with clear goals and coherency to the education system (Butler et al., 2004; Garet et al., 2001; Gersten et al., 2010; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Newmann et al., 2000; Penuel et al., 2007; Van de Berg et al., 2014; Voogt et al., 2011). The research depicted the first year out of the 3-year initiative; this is an indication of the school board’s commitment to designating a long duration to the professional development. Plus, the guide’s design process will continue into the next academic year due to the guide’s incompletion. The K-12 literacy consultant identified annual goals for the initiative to build capacity with literacy practices in the school board. The content of the initiative was consistent with the Ontario Ministry of Education documents (e.g., Learning for All) and the context of the school board (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a). Longer duration, goals, and coherency permit educators to master the skill(s) and/or content presented in the design process of this professional development (Butler et al., 2004; Gersten, 2010; Penuel et al., 2007; Van de Bergh et al., 2014).

Similar to the supported professional development in Grierson’s and Gallagher’s (2009) study, the design process compromised of multiple formats: plenary meetings, observations, co-teaching sessions, and construction of a literacy guide. These components resemble verbal, auditory, visual, interdisciplinary, and kinesthetic methods of learning. Differentiated professional learning promotes individualized learning, granting educators more opportunities to learn and apply new knowledge (Butler et al.,

Lastly, the value of incorporating collaboration was confirmed in the literature (Butler et al., 2004; Penuel et al., 2007; Voogt et al., 2011). Every component of the initiative encouraged educators to collaborate to complete the tasks. Collaboration was purposefully facilitated by the K-12 literacy consultant to stimulate discussions and teacher agency. These collaborations were multidisciplinary due to the various representations of educators (e.g. primary teacher, literacy coach, etc.) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003; Voogt et al., 2011). Multidisciplinary collaboration is a well-supported method to learn from other individuals as well as to establish a learning community (Butler et al., 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003; Penuel et al., 2007; Voogt et al., 2011).

The possible missing link in the design process. The design process aligned with the literature theoretically promoting effective professional development. However the design process was perceived to be unclear by the educators. There was a gap between the K-12 literacy consultant’s conceptualization of design process and the actual enacted design process. Despite the integration of effective traits of professional development (Butler et al., 2004; Garet et al., 2001; Gersten et al., 2010; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Penuel et al., 2007; Van de Berg et al., 2014; Voogt et al., 2011; Webster-Wright, 2009), it is likely that a lack of overt communication about the design process throughout the initiative was the missing link that led to the disconnect between the K-12 literacy consultant and the other participating educators. For instance, the
purpose of the initiative, the annual goal to construct a guide, and the components of the
design process (e.g., co-teaching sessions) were introduced to the educators at the first
meeting in October 2014 by the K-12 literacy consultant. Statements about the guide at
the other meetings were not elaborated on. Identifying and explicitly communicating the
incremental tangible goals for each meeting and/or month throughout the initiative may
have provided clarity about the design process to the educators. Setting goals throughout
the learning process is a method to communicate the purpose of the event/activity as well
as validate the progression towards the end goal (Butler et al., 2004; Van de Bergh et al.,
2014). By using the tenets of backward design to construct the procedure of the initiative,
smaller goals might have been evident. Backward design occurs when “the planning
process begins with a clear understanding of the ends in mind” (Richards, 2013, p. 22).
The goal of the learning is identified, followed by how the learners will express their
knowledge to demonstrate that the goal was obtained (Drake, Reid, & Kolohon, 2014;
Richards, 2013). Then the topics, activities, and learning opportunities are put in
sequential order to ensure the learner has the skills and/or knowledge to complete the
summative task and obtaining the end goal (Drake et al., 2014; Richards, 2013).
Backward design is “preferred in situations where a high degree of accountability needs
to be built into the [professional development] design” (Richards, 2013, p. 29) because
this approach creates a comprehensive layout of the process with each learning task, goal,
and assessment purposeful chosen to achieve the end result (Drake et al., 2014).

Insufficient communication amongst the educators in throughout the design
process also led to minimal consolidations throughout the design process. Consolidation
occurs at the end of an event to summarize the new knowledge presented in a lesson
(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). There was no consolidation at the end of the plenary meetings to summarize the educators’ professional learnings. The visual representations of literacy were not discussed or compared at the end of their design. At the meeting in March, the teachers documented the achievements of their marker students from the co-teaching sessions. After documenting their marker students’ progress, the teachers did not have an opportunity to share their experiences from the co-teaching sessions; therefore the observations and co-teaching sessions were not consolidated either. Furthermore, the guide was not consolidated after the educators were granted seven days to input their own information. Deliberately consolidating each meeting and task would contribute to the educators solidifying their professional learning and synthesizing the purpose of the event in relation to the end goal.

