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Qualitative Study of Collaboration Between Independent Reading Specialists and Elementary Classroom Teachers

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This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the College of Graduate and Professional Studies of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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School of Educational Leadership

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Dr. Kristofer Hawbaker, for providing me with unceasing encouragement; to my children Hudson, Cooper, Haley, and Madison for providing me with a sense of purpose; to my parents George and Mary Wessberg for their steadfast advocacy and generous financial support; and the many courageous children with learning exceptionalities who inspired and motivated me to pursue my calling.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank God for his love and grace. The completion of this dissertation represents a half-decade of doctoral persistence. During this time, I have endured the delivery of four children, suffered separation from my husband during his Navy deployments, and organized multiple out-of-state moves. My doctoral pursuit has taken a number of breathers to prioritize the wellbeing of my family during strenuous times. In hindsight, it seems like my doctoral progress could only be explained by the phrase: "growth is growth, no matter how small." Moreover, my dissertation was completed during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, which required numerous ad hoc changes to the study's original interview protocols and complicated researchers' traditional reliance on in-person interaction for the collection of data. This doctoral pursuit has been humbling. Yet, I am reminded of God's presence in these difficult times when I reflect on Philippians 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

I would also like to acknowledge my family–most notably my husband, Dr. Kristofer Hawbaker. He has set the bar high in so many ways. When I began my doctoral pursuit, he was just returning from a Navy deployment in Africa. Since then, he has undertaken and completed his own doctoral degree, continued to serve our country through naval service, and sacrificed seemingly endless effort and time to be present and involved with our four children. He has led me by his example, inspired me with his selflessness, and humored me with his unconditional love. Thank you, my Love.

To my children—Hudson, Cooper, Haley, and Madison—thank you for being a source of joy and ultimate humility. This pursuit would be vane if not for the hope that this endeavor might

demonstrate the value of perseverance to you one day. Sometime far into the future, when you consider ways to fall asleep, I hope you will pick up my dissertation and find yourself entranced in a narcoleptic daze by the inane amount of material researched about a topic most people hold no concept of—and when you fall asleep before the completion of Chapter 1, I hope you will at least dream of your next great achievements. Kiddos, please know that if I can achieve this, then you are capable of so much more. I love you and am so proud to be your Mom.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my father, Dr. George Wessberg, who led by tremendous example in his dedication to hard work and grit. He has encouraged me to dream big dreams from the beginning. In elementary school I was diagnosed with dyslexia and attention deficit disorder (ADD), and the counselor of my school spoke solemnly with my parents about the unlikely probability that I would be able to graduate from high school. Despite this tough opinion, my father never stopped believing in my potential. While my dissertation and subsequent doctoral degree serve as an indictment against the antiquated educational philosophy that did not understand how to potentiate children with learning differences, it does more to validate the belief of my father that I could achieve great things if I committed to persevere when things got tough. I owe my resilience and optimism to the example my Dad showed me. These intangibles serve as a legacy to me and my children of what it takes to overcome setbacks and achieve difficult goals. Thank you, Dad. I love you.

Abstract

The failure of educators to meet the needs of elementary students who require separated, differentiated, and intensive reading interventions (Tier 3) has been attributed to the scarcity of administrative resources and a lack of effective collaboration between reading specialists and classroom teachers. Experts opine that common barriers to effective collegial collaboration between institutional reading specialists, who are employed by the school, and classroom teachers include: an unsupportive school culture, the classroom teachers' fear of losing pedagogical autonomy, the absence of mutual trust and interdependence between the reading specialists and their students' classroom teachers, and the inability of reading specialists and classroom teachers to resolve interprofessional conflicts. These perceived barriers are heighted when engaged independent reading specialists, who are not employed by the school, attempt to collaborate with unengaged classroom teachers of their students for the purpose of coherent lesson planning. The findings of this qualitative case study revealed five recommendations for practical application that enable independent reading specialists to more effectively collaborate with their struggling readers' elementary school classroom teachers and also support the readers' classroom curriculum. Successful collaboration between independent reading specialists and classroom teachers is essential to improving the academic achievement of struggling readers who depend on effective Tier 3 reading intervention.

Keywords: reading specialist, elementary education teacher, collaboration, conflict resolution, leadership

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The ability to read with high levels of comprehension is essential to success in education and in life (Matsumura et al., 2013). Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, formerly referred to as No Child Left Behind [NCLB]), and other initiatives introduced by the U. S. Department of Education have changed the role of the contemporary reading specialist from a teacher who remediates individual students with reading difficulties to a diagnostician and therapist for low responding students, or a literacy coach for their classroom teachers (Kern, 2011). Despite an abundance of effective reading intervention methods available to elementary educators, one-third of fourth grade students in American schools still fail to read at grade level (NAEP, 2017). The failure of educators to meet the needs of these students has been attributed to the scarcity of administrative resources and a lack of effective collaboration between educational specialists and classroom teachers (Reeves et al., 2017).

Scholars concluded that effective collaboration between education specialists and general educators enhances student achievement (Compton et al., 2015; Kangas, 2018; Monteil-Overall, 2009; Xu, 2015). However, studies of interprofessional relationships indicated that classroom teachers' absence of mutual trust, lack of interdependence, and fear of losing their pedagogical autonomy are common sources of conflict, which even stymies effective interprofessional collaboration between institutional reading specialists, who are school faculty, and classroom teachers (Meirink et al., 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Sanchez and O'Connor (2015) cited four studies that reported as many as 20%–50% of students fail to read at grade level despite appropriate Tier 2 classroom interventions. Ultimately, many of these special needs students who live in more affluent communities seek separated,

differentiated, and intensive (Tier 3) interventions from independent reading specialists, who are not school faculty, because their school lacks the resources to provide effective Tier 3 reading interventions. Tier 3 reading interventions are separated, differentiated, and intensive interventions that are designed to meet the specific needs of each student (Kaminski et al., 2015; Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). An important facet of separated and differentiated reading intervention includes collaboration between the reading specialist and the student's classroom teacher to make connections between the context of the general classroom curriculum and the context of the specialized and targeted reading interventions (Newmann et al., 2001; Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). In this context the collaborative effort for the purpose of promoting coherent classroom lesson planning for these special needs students is usually initiated by the independent reading specialist so the possibility of interprofessional conflict with the classroom teachers is potentially much greater than collaborative efforts initiated by an institutional reading specialist. This assumption regarding coworker collegiality is due to the essential role of trust in interprofessional relationships, established leadership roles, and a preexisting collaborative culture (Gray & Summers, 2016).

Foundational work on collaboration by Vygotsky (1978) demonstrated that collegial interaction leads to greater goal achievement than is possible when educators work alone. Hargreaves (1994) and Louis and Miles (1990) were early experts who opined that collaborative efforts are most effective when they are voluntary and focus on the teachers' needs rather than in response to an administrative mandate. Tynjälä (2008) introduced five elements that are necessary to support collegial learning: (1) personal interaction, (2) shared goals, (3) mutual trust, (4) a collaborative climate, and (5) a willingness to embrace progressive problem solving. Although these five elements may be necessary for collaborative learning, Fawett et al. (2010)

opined that shared responsibility for the outcome is essential to achieving a common goal. Furthermore, Doppenberg et al. (2012) discovered that informal settings and positive attitudes appeared to be highly relevant to classroom teachers when they are involved in collegial collaboration.

Classroom teachers tend to be more receptive to collaboration with education specialists when their supervisors and colleagues promote a school culture of personal growth and professional development (Gray & Summers, 2016; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Schools that instill Bandura's (1997) appreciation for collective efficacy among their teachers promote the benefits of collegial trust and interprofessional collaboration (Gray & Summers, 2016). Despite the recognized importance of collaborative lesson planning for students with special needs, unenthused teachers view the laborious process as a dreaded chore (Bauml, 2016). Therefore, a need exists to identify the leadership skills and conflict resolution strategies that independent, private, reading specialists could utilize to effectively collaborate with indifferent classroom teachers of their students who failed to respond to the teachers' Tier 1 and Tier 2 classroom reading interventions (Ellington et al., 2017; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; Vangrieken et al., 2015).