With no consolidation, the purpose of the mandated observations and co-teaching sessions were not communicated the educators. The observations and co-teaching sessions occurred through the academic year, took a sufficient amount of time in the initiative. It was assumed that the observations and co-teaching sessions were in place to provide an opportunity for teachers to be exposed to different practices. Interestingly, the observations and co-teaching sessions did not inform educators’ professional knowledge to assist them with the development of the guide. The educators relied on the experiences from their classrooms. The observations and co-teaching sessions were a valuable learning component that could have been a purposeful element to the design process if a distinct connection to the construction of the guide was communicated to the educators.

**The incomplete guide.** The guide was incomplete at the end of the academic year. The K-12 literacy consultant planned a half day meeting to build the guide, in
addition to 7 days for educators to individually input information into the guide via Google Drive. This time allotment was not long enough to achieve the goal, as addressed by the educators. Although, other factors could have influenced the guide’s lack of completion. First, the contribution of information to the guide on an individual basis did not hold educators accountable to participate in this online activity. Secondly, the guide was constructed in May, which is a time when teachers are occupied with their students’ end of the year projects, standardized assessments, and preparing for report cards. Lastly, it is plausible that the educators were not motivated to contribute to the guide because the educators did not perceive the value of the guide as an outcome of the ambiguous design process. Alternative factors, in addition to the inadequate amount of time, might have contributed to the guide’s incompletion.

**The Guide**

Equally important as examining the design process is positioning the guide as a teacher resource within the literature. There are some affirmations in the literature on the effective components of literacy resources and this guide’s components. Effective literacy resources need a balance of the correct amount of content information without being inefficient or overwhelming (Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Grossman & Thompson, 2008). The educators mentioned the difficulty of embedding enough information in the guide, yet remaining concise. This challenge was not overcome because the guide was not finished. Next, incorporating pedagogical frameworks within a literacy resource, such as instructional approaches is suggested (Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Grossman & Thompson, 2008). The guide included reading pedagogies within the Strategies column, but this was not well-defined as the literature recommended (e.g., Davis & Krajcik, 2005;
Grossman & Thompson, 2008). The addition of supplemental materials within any resource should be meaningfully referenced (Grierson et al., 2007; Grossman & Thompson, 2008). The guide built in supplemental materials in the Resource column, including websites and videos from Ontario’s Ministry of Education. It was also the intention of the educators to make additional videos to complement some of the strategies. Finally, it was recommended to incorporate alternative instructional approaches and assessments for educators to diversify their plans to meet their students’ needs (Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Grossman & Thompson, 2008). The guide did not provide such modifications. At the end of the year, the guide did not align with many of the necessary resource components cited in the literature.

**The guide’s content.** This study provided insight about what a group of primary and junior educators believed to be the best practices and resources for reading assessment and instruction. The content in the guide extended beyond reading practices to factors that support teachers (e.g., Document Transfer). In relation to reading, the guide referred to collaborative planning with the Mentorship category and the System/School Supports category (Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2013). The Assessment category listed two formative assessments: running records and PM benchmark assessments. The guide did not include alternative information on diagnostic, formative, or summative reading assessments (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2008, 2013a, 2013b). Whole group, small group, and individual instructional approaches were connected with the How to Teach Reading category, in which only guided reading is described (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Grierson et al., 2007; Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2008). Separate categories of Word Study
and Conferencing also relate to instructional approaches. It is noteworthy that most of the categories and affiliated content items mentioned were still a work in progress.

Many empirically validated practices were not mentioned in the guide. Information on foundational literacy concepts, such as print awareness were not identified (International Reading Association, 2007; Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). Pedagogical considerations, including cross-curricular instruction, authentic learning tasks, scaffolding, and differentiation were not recognized (Aubut et al., 2004; Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Laveault et al., 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2008, 2013a). Also, elements of the classroom environment (e.g., characteristics of a classroom library) were not documented (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b; Student Achievement Division, 2011). The teachers may not have included these practices due to the limited time for designing the guide or these practices might have been considered to be too preliminary for the guide.

The reading practices included in the guide were based on the educators’ experience. The educators might have called on both empirical research and their experiences to determine recommended practices. Teachers are not often effective evaluators due to their limited background in research (Choppin, 2011; Sherin & Drake, 2009). Grossman and Thompson’s (2008) study demonstrated that teachers often repeatedly use a resource because it is familiar to them even if the teachers did not evaluate the resource. Empirical research can provide validation and credibility for teachers’ assessment and instructional practices (Choppin, 2011; Lovell & Phillips, 2009; Sherin & Drake, 2009).
The most surprising result was the detachment between the visual representations of literacy development and the guide. At the meeting in October, it was explained that the visual representations were a method to document the teachers’ growing content knowledge to use as a visual aid during the guide’s development. Once the visual representations were complete, the teams were not provided with the opportunity to consolidate their graphics at the meeting in March 2015. Then, the visual representations were displayed at the meeting in May 2015 but the images were not referred to during the guide’s design. Thus, the guide did not exemplify any notion of a literacy continuum which was a key concept for the educators to grasp in the first year of the initiative.

Rodney (K-12 literacy consultant) stated in his interview that he desired to have a literacy continuum as part to the resource; however a question-answer chart model was agreed upon by the teacher participants instead. David (resource teacher/vice principal) was the only educator who specified his understanding of a literacy continuum when he observed primary strategies being used in junior classrooms and vice versa. Why did the educators not emphasize the principle of a literacy continuum? The design process indirectly supported the concept of a literacy continuum (i.e., as attempted to illustrate with the visual representations) through discussions, activities at the meetings, observations, and in co-teachings sessions. It is a possibility that the K-12 literacy consultant and the facilitators assumed that the teachers unconsciously conceptualized the literacy continuum concept. The connection was not explicit or emphasized enough for all of the educators to grasp it throughout the design process. The objective to bridge the gap of primary and junior language divisions to a literacy continuum to support all students’ abilities in the classroom through the use of best practices was not achieved.
Omitted foundational skills. An analysis of the guide’s design process elucidated the fact that two foundational skills that the educators required to construct the guide were absent. First, the educators were not provided with skills on how to evaluate resources. Determining any resource’s quality is an applicable skill for resource designers (i.e., the educators in the initiative) and educators using resources (Grierson et al., 2007; Khan & Gorard, 2012; Lovell & Philips, 2009). As exemplified in Grierson et al.’s (2007) study as well as Khan and Gorard’s (2012) study, it is imperative for educators to critically analyze resources to determine their value and usefulness (Choppin, 2011; Grossman & Thompson, 2008; Remillard & Bryans, 2004). Sherin and Drake (2009) discussed the multiple ways teachers reviewed resources (i.e., coherence to students, content alignment to the curriculum, etc.) depending on when the teacher interacts with the resource. The teachers in Sherin and Drake’s (2009) study did not use empirical evidence to evaluate a resource and they reviewed a resource with one consideration at a time (e.g., coherence to the students or content alignment to the curriculum) instead of a comprehensive analysis. Despite the fact that resources are manufactured by corporate publishers or produced by another educator, it does not mean that the resource is up-to-date, aligned with the Ontario education system and/or evidence-based, as noted by Lovell and Phillips (2009). Amongst the 15 educators who participated in the meeting in May to design the guide, only one individual questioned how the validity of the guide’s content will be established. No conclusive answer was determined.

Furthermore, results indicated that the design process did not inform the educators about how to format the guide. How could the educators design the guide without the foundational knowledge about how to structure a resource? The educators decided on the
format of the guide (i.e., questions-answer chart model on Google Drive) based on their personal preferences. Lovell and Phillip (2009) advocate that a resource’s format, design, directionality, instructional progression, assessment components, and ability to adapt to the needs of the user are all important considerations for developing educational resources. The skill to determine a resource’s value through its format is important for educators in order to evaluate existing resources and design new resources. It would have been beneficial for the educators to learn how to construct an effective format for the guide; this would have enhanced the guide’s quality.

**Implications**

The findings of this research study have implications for theory, educational practice, and future research. Theoretical implications are informed by the social constructivist practices that the educators engaged in during the design process. Implications for practice will elaborate on the significance of having an initiative’s facilitator with strong leadership skills with clear professional development goals. Secondly, the findings imply that teachers need to be better prepared to evaluate practices. The implications for future research present some recommendations.