Background of the Problem

Historically, reading tutors were general education teachers who developed an exceptional interest in helping their struggling students learn to read at grade level by providing focused remedial instruction (Bean et al., 2002). The role of the teacher-reading tutor changed in 2002 when states required reading interventionists to complete some graduate-level course work and pass a state sponsored examination to become certified reading professionals (Dole et al., 2006). The educational trifurcation of contemporary reading professionals has led graduates to

become experts in a specific aspect of reading intervention: (1) as reading teachers who work exclusively with students individually or in small groups in their classrooms; (2) as reading specialists who spend the majority of their time working directly with students outside the classroom and spend some time collaborating with these students' teachers to improve classroom literacy programs; or (3) as reading coaches who work exclusively with classroom teachers to provide professional development, planning literacy curricula, analyzing student test results to prescribed differentiated interventions, and perform various administrative functions (Dole et al., 2006).

The majority of reading professionals work with students and teachers in elementary and middle schools (Dole et al., 2006). Although contemporary reading specialists spend the majority of their time providing individualized diagnostic and separated literacy support for students who struggle to read at grade level, they may also respond to requests from teachers to help these at-risk students reenter their classroom's literacy curriculum (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014).

Twenty years ago, the institutional reading teacher-specialists spent 90% of their time working individually with students via separated instruction (Bean et al., 2002). Within the past five years, institutional reading specialists, who are sometimes described as literacy coaches, spend 28% of their time collaborating with classroom teachers, 25% of their time administering reading assessment tests and analyzing data, 10% of their time providing student interventions, and 37% of their time attending to administrative functions and teachers' professional development (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014).

A literacy coach's primary responsibility is to collaborate with teachers to help them achieve specific professional development goals; help teachers develop clinical knowledge about teaching at-risk students to read in their classroom; and to be a literacy resource for classroom

teachers and their students (Al Otaiba et al., 2008). Therefore, the contemporary reading specialist must master two role demands: one role as a literacy coach who helps classroom teachers assess students' reading difficulties, and improve the teachers' ability to teach literacy skills to struggling students; and the other role as a reading interventionist who provides intensive and individualized instruction to the students who fail to respond to classroom reading interventions (Bean et al., 2002). Problems inevitably arise when the struggling students who undergo separated, outside the classroom, reading intervention return to their classroom's reading program (Vaughn et al., 2010; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

The problem studied was how independent reading specialists need to discover strategies that will enable them to effectively collaborate with their students' elementary school classroom teachers so their differentiated, intensive, and separated reading interventions will be coherent with the students' core classroom curriculum (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012; Compton et al., 2015; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). An independent reading specialist is an education specialist who conducts reading instruction outside of the institution and who provides separated, data-based, differentiated, individualized, and intensive, interventions to students who struggle to read (Compton et al., 2015). The ability to read with high levels of comprehension is essential to success in education (Matsumura et al., 2013). Nonetheless, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress data, 32% of fourth grade students in the United States fail to read at basic grade level (NCES, 2017). Research by Bean et al. (2003) reported that schools with exemplary reading programs demonstrate that a multitiered classroom-based model, which is supported by literacy coaches and qualified classroom teachers, is the most effective way to provide literacy interventions for children who struggle to read. This seminal work was

subsequently validated by more contemporary research (Allington, 2013; Coburn & Woulfin, 2012; Daly et al., 2007; Fuchs et al., 2014; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; L'Allier et al., 2010).

Unfortunately, many elementary schools lack administrative resources, literacy coaches, and qualified teachers necessary to meet the special needs of students who require differentiated, intensive, individualized reading interventions in their classroom (Vaughn et al., 2010; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008). Separated interventions provided by independent reading specialists are usually the only practical alternative for some of the low responder students (Denton et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2016; Kaminski et al., 2015). Educational scholars concluded that separated, which are one-on-one reading interventions, are most effective for students who fail to respond to traditional classroom interventions (Slavin et al., 2011). Unfortunately, the separated approach generally lacks cohesion with core classroom education (Slavin et al., 2011). Hence, the lack of cohesion between separated reading interventions and the core classroom curriculum leads to confusion for these high-risk students (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2010; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009).

Specifically, research indicates that a lack of cohesion between separated reading interventions and the students' classroom curriculum, which is due to ineffective collaboration between the classroom teacher and the student's reading specialist, compromises the student's potential for achievement (Banerjee et al., 2017; Reeves et al., 2017; Varghese et al., 2016). Regrettably, many classroom teachers resist opportunities to collaborate with their students' reading specialists (Vangrieken et al., 2017). Nonetheless, effective collaboration between the independent reading specialists and the classroom teacher is necessary to ensure the separated reading intervention is coherent with the core classroom curriculum (Slavin et al., 2011; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). Although strategies for collaboration between classroom

teachers and institutional education specialists have been reported, the literature lacks specific evidence to guide collaboration between independent reading specialists and their students' elementary school teachers (Doppenberg et al., 2012; L'Allier et al., 2010; Monteil-Overall & Grimes, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the leadership and conflict resolution experiences of five independent reading specialists who used collaborative practices in an attempt to enhance the academic achievement of their early elementary school students (Compton et al., 2015; L'Allier et al., 2010; Xu, 2015). This study explored the role of independent reading specialists within the framework of their students' public and private elementary schools in an affluent community. The role of independent reading specialists was investigated from a leadership and conflict resolution perspective, with emphasis on the independent reading specialists' leadership role in the context of effective collaboration with their students' elementary classroom teacher. The independent reading specialists' role in promoting collegial collaboration with elementary classroom teachers was examined through the lens of Deutsch's (1983) theory of cooperation and competition in conflict resolution, which advances two basic ideas: the type of interdependence among the goals of the people involved in a given situation; and the type of action, whether it is cooperative or competitive, the people involved take to resolve the mutual problem (Deutsch, 2014).

Research Questions

RQ1: How do independent reading specialists develop strategies to collaborate with their students' elementary school classroom teachers to support their students' classroom curriculum?

The first research question sought to reveal the issue of collaboration between independent reading specialists and elementary teachers in support of the classroom curriculum. The following minor research questions assisted the information gathered from this question. These minor research questions included:

RQ1A. How does the independent reading specialist describe the process of collaborating with a students' classroom teacher to support their students' classroom curriculum?

RQ1B. What specific factors motivate an independent reading specialist to voluntarily seek a collaborative relationship with their students' elementary classroom teachers?

RQ2: What strategies do independent reading specialists develop to support their students' classroom curriculum?

The second research question sought to highlight specific collaboration strategies employed by independent reading specialists to work with elementary teachers in support of their students' classroom curriculum. The following minor research questions assisted the information gathered from this question. These minor research questions included:

RQ2A. What are the mutual benefits of elementary classroom teachers and independent reading specialists who cooperate to support students' classroom curriculum?

RQ2B. What assumptions do independent reading specialists make about the process of collaborating with students' elementary teachers to support classroom curriculum?

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms need definition to improve clarity and eliminate confusion. Descriptions of these terms are grounded and inspired by scholarly literature review. The aim of this section is to provide the reader with a basic foundation and understanding of terms considered central to this work.

Achievement. Achievement is the measurable improvement in learning that results from the adoption of specific instructional practices (Polly et al., 2015).

Autonomy. Autonomy is a common-sense belief among educators that teachers value their individualism, their personal educational training and teaching philosophy, and the long-standing culture of teaching students within isolated classrooms (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Autonomy relates to the degree to which teachers can make independent decisions about what they teach their students and how they teach the material (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Collaboration. Collaboration is defined as co-teaching, wherein the general education teacher and the education specialist jointly provide instruction to the benefit of one or more students in the teacher's classroom (Compton et al., 2015). Collaboration may involve any interaction between professional educators that is based on voluntary participation, mutual goals, and shared responsibility for making decisions in the best interest of a student (Compton et al., 2015).

Differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction is a responsive approach to reading intervention that incorporates a variety of strategies designed to meet the unique needs of individual students. It focuses on the processes by which students learn, the measurable outcomes of their learning, the environment in which they learn, and the content they are learning (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012).

Education specialist. An education specialist is a teacher with special training to serve teachers and students within an inclusive classroom environment, which includes a remedial reading teacher for students, a diagnostician for students who fail classroom reading interventions, and a consultant or coach to classroom teachers, a facilitator for supportive resources, and an agent of change within their school culture (Bean et al., 2002; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; Kern, 2011).

Engagement. Engagement is a measure of a teacher's level of energy and mental strength, enthusiasm, and inspiration; pride or dedication toward one's duties; and intensity of concentration on one's work (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

Independent reading specialist. An independent reading specialist is an education specialist who conducts reading instruction outside of the institution and who provides separated, data-based, differentiated, individualized, and intensive, interventions to students who struggle to read. Voluntary collaboration with their students' general education teacher is necessary to accomplish mutual goals for the student and optimize student achievement (Compton et al., 2015).

Institutional reading specialist. An institutional reading specialist is a member of the school faculty who is a specially trained classroom teacher or literacy coach capable of integrating a multitiered reading intervention program into the classroom with appropriate supportive resources (Kern, 2011; Sanchez & O'Connor, 2015)

Integrated instruction. Integrated instruction is an approach to reading intervention that emphasizes training teachers in effective classroom-based, or inclusive methods instead of using separated, or pullout services by a reading specialist for at-risk students (Slavin et al., 2011; Solari et al., 2017).

Intensive instruction. Intensive instruction is the third tier in the Response-to-Intervention model that provides data-based individualized instruction for students with significant reading problems. The context for specialized instruction is determined by the expertise of the reading specialist and the severity of the students' reading problems (Fuchs et al., 2014).

Intervention. Intervention is a structured and multitiered approach to managing reading difficulty, and which is provided by a qualified classroom teacher or reading specialist to help children learn to read (Slavin et al., 2011). Response-to-Intervention is the standard three-tiered model upon which contemporary reading interventions are based (Fuchs et al., 2014).

Itinerant teacher. An itinerant teacher is an education specialist employed by the school system who provides data-based individualized instruction to students with special needs via separated instruction. The itinerant teacher also provides consultation and workshop development for the classroom teachers of special needs students (Compton et al., 2015).

Literacy coach. A literacy coach is an institutional reading specialist who is responsible for teaching classroom teachers to become more effective reading interventionists. The literacy coach supports classroom teachers by performing student reading assessments, arranging professional development opportunities in reading intervention, sharing ideas for classroom reading intervention strategies, and providing encouragement to general educators who aspire to become better reading teachers (Kern, 2011; Sailors & Price, 2015).

Separated instruction. Separated instruction was the traditional pullout approach to reading intervention that was previously the "gold standard" for teaching at-risk students to read (Slavin et al., 2011). This approach is contrary to the contemporary trend in education, which is

to strive for effective classroom-based approaches that maintain students with learning

disabilities in their general education classroom (McLesky & Waldron, 2011).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of the qualitative collective case study was to examine the experiences of five independent reading specialists who aspire to engage classroom teachers in collegial collaborative practices in an altruistic effort to improve the effectiveness of their separated, intensive reading interventions for their early elementary school students who struggle to read (Compton et al., 2015; L'Allier et al., 2010; Xu, 2015). Compton and colleagues (2015) implied that collaboration is commonly interpreted as a system of co-teaching, wherein a general education teacher and an education specialist jointly provide instruction to the benefit of one or more students in the teacher's classroom. However, a broader interpretation of the phenomenon suggests that any interaction between professional educators that is based on voluntary participation, mutual goals, and shared responsibility for making decisions in the best interest of a student is collegial collaboration (Compton et al., 2015).

Literature Search Methods

The sources utilized to conduct this literature review came from scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles and books, which were located using electronic search engines from databases located at Abilene Christian University. In addition to online resources, physical references in books were located and shared from personal collections. A variety of online databases were used including: EBSCO Education Research Complete, ERIC digest, Sage Journals Online, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, Google Scholar and Bing. These databases facilitated the location of journal articles, books, and websites. Proximity searches were supplemented by regular phrase searches that include two or three additional search terms. I also located references through cited by searches and searching references identified in various resources. Key terms included in these searchers were: *reading specialist*, *literacy coach*, *elementary*

education teacher, *collaboration*, *conflict resolution*, *leadership*, *teacher job satisfaction*, *inter-professional collaboration*, *collegial collaboration*, *special education*, *education specialists*, *student achievement*, *coherent curriculum*, *teacher professional development*, *teacher efficacy*, *early education pedagogy*, *teacher autonomy*, *reading intervention*, *conflict resolution*, *educational leadership*, and *teacher engagement*.

Theoretical Framework Discussion

According to Imenda (2014), a theory is a set of interrelated concepts, which structure a systematic view of phenomena for the purpose of explaining or predicting. Theoretically, teacher collaboration in its most robust form involves "joint work, mutual observation, and focused, reflective inquiry" (Datnow, 2011, p. 147). Realistically, collaborative teaming can vary from structured meetings to informal conversations (Doppenberg et al., 2012; Hunt et al., 2003; Vangrieken et al., 2015). Therefore, a theoretical framework enabled me to identify the main variables in this study, which were: to select the appropriate methodologies; to collect, interpret and explain the data; and to possibly provide substantive guidance for current practice and future research on the topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Imenda, 2014). An inductive approach guided the literature review, which enabled me to synthesize concepts of teacher collaboration from the perspectives of five primary participants, who were independent reading specialists (Imenda, 2014). The goal guiding this study was identification of strategies for collaboration with classroom teachers developed by independent reading specialists. The theoretical framework was a constructivist-interpretive paradigm.

This collective case study focused on the issue of collaboration by interviewing a small group of independent reading specialists who provide intensive, separated reading interventions for elementary school students in an affluent suburban central Texas school district who struggle

to read at grade level (Creswell, 2014; Hanna et al., 2017; Imenda, 2014). The research problem of this collective case study was identification of strategies, which independent reading specialists could utilize to engage their students' elementary classroom teachers in a mutually beneficial collaborative relationship for the purpose of enhancing the academic achievement of their students who need separated, intensive reading intervention. The theoretical framework described the modern educational environment and strain placed on classroom teachers and institutional reading professionals, explained the rise of independent reading specialists in support of classroom teachers, and highlighted the challenge independent reading specialists have collaborating with classroom teachers.

Students' ability to read with high levels of comprehension is essential to their success in education (Matsumura et al., 2013). The role of the contemporary reading specialist in supporting students' success in reading comprehension has changed with passage of Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and other initiatives introduced by the U.S. Department of Education (Kern, 2011). Today's reading specialists have transitioned from being specialized teachers who remediate individual students with reading difficulties, to diagnosticians and therapists who assess and treat low responding students, and literacy coaches who provide resources for classroom teachers (Kern, 2011).

Despite an abundance of effective reading intervention methods available to elementary educators, one-third of fourth grade students in American schools still fail to read at grade level (NAEP, 2017). A scarcity of administrative resources and a lack of effective collaboration between educational specialists and classroom teachers are to blame for educators' failure to meet the needs of their students (Reeves et al., 2017). Two decades ago, institutional reading specialists spent 90% of their time working individually with students via separated instruction

(Bean et al., 2002). Today, the classroom teachers and educational specialists in many schools lack the resources and the time necessary to provide appropriate individualized reading instruction for students who struggle to read after the usual classroom interventions (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; Vaughn et al., 2010; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008).