**Implications for Theory**

In this research, the guide’s design process ascribed to social constructivist tenets. Social constructivism is at play when individuals build knowledge from participating in their environment through dialogue with other people (Adams, 2006; Creswell, 2014; Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). Knowledge is perceived to be contextual with multiple truths (Adams, 2006; Creswell, 2014; Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). Vygotsky, a contributor to the theory of social constructivism, proposed the concept of scaffolding
and the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Scaffolding of the learner occurs within the zone of proximal development as the learner works from being a dependent to independent worker with a specific task or skill (Adams, 2006; Jennings & Di, 1996; Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002; Nuthall, 2002). Each phase of the guide’s design process was premised on social constructivist principles and required the educators to collaborate: the dialogue in the meetings, team effort to create the literacy visual representations, the observations, and co-teaching sessions in dyads. These collaborations resulted in the educators learning from each other’s experience and knowledge. In this research study, scaffolding and the zone of proximal development were indirectly embedded through these collaborative activities and discussion among the educators. The utility of such professional learning collaborations through dialogue amongst educators is supported by research (Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Precidado-Babb & Lijedahl, 2012).

**Implications for Practice**

There are two implications for practice that stem from the findings of this research study. It was demonstrated that professional development, such as the initiative researched herein, requires a facilitator with strong leadership skills and an explicit approach to accomplish the goal of the professional development. In the initiative, the K-12 literacy consultant appeared organized with several learning opportunities through the initiative (e.g., meetings and co-teaching sessions), in addition to the annual goals within the initiative’s three year plan. Nonetheless, at the end of the first year, the teacher participants were uncertain about the design process and incompleteness of the guide; therefore, it might be implied that there is a need for explicit communication from the leader of the initiative about the design process and purposes of the guide components.
Grierson and Gallagher (2009) describe the significance of organization, including goal setting within professional development. The professional development studied by Grierson and Gallagher (2009) used goals that structured the program, along with personal goals set by the teachers. The goals for the professional development aligned the learnings to the Ontario Ministry of Education’s resources and curriculum to organize each component of the project. The teachers’ personal goals were constantly referred to in group discussions, emitting purpose and direction to their professional learning (Grierson & Gallagher, 2009). Additionally, in the same professional development, the teachers attributed the success of the project to the professional knowledge of the leaders’ (i.e., the demonstration classroom teacher) interpersonal skills to guide the teachers throughout the project (Grierson & Gallagher, 2009). School board superintendents, principals, and teachers may benefit from understanding the value of this implication.

The second implication for practice is for professional learning facilitators attend to preparing teachers to design and integrate literacy practices and resources meaningfully. As demonstrated by the construction of the guide, teachers generally do not affiliate their practices, resources, or teaching-based decisions based on research literature as a way to infirm their decisions. It cannot be expected that teachers can support their actions based on research when teachers are not trained with research evaluation skills (Walpole et al., 2004). Studies by Grierson et al. (2007), Khan and Gorard (2012), as well as Lovell and Phillips (2009) demonstrated that teachers do not have the skills to evaluate resources and this is an integral skill. Why do not all teachers have the skills to be critically analyze resources? The role and responsibilities of a teacher are changing. Traditionally, teachers taught directly from a textbook with
minimal alterations (Sherin & Drake, 2009). Today, teachers are expected to design their own lessons to meet governmental standards, the needs of the students, and to demonstrate accountability (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015; Sherin & Drake, 2009). With countless options for teaching methods, practices, curriculum support, and associated technology, teachers need to use research to support their practices as well as to maximize student achievement within classroom context (Walpole et al., 2004). This implication may benefit school board superintendents, principals, support staff (e.g., literacy coaches) as they consider how to best prepare teachers to appreciate the significance of research and their role as evaluators.

**Implications for Future Research**

Implications for future research include recommendations to continue and/or build from this research to contribute to the growing body of literature. It would be worthwhile to follow up on the guide’s design process into the second year of the initiative with a focus on how the guide was altered and the teachers’ reactions to the guide once it is piloted. Adjusting the methodology to a mixed methods design would provide a comprehensive overview of initiative (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative data could be collected through field notes and artifacts from the meetings, electronic journal reflections at the end of each meeting, as well as individual interviews with the educators at the end of the implementation year (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative data could be collected with a Likert scale questionnaire about the perceptions of the guide by the educators who pilot the guide within the school board, including the teachers participating in the initiative to gather more input on the guide (Creswell, 2014). Continuing to follow the project might advance our understanding about how practicing
teachers identify essential literacy assessment and instructional practices as well as how
the teachers design a resource guide for their colleagues.