The role of the classroom teacher-as-reading tutor changed in 2002 when states required reading interventionists to complete some graduate-level course work and pass a state sponsored examination to become certified reading professionals (Dole et al., 2006). Despite the increased qualification standards of contemporary reading specialists, many elementary schools lacked administrative resources, literacy coaches, and qualified teachers necessary to meet the special needs of students who require differentiated, intensive, individualized reading interventions in their classroom (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; Vaughn et al., 2010; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008). When classroom teachers request the assistance of institutional reading specialists to help at-risk students reenter their classroom's literacy curriculum, one-on-one interventions provided by independent reading specialists are usually the only practical alternative for some of the low responder students (Denton et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2016; Kaminski et al., 2015).

While educational scholars concluded that separated reading interventions are most effective for students who fail to respond to traditional classroom interventions, the separated approach generally lacks cohesion with core classroom education (Slavin et al., 2011). Consequently, the lack of cohesion between separated reading interventions and the core classroom curriculum leads to confusion for these high-risk students (Vernon-Feagans et al., 2010; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). Research indicates that a lack of cohesion between separated reading interventions and the students' classroom curriculum, which is due to ineffective collaboration between the classroom teacher and the student's independent reading

specialist, compromises the student's potential for academic achievement (Banerjee et al., 2017; Reeves et al., 2017; Varghese et al., 2016).

Effective collaboration between education specialists and general educators enhances student achievement (Compton et al., 2015; Kangas, 2018; Monteil-Overall, 2009; Xu, 2015). Regrettably, many classroom teachers resist opportunities to collaborate with their students' independent reading specialists (Vangrieken et al., 2017). Nonetheless, effective collaboration between the independent reading specialists and the classroom teacher is necessary to ensure the separated reading intervention is coherent with the core classroom curriculum (Slavin et al., 2011; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009).

While strategies for collaboration between classroom teachers and institutional education specialists have been reported, the literature lacks specific evidence to guide collaboration between independent reading specialists and their students' elementary school teachers (Doppenberg et al., 2012; L'Allier et al., 2010; Monteil-Overall & Grimes, 2013). The role and responsibility of contemporary reading specialists has changed significantly over the past two decades, which has challenged their ability to supply individualized reading instruction to students in need (Dole et al., 2006; Kern, 2011). Separated interventions provided by independent reading specialists are usually the only practical alternative for some of the low responder students; however, the separated approach provided by independent reading specialists generally lacks cohesion with core classroom education (Denton et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2016; Kaminski et al., 2015; Slavin et al., 2011). Experts opine that the classroom teachers' fear of losing pedagogical autonomy, absence of mutual trust, and lack of interdependence are common barriers to effective collegial collaboration (Meirink et al., 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Vangrieken et al., 2017). Therefore, a need exists for strategies that enable independent reading

specialists to effectively collaborate with elementary classroom teachers of students who struggle to read at grade level (Ellington et al., 2017; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; Vangrieken et al., 2015).

The theoretical framework described the modern educational environment and the strain placed on classroom teachers and institutional reading specialists, explained the rise of independent reading specialists in support of classroom teachers, and highlighted the challenge independent reading specialists have when collaborating with classroom teachers. These concepts sought to enhance the readers' understanding of the unique challenges associated with providing critical reading instruction services to students in need, while also revealing specific issues confronting independent reading specialists in their pursuit of effective collaboration with classroom teachers. Many students are not receiving the individualized reading instruction they need, while their receipt of these services appears inextricably linked with the effective collaboration of their classroom teachers with institutional and independent reading specialists.

Literature Review

The literature review is organized to help the reader appreciate: (1) that collaboration between reading specialists and the classroom teachers of students who struggle to read optimizes the students' academic achievement; (2) that contemporary multitiered reading interventions are predictably effective in meeting the needs of early elementary school students who struggle to read; (3) that independent (private) reading specialists must assume the role of engaged leader to facilitate a voluntary collaborative relationship with these students' classroom teachers; (4) that independent reading specialists must motivate general education teachers to become engaged in a voluntary collaborative relationship to improve student literacy achievement, while preserving their sense of pedagogical autonomy; and (5) that independent

reading specialists must be able to effectively prevent and resolve conflicts that may compromise the collaborative relationship and negatively impact their students' performance.

Educator Collaboration and Students' Academic Performance

Voluntary collaboration between two professional educators who are mutually responsible for improving the academic achievement of specific students who struggle to read was the central theme of this study. Scholars have determined that effective collaboration between reading specialists and classroom teachers of early elementary school students who struggle to read, despite inclusive classroom interventions, is essential to optimizing their academic success (DeLuca et al., 2017; Ellington et al., 2017; Latham et al., 2016; Matsumura et al., 2013). A study by Marr et al. (2010) also demonstrated a favorable impact on the academic performance of students who struggled to read when their classroom teachers collaborated with literacy coaches. Abbott and Wills (2012) detailed how a school-wide collaborative approach to classroom-based literacy intervention significantly reduced the number of students requiring separated (outside classroom) intensive intervention by a reading specialist.

This collegial interaction can also have a positive impact on the self-efficacy of the students' classroom teachers (Varghese et al., 2016). Poulson and Avramidis (2003) reported a detailed case study analysis of the literacy-related professional development experiences of elementary school teachers who were deemed to be effective teachers of literacy in their classrooms. One of the relevant observations from the analysis of the data in their case study was the creative interaction that arose as a result of the classroom teachers' need to preserve their pedagogical autonomy, and their desire for the professional development afforded by collegial collaboration with reading specialists (Poulson & Avramidis, 2003).

Little's (1990) foundational work recognized that interprofessional collaboration might vary from casual transactional exchanges to formal collegial interactions that involved shared efforts. This broader perspective of interprofessional collaboration prompted scholars to investigate the manner in which this phenomenon occurs in various professions, such as health care, social work, and education, wherein professionals from various disciplines interact within a specific context to provide certain services.

Importance of Teacher Trust. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) described trust as a teacher's willingness to be vulnerable to another person based upon the confidence that person will be "benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open" (p. 189). Forsyth et al. (2011) opined that trust is "the keystone of successful inter-personal relationships" (p. 3). Gray and Summers (2016) also stressed the importance of trust in establishing and maintaining collegial relationships. D'Amour et al. (2005) stated that professionals must trust one another before a collaborative process can be established.

Tallman (2019) conducted a qualitative, interpretive qualitative study of five middle school teachers to investigate their experiences working in a teacher-initiated collaborative environment. The teachers in Tallman's (2019) study felt that mutual trust promoted a more comfortable, transparent, and open collaborative relationship with their partners; and it resulted in more student-focused development of curricula. Conversely, Lassonde and Israel (2010) opined that some teachers resist collaboration because it encroaches on their need for autonomy, infringes on their preference to teach in isolation, or triggers a fear that they won't be given credit for exceptional performance.

Participant Collaboration and Efficacy. Gilbert (2010) emphasized that education of the participants in the endeavor is not enough; and that guidelines for the structure and context of

interprofessional collaboration are obviously essential. Voluntary interprofessional collaboration, whether it occurs in education, health care or government, is deemed to be vastly more effective than mandatory collaboration, and even more so when it is distinguished by its mutuality, commitment to deliberation, and hierarchical flatness (D'Amour et al., 2005; Hall, 2005). Gilbert (2010) outlined the competency domains of an ideal collaborative health care practitioner to include: collaborative leadership, effective interprofessional communication, client-centered care, role clarification, team facilitation, and conflict resolution. These competency domains may be reasonably applied to education specialists who care for students with special needs.