A significant contribution to the academic community would be to conduct a
research study with the Ontario Ministry of Education’s advisory panel of educators who
design a publication on literacy practices. A qualitative case study approach with data
collection from field notes at the meetings, electronic journal entries at the end of
meeting, focus group interviews at the half way point of the project, and individual
interviews at the end of the project could be taken for an in-depth account (Creswell,
2014). Additionally, a field-based analysis of implementation of the final publication
would also be conducted (Creswell, 2014). The components of the Ontario Ministry of
Education’s design process and final publication would be interesting to compare the
design process and the final product of the initiative presented in this research.

There is limited literature on educators evaluating commercial resources and non-
commercial resources (Butler et al., 2004). Similarly to Grierson and Woloshyn (2013),
the school board professional learning facilitators could hold bi-monthly meetings to train
educators on how to evaluate resources using empirical research (Butler et al., 2004;
Garet et al., 2001; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009; Voogt et
al., 2011). The professional development opportunities could vary in format with
meetings, focus groups, and critiquing resources in the educators’ classroom. To address
the structure, content, and the educators’ perceptions of the professional development,
qualitative data could be collected. Each meeting and focus group would be videotaped
and field notes would be collected (Creswell, 2014). At the end of the professional
development, the educators would be interviewed individually to question their opinions
about the professional development as well as the impact of on their professional practice (Creswell, 2014). Addressing educators as researchers is an important step to conceptualizing educators as resource designers and resource evaluators.

**Conclusion**

This qualitative research study attempted to understand how primary and junior educators identified literacy practices to inform the process of designing a literacy guide for professional development. After collecting qualitative data for one academic year of this southern Ontario school board’s literacy initiative, several findings emerged. The design process was structured with plenary meetings, constructing a visual presentation of literacy, observations, and co-teaching sessions in cross-divisional dyads in preparation to construct the guide on reading pedagogy at the meeting in May 2015. The educators perceived the design process as unclear likely due to the inadequate communication from the K-12 literacy consultant to the educators throughout the design process. The guide was perceived as a working document with areas that need enhancements to be teacher friendly. Interestingly, the connection to the key concept of the initiative—a literacy continuum of student achievement—and empirically based literacy practices were not included in the guide. Theoretical implications of social constructivism were upheld within the initiative’s facilitation. Practical implications underscore the importance of leadership, goal setting and the need for primary and junior educators to identify best practices with sound research.

The key message offered from the findings of this research study speak to: (a) the value of research in educational practices, and (b) the need for professional development projects to maintain a framework of education design. Educators need to have an
appreciation for the value of research, which includes the role of research, how to be involved with research (as a researcher or as a participant), and how to integrate empirically researched practices into the classroom. This is no easy feat with an immense amount of professional development needed but the benefits outweigh the costs: teachers will be employing sound practices, leading to higher achievement for all students.

Finally, professional development should be planned using the same procedure and practices as if the facilitator was unit planning for classroom instruction. Designing a professional development project and an instructional unit both require a delineated path of learning opportunities to achieve a desired result, such a skill or knowledge. There is a precedence of effective characteristics of designing professional development within Ontario classrooms to account for how people learn along with multiple possibilities of the learners’ needs (Butler et al., 2004; Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Fishman et al., 2003; Gersten et al., 2010; Grierson & Woloshyn, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2006; Penuel et al., 2007; Voogt et al., 2011; Webster-Wright, 2009). The initiative’s missing component was communication that led to poor goal setting, unclear purposes for activities, and a lack of guidance. Regardless of the lack of communication, these practices are representative of common educational best practices: lesson design, learning goals, diagnostic assessment, and backwards design (Drake et al., 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003, 2006). Teacher professional development positions education in the role of the learner and it should not be assumed that facilitating their knowledge growth is any different from supporting learners in the classroom.
References


Appendix A

Interview Prompts for Reading and Writing Lead Participants

1. Describe your background in Education.
   a. How long have you been a teacher?
   b. What grades have you taught?

2. Has your understanding of teaching reading changed since the beginning of the project? If yes, be specific and explain how it has changed? If it hasn’t, please explain why you think that it has not changed.

3. Do you feel that being a part of the Reading and Writing Leads Project has been influential in assessment and teaching of Language Arts? Describe any shifts in your individual practice.

4. Based on your time developing curriculum resources over the past months, how would you describe your experiences from a personal and professional perspective?

5. What process did you engage in to develop the resource package to train other teachers in effective reading instruction?

6. What some of the accomplishments and challenges that you incurred during the process that you engaged in to develop the resource package?

7. How would you evaluate and compare your developed resource package to commercially produced resources such as Words their Way?

8. Do you think observing and co-planning has influenced your Language Arts program?

9. Describe a/some milestones or pivotal moments from being a part of the Reading and Writing Leads Project.

10. Do you feel that the Reading and Writing Leads Project has made an impact on your future teaching practice?

11. What influential/memorable professional development experiences have you had with respect to collaborating with other Reading and Writing Leads?
Appendix B

Interview Prompts for Facilitators

1. Describe your background in education.
   a. How long have you been in education?
   b. How long have you been principal/facilitator in this school/board? Prior administrative experience?

2. What literacy instructional resource(s) are most beneficial for teachers? For students?

3. What process did you and the teachers engage in to develop the resource package to train other teachers in effective reading instruction?

4. What are some of the accomplishments and challenges that you and your teachers incurred during the process that you engaged in to develop the resource package?

5. How would you evaluate and compare the developed resource package to commercially produced resources such as Words their Way?

6. Do you think being a part of the Reading and Writing Leads Project has been influential in helping these teachers make some of these changes?

7. Specifically, have you seen changes in teacher practices, student work, and/or student achievement as a result of the work teachers have done in this Project?

8. Do you think observing and co-planning has influenced teachers to make some of these changes?

9. Has the Reading and Writing Leads Project increased teachers’ self-efficacy in literacy instruction?

10. Do you perceive that the Reading and Writing Leads Project has made an impact on teachers’ intentions for their future practice?

11. Do your teachers perceive growth in their knowledge of literacy instructional practices?

12. What changes have you experienced as an administrator/facilitator as a function of the Reading and Writing Leads Project?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
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| Assessment: Running Records, Learning Goals, Success Criteria | How do we effectively use observations, conversations and products to triangulate evidence of learning? | • *Knowing What Counts* series by Davies & Herbst  
• MISA London PNC website (www.misalondon.ca)  
• *An Observation Survey - Of Early Literacy Achievement* by Marie M. Clay  
• www.eworkshop.on.ca  
• ERTs  
• LinguiSystems resources - some with SLP, CDA, ERT, school libraries | Running records should be done regularly to check for student learning. The running record needs to be evaluated each time it is administered. Running records can be done on any book but do not use the books from the benchmark binder for regular running records. The Benchmark binder should only be used at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year.  
   • Analyze decoding, comprehension and fluency over time  
   • Student profiles that can be carried forward from year to year are very helpful |
| Time Management for Conferencing | How often should I meet with students who fall below the recommended reading levels for their grade?  
What is the rest of the class doing while I conference with a student? | | For students who have not yet reached the recommended grade level in reading, you should try to meet with them daily for 5-10 minutes to check their learning and progress. A quick check in with the student will help to reinforce strategies that you are working on with that student. Students who are already at grade level require weekly or bi-weekly check ins to monitor learning.  
   • The level the student is behind also needs to be considered  
   • A student who is one level behind may not need as much |
A conference is a quick check-in to monitor a learner's progress. During independent reading is an ideal time to conference with individual students about how their reading is going. You may want to ask them to read a passage to observe for fluency and accuracy. You may then ask a few comprehension questions about the passage and its connection to the rest of the book. Do not feel like you must have read the book to conference with a student about it. Asking the right questions is key during this process.