   Social Validity and Teacher Acceptance of Curriculum Changes. Social validity relates to a teacher's perspective on the importance, effectiveness, appropriateness, and satisfaction of a suggested change in the classroom curriculum (Wehby et al., 2012). Procedures that are perceived by the classroom teacher to be too complicated, impractical, or unsuccessful will not be adopted, implemented, or maintained unless there is a high degree of social validity attached to the proposed intervention (Koster et al., 2017). Data from surveys and case studies show that collaborative activities, which provide support for classroom instruction, have a positive impact on teaching practice and teachers' morale (Vescio et al., 2008).

   Working Alliances Between Teachers and Reading Specialists. One of the challenges in education is the lack of integrity in the classroom teachers' implementation of empirically supported interventions (Wehby et al., 2012). One role of a school literacy coach is to work directly with classroom teachers to assist them with the implementation of specific literacy programs by providing feedback, answering questions, and modeling or role-playing (Matsumura et al., 2013). An important factor in the success of literacy coaching is the quality of the working relationship between the literacy coach and the classroom teacher (Steckel, 2009). Steckel (2009)

opined that literacy coaches can cultivate a collegial working relationship by projecting a "respectful personality" (p. 19). The study by Wehby and colleagues (2012) implies that the coach-teacher bond might be a significant factor to consider with regard to the procedural adherence to evidenced-based practices in the classroom. In fact, these researchers opined that working alliance impacts intervention integrity more than social validity (Wehby et al., 2012).

Shared Responsibility for Solving Problems. Research by Bronstein (2003) and Mellin (2009) focused on defining and measuring interprofessional collaboration between schools and social workers in their efforts to enhance student mental health. They concluded that shared responsibility for problem solving, decision-making, and power were essential to connecting interprofessional collaboration to desired student outcomes (Bronstein, 2003; Mellin, 2009). Pawan and Ortloff (2011) discovered that a formal transfer of responsibility from the education specialist to the classroom teacher whenever deemed appropriate helped prevent misunderstandings and conflict.

Stone and Charles (2018) elaborated on this work to develop conceptual guidelines for collaborative practices that encouraged social workers and education professionals to become interdependent, to share tasks that emerged from their collaborative efforts, to maintain flexibility in their respective professional roles, to adhere to mutual setting of goals, and to maintain reflexivity throughout the collaborative relationship.

Collaboration That Encourages Flexibility and Innovation. Schools that promote inclusive education for students with special needs are complex, so classroom teachers must be flexible in the application of their instructional techniques (Forsyth et al., 2011). A collaborative relationship that encourages innovation and flexibility to improve student learning empowers

teachers (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). The collaborative process requires educators to transcend traditional professional boundaries to accomplish shared goals (D'Amour et al., 2005).

   Shared Goals and Collective Action. Interprofessional collaboration implies the idea of shared goals and collective action that is oriented toward their common goals while working in a "*transdisciplinary*" spirit of harmony and trust that focuses on student achievement (D'Amour et al., 2005, p. 120). Effective collegial learning evolves from shared values and norms, which enable the participants to share a clear and consistent focus on student learning (Erdem et al., 2014; Vescio et al., 2008). Shared goals are necessary in an informal collaborative relationship because they guide learning activities that promote improvements in learning outcomes (Doppenberg et al., 2012).

   Teacher Reflexivity and Problem Solving. Steckel (2009) stated that literacy coaches must be guided by the belief that "coaching is about empowerment; that teachers must become reflective practitioners and independent problem solvers" (p. 20). Reflexive dialog within the context of a collaborative relationship encourages teachers to take risks necessary for change (Vescio et al., 2008). An effective mentor must facilitate teachers' deeper understanding of how students learn by encouraging self-reflection on the best methods for implementing change in their classrooms (Stover et al., 2011).

   Within the spectrum of students who enter school with a preexisting mental health issue, there will be a number of them with co-existing diagnoses, which may include: environmental or emotional factors, physical or intellectual disabilities, or specific learning disorders, which create barriers to learning in a traditional classroom environment (Charlot & Beasley, 2013; Iachini et al., 2013; Leader-Janssen et al., 2012; Vaughn et al., 2010). Expanded collaboration is also relevant for students who struggle to read. Reading specialists and literacy coaches must

collaborate not only with classroom teachers, but also with social workers and family members to support the prescribed reading interventions for these students (Hunter et al., 2017). Salm (2017) conducted a case study to investigate the development of collaborative competencies among a team that consisted of professional nurses, educators, social workers, recreation therapists and psychologists. Role clarification, student centeredness, communication, and team functioning were identified as core competencies for an effective collaborator (Salm, 2017). The findings of Salm's (2017) study provide insight into effective strategies that independent reading specialists could use to effectively collaborate with the classroom teachers of their students who struggle to read.

Although collaboration is an important phenomenon that has been advocated by many contemporary education scholars, collaboration between grade-level teacher cohorts, instructional specialists, and special educators to jointly plan classroom curriculum for students with special needs seems to be the most important, and the most effective, strategy for improving teacher efficacy and boosting student achievement (Bauml, 2016; Stover et al., 2011).

Role of Engagement in Voluntary Collaboration. A review of the literature was also warranted to understand the comprehensive nature of engagement and its critical role in facilitating voluntary collaboration between education professionals who are in pursuit of an important common goal. There is a plethora of research on teacher job satisfaction and its relative significance to career longevity, burn-out, quality of teaching, and student academic achievement (Banerjee et al., 2017; Larkin et al., 2016; Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017; Song & Alpasplan, 2015). A significant research sample collected by Maylett and Warner (2014) prompted them to conclude that a transactional and contractual basis for job satisfaction does not promote engagement. Individuals become engaged when they are energized to pursue a purpose

greater than themselves; a cause that is meaningful, that allows for autonomy, that stimulates personal and professional growth, that creates an impact, and that provides a sense of connection (Maylett & Warner, 2014).

   Differentiated Support for Teachers. Anderson and Olson (2006) opined that successful efforts for professional development are reflective, collaborative, and focus on the immediate needs and interests of teachers. Reading specialists who are motivated to help teachers adopt meaningful changes in their classroom literacy interventions must offer support based upon the teachers' individual needs and learning styles (Stover et al., 2011). Since teachers are unique with regard to pedagogy, experience, content knowledge, and desire for autonomy the literacy instruction provided by a coach should be differentiated to provide each teacher with multiple options for learning new concepts and implementing new methods of teaching that are relevant to each teacher (Stover et al., 2011).

   Educational engagement is a multidimensional construct involving aspects of behavior, cognition, and emotion, which impact the learners' academic achievement (Fredricks, 2011). Whereas behavioral engagement relates to physical involvement, cognitive and emotional engagement is activated by the individual's desire to solve a practical problem through critical analysis and capacity to revise previously accepted beliefs (Chitpin, 2015). Individuals become engaged in the pursuit of knowledge when their intellectual and emotional energy to accomplish a specific task correlates with meaningful educational outcomes, which include academic achievement, persistence, satisfaction, and sense of connection (Halverson & Graham, 2019).

   Although professional educators are like most people in the general population, it is important to understand the unique context in which voluntary collaboration between an education specialist and an elementary classroom teacher takes place (Galloway & Lesaux,

2014). A primary responsibility of education specialists is to motivate classroom teachers to become engaged in professional development that will enhance their career satisfaction, improve professional efficacy, and enhance student achievement (Easterly & Myers, 2019; Polly et al., 2015). In turn, a primary responsibility of classroom teachers is to motivate students and their parents to become more engaged in the classroom curriculum (Duchaine et al., 2018; McDowall & Schaughency, 2017).

Contemporary Reading Interventions

Historically, reading tutors were classroom teachers who developed an exceptional interest in helping their struggling students learn to read at grade level by providing remedial instruction during class or after school (Bean et al., 2002; Kern, 2011). The role of the early teacher-reading tutor changed in 2002 when states required reading specialists to complete some graduate-level course work and pass a state sponsored examination to become certified reading professionals (Dole et al., 2006; Kern, 2011).