- It is important to teach students how to work independently and the number of minutes of independent work would depend on grade level - this would be an excellent time to conference with other students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How to Teach Reading: Guided, Shared, Independent, Read aloud</th>
<th>What does guided reading look like?</th>
<th>Guided Reading - Good First Reading for All Children (Irene C. Fountas &amp; Gay Su Pinnell)</th>
<th>Guided reading can be a group of students or one-on-one. Based on need/strength not always based on level. Teach students what a guided reading period is and what it looks like.</th>
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</table>
|                                                             | Guided Reading - Good First Reading for All Children (Irene C. Fountas & Gay Su Pinnell) | www.eworkshop.on.ca | |}

Early Writing -
https://drive.google.com/a/niagaracatholic.ca/file/d/0B9B0o3BZQgIMNHFjZWdFeWhHRGM/view?usp=sharing
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Use of Technology</th>
<th>What Privacy and Information Management (PIM) issues do I need to be aware of to support student safety when we are using technology?</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teach all students how to use software available at a board level - all students can benefit from the software and technology motivates most students but not necessarily all students.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Use of technology to track data and analyze over time.</td>
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<td>How can I effectively use technology to support my assessment, evaluation and reporting practices and improve student engagement and achievement?</td>
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<td>Public libraries - encourage use</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Alternative resources to work with at home including print and interactive web sites</td>
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<td>Host parent information evenings to inform parents of literacy best practices but don’t expect that parents will be able to do the same teaching at home. Bag a book programs are best done at school. Home reading should not be difficult or even at an instructional level but rather an opportunity to showcase what the student is doing well or reading for fun.</td>
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<td>• Encourage to read about topics of interest</td>
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| Word Study | How can I ensure students' word knowledge continues to develop over time, while at the same time ensuring this knowledge improves their reading? | Links to Ministry Videos about the Effective integration of word study in the classroom = http://curriculum.org/secretariat/wordstudy/index.shtml | Students are pattern seeking beings. It is the teacher's job to generate students' interest in words by allowing them to explore and inquire about how words are built. **Word sorting** is a great, inquiry based approach, that allows students to compare and contrast words and uncover generalizations about how words are constructed. As students explore specific features of words, it is important that they participate in **word hunts** during their independent reading and continue to look for and make connections between both the spellings and meanings of words.  

The best way to assess a student's knowledge of words is to observe their reading and writing. Focusing on their errors in these areas will help teachers focus their instruction on specific aspects of spelling. If a student is falling behind in their spelling, a spelling inventory (found in *Words their Way*, may be used to identify, more precisely, what next steps to take with the student.  

- Analyse classroom observations and KTEA results to determine types of reading and spelling errors.  

Add pictures to words to help visually and then remove the pictures - i.e. Writing with Symbols and high frequency word. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| How do I assess a student's knowledge of words? | • High frequency word lists  
• Word games | | |
### Mentorship

| Role of the Principal | How can administrators ensure consistent practices across grade levels? | Ministry of Education document: *Creating Pathways to Success, K-12*  
- School team meetings | Facilitate release time for divisional staff to meet to discuss and align best practices  
- Data tracking across all grade levels |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| System/School Supports| Beyond in-services, how can system-level consultants support classroom teachers, including supporting instruction for students with special education needs? | Ministry of Education document: *Shared Solutions: A Guide to Preventing and Resolving Conflicts Regarding Programs and Services for Students with Special Education Needs*  
- Consultants, PRTs and ERTs | Use of consultants to support and direct division meetings to discuss and align best practices  
- Classroom teachers/ERT share identified problem for specific strategies to try for a period of time  
- Allow for collaborative work time between teachers, including visits or group discussions. |
| Documentation:  
Transfer of Information Between Teachers, SBT Meetings |  
- Maplewood *connectEd*  
- SBT minutes to track all strategies over a period of time to help with understanding what has been done and what worked and what did not work.  
- Transition packages for students who are weak to document as well. | Record and review Standardized, System-Wide Assessments data. | In school data can and should be handed on to the next year teacher including observations and anecdotal notes about the student. The scores don’t tell the whole picture.  
- Data collection for full elementary schooling and beyond just the next grade |
| Learning Concerns | What are the next steps when my student shows very little growth after |  
- Vision/Hearing tests  
- ERT  
- School Based Team  
- K-TEA | IEP  
- Analyse when the problems occur and what type of problem occurs |
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<tr>
<th>EQAO Skills</th>
<th>How can we teach EQAO Assessment taking skills throughout the grades without “teaching to the test”?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speech and Language Pathologist</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Discussion with parents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Consider a number of variables, environment, reading topics, listening comprehension versus reading comprehension</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Mock” EQAO Assessments and moderated marking</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Develop a continuum of EQAO Assessment taking strategies from K to 8</td>
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<td>Teach independence throughout the school year</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encourage students to take risks, and learn from mistakes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encourage students to become problem solvers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teach test taking skills throughout the year - there should be no difference between EQAO testing and classroom test taking</td>
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