Types of Reading Professionals. Reading professionals evolved to specialize in one of three categories: reading teachers who worked exclusively with students individually or in small groups in their classroom; reading specialists who spent the majority of their time working directly with students outside the classroom but also spent some time collaborating with the teachers of their students to develop and implement classroom literacy programs; and reading (literacy) coaches who were employed by schools to work exclusively with classroom teachers to provide professional development programs, assist with planning literacy curricula for the classroom, analyzing the test results of students who struggle to read, and provide various administrative functions (Dole et al., 2006).

Reading Specialists. For the purpose of this study, I divided the roles of reading specialists into two distinct categories: institutional reading specialists, who are employed by public or private schools; and independent reading specialists, who are either self-employed or aligned with a private for-profit or not-for profit group or organization. Although independent reading specialists are the focus of the current collective case study, the peer-reviewed articles in the literature review generally relate to the experiences of institutional reading specialists.

Most reading specialists work with students and teachers in elementary and middle schools (Dole et al., 2006). Although contemporary reading specialists still spend the majority of their time providing individualized diagnostic assessments and interventional support for students who struggle to read at grade level, they may also face requests from teachers to help their students reenter the teacher's classroom literacy program (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). There is a paucity of evidence in the professional literature relating to the manner in which independent reading specialists could respond to these requests from classroom teachers to facilitate the reentry of students for whom the independent reading specialist provided separated, intensive reading intervention.

Literacy Coaches. A literacy coach is an institutional reading specialist whose primary responsibility is to collaborate with teachers to help them achieve specific professional development goals; to help them develop clinical knowledge about teaching children to read in their classroom; and to be a literacy resource for classroom teachers and their students (Al Otaiba et al., 2008). In essence, the contemporary literacy coach must be trained to fill two role demands: one role as a reading interventionist who provides separated, intensive, and individualized instruction to the students who need extra help outside of the classroom, and the

other role as a professional development coach who helps classroom teachers improve their ability to teach literacy to struggling students in their classroom (Bean et al., 2002).

It is the responsibility of the institutional reading specialist / literacy coach to prescribe the optimal reading intervention for the student based upon available scientific evidence gained from standardized assessments (Cassidy et al., 2010). In the literacy coach capacity, it is the responsibility of the reading specialist to be a content expert, promoter of reflective instruction, professional development facilitator, and builder of a school-wide learning community (Kissel et al., 2011).

Types of Reading Interventions. Current literature indicates there are two general methods for providing reading interventions for children who struggle to read at grade level: separated and integrated. The separated method is the traditional pullout program. A reading specialist provides the intervention individually or in small groups outside the classroom. Separated instruction allows for the appropriate intensity and frequency during remediation that most struggling readers need to catch up to their classmates' literacy skills (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). The integrated method is the contemporary classroom-based program currently favored by most education scholars (Baker et al., 2010). A specially trained classroom teacher and an institutional reading specialist, or two specially trained classroom teachers, provide integrated (inclusive) instruction to students in small groups or the entire class (Slavin et al., 2011; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009).

Woodward and Talbert-Johnson (2009) examined the positive and negative aspects of separated and integrated methods of reading intervention from the perspective of reading specialists and classroom teachers. The findings supported an organized reading team concept that was moving toward a Response-to-Intervention framework, which utilizes a continuous

multitiered program of high-quality integrated (inclusive) reading intervention program that is matched to individual student needs (Abbott & Wills, 2012; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009).

Multitiered Intervention. According to Abbott and Wills (2012), an ideal integrated classroom would consist of 80% of students who read at grade level, approximately 15% of students that require targeted (Tier 2) reading intervention, and less than 5% of students that require intensive (Tier 3) reading intervention. The strong reading team is responsible for implementing an effective, systematic, school wide reading intervention structure that continually improves student achievement (Abbott & Wills, 2012). Hence, there is a growing need for reading specialists who can function as "teachers of teachers" as well as "teachers of children" (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014, p. 519). Despite this growing demand for institutional reading specialists to support integrated and semi-integrated classroom-based reading intervention programs, a large number of graduates still prefer to function as independent reading specialists so they can work directly with children, and without the stress of administrative mandates and faculty interference (Kissel et al., 2011). Additionally, not all elementary classroom teachers in America's schools readily adopt the Response to Intervention models that are being introduced to educators (Castro-Villarreal et al., 2014).

Tier 1 Prevention. The first Tier of the Response to Intervention system is considered primary prevention. All general classroom students are assessed for initial literacy risk factors by using universally accepted screening methods, provided with standard classroom reading instruction, and monitored for rate of individual reading progress (Gilbert et al., 2013).

Tier 2 Prevention. Students who are unable to maintain grade-level reading progress are provided with targeted Tier 2 literacy supports. The extra time and attention provided by the

teacher in a small group inclusive format, which focuses on specific remediation needs within the classroom that were identified with standard literacy assessments (Gilbert et al., 2013). The Tier 2 interventions enable many of these students to return to Tier 1 reading level, but others will progress to Tier 3 (Lane et al., 2014).

Tier 3 Prevention. Students who fail to respond to Tier 2 interventions general require more intensive, individualized intervention provided by a reading specialist (Gilbert et al., 2013). These students are tested for specific learning disabilities so effective, separated, differentiated, and intensive reading interventions can be provided (Lane et al., 2014; Sanchez & O'Connor, 2015).

Separated Intervention. Effective out-of-classroom interventions may be provided to students in small groups of four to seven students and a teacher (Wanzek et al., 2017), or individual students in a one-on-one format (Slavin et al., 2011). A review of the literature provides evidence, which indicates that separated educational settings are necessary to deliver Tier 3 reading interventions, and that full classroom inclusion is not a feasible option for most students with learning disorders (Kaminski et al., 2015; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). Conversely, Marr and colleagues (2010) demonstrated a classroom-based reading intervention for Tier 3 students was as effective as other more intensive, separated intervention methods.

Differentiated Intervention. Collaboration between the reading specialist and classroom teacher, and the students' parents is necessary to complete a thorough assessment of each student's specific literacy needs so the appropriate interventions are prescribed, implemented, and monitored for progress (Lane et al., 2014). Jones et al. (2016) analyzed how reading specialists and classroom teachers can differentiate reading interventions to effectively focus on students' most serious needs and accelerate the growth of their reading skills. They identified

five distinct profiles: (1) severely inadequate decoders, (2) poor decoders, (3) non-automatic decoders, (4) adequate decoders, and (5) unexplained poor comprehenders. Three specific areas of need were also identified: (1) decoding, (2) automaticity, and (3) comprehension (Jones et al., 2016). Scholars have reported the success of targeted (Tier 2) classroom-based reading interventions for many of these students (Daly et al., 2007; Wanzek et al., 2017).

Intensive Intervention. When a student's lack of reading progress during Tier 1 prevention is obvious, and confirmed by literacy assessments, it can be beneficial to the student to by-pass Tier 2 classroom-based reading interventions and initiate Tier 3 separated, differentiated, and intensive interventions (Vaughn et al., 2010). Intensive support may also be appropriate for pre-school and kindergarten students with properly identified learning disorders, such as dyslexia, that typically do not respond to Tier 1 and Tier 2 classroom-based interventions (Kaminski et al., 2015). Austin et al. (2017) synthesized the results from 12 peer-reviewed studies that documented the success of intensive Tier 3 interventions for K-3 grade students with inadequate response to Tier 2 interventions. A randomized controlled study to evaluate the effects of intensive, individualized Tier 3 reading intervention for fourteen second grade students demonstrated significant progress in word identification, phonemic decoding, and word reading fluency and comprehension when compared to classmates who received typical classroom-based reading instruction (Denton et al., 2013).

Implementation of Quality Reading Instruction. Since special education initiatives, such as No Child Left Behind and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, were federally mandated nearly two decades ago, school administrators and teachers are aware of the need to improve teacher literacy quality in the classroom to increase the academic achievement of all students (Greenfield et al., 2010). Highly qualified teachers are familiar with using data to

inform instructional planning, using progress monitoring to measure the effectiveness of multitiered classroom literacy instruction, and sensing when to refer students to a reading specialist when they fail to read after inclusive classroom interventions (Greenfield et al., 2010).

Collaboration with a reading specialist enables an engaged classroom teacher to establish a definitive diagnosis of each student's learning disability, and prescribe the appropriate separated, differentiated, and intensive reading intervention each student needs (Baker et al., 2010). Unfortunately, effective multitiered models (i.e., Response to Intervention) require substantial classroom teacher training and a significant increase in supportive school resources, which many schools are not able to provide (Greenfield et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2016). Therefore, some of the resistive or low responder students who fail to improve after classroom-based Tier 2 interventions, will pursue separated, differentiated, and intensive Tier 3 interventions with an independent reading specialist (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; Levine & Marcus, 2010; Weiss & Friesen, 2014). Commonly, there are no administrative mandates or any economic incentives to motivate voluntary collaboration between these students' independent reading specialists and their classroom teachers. Since voluntary collaboration will benefit the literacy and academic achievement of these students with special needs it is incumbent upon an engaged independent reading specialist to initiate the collaboration with the students' classroom teachers.

Reading Specialist Engagement

In the context of this study, an independent reading specialist would not become involved in building a school-wide learning community; however, it is reasonable to assume that an independent reading specialist would readily serve as an instructional expert for the classroom teachers of the students for whom they provide separated, differentiated, and intensive Tier 3

reading interventions. It is also plausible to assume that a highly enthusiastic independent reading specialist could be a promoter of reflective instruction, a mentor for curriculum planning, and even a facilitator for the professional development of classroom teachers for the benefit of their mutual students who struggle to read.

Although deep level interprofessional collaboration is often constrained due to classroom teachers' preference for psychological safety, avoiding confrontation and interdependence, and preserving their norms of classroom privacy and professional autonomy, Vangrieken and colleagues (2015) demonstrated that authentic collaboration between the reading specialist, who is responsible for separated, differentiated, and intensive interventions, and the students' classroom teacher is beneficial for professional development and student achievement. Others reported that interprofessional collaboration increased teacher engagement by improving communication, teaching skills, morale, coherence of the classroom curriculum, and student achievement (Egodawatte et al., 2011; Slavit et al., 2011). In spite of these overt benefits, any independent reading specialist who voluntarily attempts to assume the role of literacy coach for a classroom teacher will likely encounter barriers to collaboration that include communication, relationship, and leadership issues (Ausband, 2006).

Improved Communication for Better Collaboration. In their seminal book, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work,* psychologists Kegan and Lahey (2001) introduced seven languages individuals can use to transform the way they communicate with themselves and others. The authors stated that successful collaborative relationships are dependent upon each person's internal communications that relate to commitment and responsibility, and their ability to recognize and disrupt immunity to change (Kegan & Lahey, 2001). Keiser et al. (2011) reported on the benefits and challenges associated with the transition from a conventional

leadership to a transformational leadership model in an education department. The transformational leadership model not only expands participation and improves communication, which enhances the organization's ability to solve existing problems and increases the enthusiasm to create and implement new strategies, it may also positively impact collaboration and student achievement (Keiser et al., 2011; Sun & Leithwood, 2012). Although professional collaboration is an effective approach for solving problems and improving student outcomes, Santangelo (2009) discovered that the collaborative process is difficult to sustain beyond a year without supportive leadership.

Building Trusted Relationships to Enhance Collaboration. Although most educational innovations are intended to enhance student achievement, the successful implementation of new teaching methods by classroom teachers often depends on the building of shared knowledge with trusted colleagues (Bouwmans et al., 2017). According to Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, collaborative relationships are necessary for teachers to develop knowledge that enables them to improve existing skills and competencies (Naujokaitiene & Passey, 2019). In addition to the strong intellectual element that drives the formation of collaborative relationships, Luckin (2010) emphasized these professional interactions have a social element that is influenced by emotional factors, which may encourage motivation, raise self-esteem, and promote reflection. Kissel and colleagues (2011) echoed these findings and emphasized that literacy coaches should focus on identifying areas of strength in the classroom teachers' pedagogy, and establishing rapport by providing support rather than evaluation. Steckel (2009) discovered through two extensive case studies that successful literacy coaches must foster a collaborative relationship with teachers that begins with mutual respect, grows to commonality, and consummates with engagement.

Mutual Respect. Like most people, teachers are motivated by three intrinsic needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Healthy collaborative relationships satisfy teachers' need for feeling connected and supported by people at work (Ryan & Deci, 2017), which activates intrinsic motivation and a tendency for more engagement (Jesus & Lens, 2005). Promoting a climate of mutual respect before and during coaching sessions is essential for any reading specialist who aspires to establish an effective collaborative relationship with classroom teachers (Steckel, 2009).

Commonality. Echterhoff et al. (2009) described commonality as a sense of connection that arises when members of a group or team discover they have similar attitudes and beliefs regarding important issues. Hence, commonality facilitates communication and trust among the participants (Glaman et al., 1996). Conversely, a lack of commonality often leads to increased disputes, communication problems, and low performance (Hobman et al., 2004). Drescher and Garbers (2016) found that teams with low commonality benefitted most from shared leadership because it enhanced the members' performance and their perceived satisfaction with the outcome.

Leadership Style and Impact on Performance. Paunova (2015) stated that collective leadership is an emergent phenomenon that includes shared and distributed dimensions. Shared leadership is a dynamic process between participants for which the objective is to "take turns" leading one another to a shared goal (Pearce, 2004). Distributed leadership is a decentralized process in which all participants are equal and utilize consensus to move toward a shared goal (Paunova, 2015). Drescher and Garbers (2016) conducted multilevel analyses involving shared leadership and concluded that it positively impacted performance and satisfaction.

Situational. It is generally accepted that the school principal is the instructional leader of an elementary school (Daniels et al., 2019). However, situational leadership theory states that any qualified individual can become a leader within the school environment by intentionally influencing classroom teachers to engage in a collaborative relationship and structure activities to promote student achievement (Daniels et al., 2019).

Torres (2019) discovered that a reciprocal relationship exists between distributed leadership, professional collaboration, and student achievement. Esch (2018) conducted a case study of two teacher-leaders who acted as successful change agents by employing distributive leadership methods to facilitate a shared vision for the teaching and learning of students with special literacy needs. Important findings of that study were the teacher-leaders' identification of changes that could be made to more equitably serve the students with special needs, and their introduction of evidence-based methods to support student achievement (Esch, 2018).

Transformational. Bouwmans and colleagues (2017) concluded from the quantitative analysis of their data that a transformational leadership approach toward professional collaboration was positively associated with teacher learning and student achievement. A transformational leader in the context of a multitiered reading intervention program would be a reading specialist, who is able to motivate a classroom teacher towards shared goals that would enhance the teacher's literacy skills, and positively affect their mutual student's academic achievement (Daniels et al., 2019).

Authentic. Preskill and Brookfield (2009) described authentic leadership as a reciprocal relationship in which the leader and the followers are sincerely interested in understanding one another's perspective on the issue under discussion, and within an environment of mutual respect and trust. Authentic leadership theory emerged from the post-charismatic critiques of pseudo-

transformational leadership attributed to politicians (Michie & Gooty, 2005). Glowacki-Dudka and Griswold (2016) opined that authentic leadership promotes trust, which infuses participants with a deeper level of collaboration. Luthans and Avolio (2009) opined that the true value of authentic leadership theory is that it provides a foundation for all positive, effective forms of leadership.

Accountable. Leadership also plays an important role in supporting a learning environment for the teachers and their students because someone has to be accountable for the results of adopted educational strategies and programs (Brown, 2016). Since reading specialists have proven to be a strategic resource that directly impacts student achievement, it is necessary for elementary school principals to appreciate and support the development of collaborative relationships between independent reading specialists and their students' elementary classroom teacher (Dean et al., 2012).

Engaging. Educational leaders must promote a culture in which teachers become engaged in professional development for the purpose of improving student learning (Vescio et al., 2008). Maylett and Warner (2014) stated that in order recognize the potential for stimulating engagement in others an effective leader must be able to recognize the three types of engagement, which are: trait engagement, state engagement, and behavioral engagement. Conversely, the hallmarks of employee disengagement are "lack of support, employee attrition, decreased quality and output, and employee burnout (Maylett & Warner, 2014, p. 44). Disengagement can infect an entire group or organization; however, engagement can also be contagious; if it is introduced by an engaged leader who empowers and inspires individuals with an enthusiastic desire to make a difference (Maylett & Warner, 2014).

Trait Engagement. A small number of people are superstars, who seem to be born with an optimistic, conscientious, energetic, confident, and positive personality; and who perceive every problem as a challenge to overcome (Maylett & Warner, 2014)

State Engagement. Some people are conditionally engaged based upon the relevance of the problem, and their emotional state at the time the problem arises (Maylett & Warner, 2014).

Behavioral Engagement. Some individuals awaken every morning being physically and psychologically present, and fully engaged with an attitude to seize the day and make a contribution toward solving every problem they encounter (Maylett & Warner, 2014).

Although job satisfaction was once a primary focus of organizational researchers, contemporary scholars have directed their attention toward personal or situational factors that promote employee engagement (Avery et al., 2007). Ologbo and Sofian (2012) utilized a regression analysis to explore individual factors related to engagement and discovered that co-employee support was a major factor that influenced engagement and work outcomes. The need for collegial connectedness, along with efficacy and agency, was also revealed in case studies of classroom teachers conducted by Cooper and Davey (2011).

Unlike independent reading specialists, who prefer to provide separated interventions for students, the majority of institutional literacy coaches are eager to participate in more productive leadership roles so they can directly impact teacher motivation, self-efficacy, and self-esteem, which indirectly impacts student achievement (Hathaway et al., 2016). However, an effective strategy for a literacy coach who intends to engage classroom teachers must include satisfaction of the classroom teachers' intrinsic needs, which are: autonomy, competence, and relatedness / connectedness (Klassen et al., 2012). This strategy will predictably help reading specialists acknowledge classroom teachers' desire to preserve their autonomy and agency, while enhancing

the teachers' level of engagement in the adoption and implementation of the desired changes to reading interventions in their classroom (Klassen et al., 2012).

Classroom Teacher Engagement

A study of 664 elementary and secondary school teachers conducted by Collie et al. (2012) revealed that teachers' perception of students' motivation and behavior had the most powerful impact on their sense of job satisfaction and teaching efficacy. Van den Broeck et al. (2010) discovered a positive relationship between self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation and engagement. According to the self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan (1985), autonomy, competence, and relatedness (connectedness) were used as the determinants of intrinsic motivation. Holzberger et al. (2014) reported that teachers' sense of efficacy is contingent upon satisfaction of their intrinsic needs, as well as task autonomy, skill utilization, and positive feedback. Others opined that shared conception of the problem lies at the center of effective collaboration, which contributes to teacher engagement (Van den Bossche et al., 2006).

Bakker and Bal (2010) observed that teachers' performance increases when they are engaged in their work. Klassen et al. (2012) reported that engaged teachers view their work as relevant and meaningful, which motivates them to devote more effort and concentration toward teaching. According to self-determination theory, engagement suggests a form of intrinsic motivation that leads a teacher to higher levels of performance, persistence, and creativity (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Teacher Job Satisfaction and Student Achievement. Song and Alpaslan (2015) opined that teacher job satisfaction is a major contributing factor to student achievement. Researchers concluded that student achievement also plays a reciprocal role in teachers' perception of job satisfaction and self-efficacy (Erdem et al., 2014; Sun & Xia, 2018; Torres, 2019). Elementary

school teachers' motivation to improve their efficacy through professional development is linked to student achievement (Polly et al., 2015).

The emotional tension and complexity of classroom teaching often contributes to job dissatisfaction (McCarthy et al., 2014; Okeke & Mtyuda, 2017). Studies indicate that large class size composed of students with complex and diverse learning needs and insufficient supportive resources are especially stressful for teachers (Gray et al., 2017). Therefore, it is essential that independent reading specialists who attempt to collaborate with highly stressed classroom teachers are sensitive to the emotional climate in the classroom, and become prepared to cope with these emotionally complex challenges (McCarthy et al., 2015).

Scholars concluded that the inability of a reading specialist to interact constructively with classroom teachers, parents, and other adults negatively affects the reading performance and academic achievement of their students (Bean et al., 2003). A major factor that affects this constructive interaction is the conflicting expectations between the reading specialist-coach and the classroom teachers (Hunt, 2016). The conflicting expectations are based upon the reading specialists' belief that their primary responsibilities are assessment and instruction of the students who struggle to read, while elementary school classroom teachers viewed the reading specialist as a resource and support person for the reading interventions provided in the classroom by the teacher (Quatroche et al., 2001).

Although it is a valid appraisal that many institutional reading specialists believe their assessment and instructional roles are of primary importance, many reading specialists also agreed they could play an important role in facilitating the use of appropriate reading interventions provided by classroom teachers (Bean et al., 2002). Institutional reading specialists or literacy coaches are expected to support the classroom teachers by: observing and debriefing

classroom practices, providing curricular resources, and supporting literacy reform agendas (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; Hathaway et al., 2016; Quatroche et al., 2001; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009).

Tatum (2004) described, "role making" as an effective strategy that reading specialists could utilize to engage classroom teachers in a collaborative effort to help their students who are struggling to read (p. 28). The role a reading specialist assumes in each circumstance will be defined by the culture of the school and the climate of the teacher's classroom (Tatum, 2004). Gray and colleagues (2017) described school culture as "a reflection of the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (p. 206). Banerjee and colleagues (2017) reported that school culture and teacher job satisfaction operate synergistically to improve student achievement in elementary math and reading.

Importance of Teacher Efficacy and Student Achievement. Teachers have a sense of efficacy when they deem, they are capable of bringing about their desired outcomes of student engagement and learning despite the fact that some of their students may demonstrate behavioral or learning difficulties (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Hence, teaching efficacy is dependent upon the development of effective instructional strategies, exercising successful classroom management skills, and inspiring students to become engaged in learning (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

The greater a teacher's perception of his or her ability to influence circumstances in the surrounding environment the more likely the teacher will persist in his or her efforts toward professional development and the enhancement of student achievement (Bandura, 1997). According to research, a teachers' sense of self-efficacy is determined by: classroom management, instructional quality, and student engagement (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk

Hoy, 2001). Klassen and Tze (2014) explored the relationship between teachers' self-reported personality characteristics and self-efficacy, and measures of teaching performance and student achievement. The results demonstrated a strong effect size for self-efficacy on evaluated teaching performance (Klassen & Tze, 2014). Investigators also demonstrated a positive correlation between teachers' sense of efficacy when their classroom reading interventions improve students' literacy outcomes (Guo et al., 2012; Varghese et al., 2016).

Importance of Collaborative Interprofessional Development. It is universally accepted that the purpose of formal education is to optimize student learning of requisite knowledge. Since the quality of teaching within the classroom is the most critical factor that impacts student outcomes there is considerable emphasis on the professional development of teachers (Avalos, 2011). Tallman (2019) stated that collaboration is a powerful tool for the professional development of teachers. Regrettably, Moats (2014) opined that traditional teacher education programs fail to prepare K-4 professional teachers with the knowledge and practical skills to effectively manage students with reading and learning disabilities.

Reciprocal peer coaching is one of several collaborative approaches introduced during the past thirty years to promote the continuous development of teachers' pedagogical skills and competencies (Kohler et al., 1997). Studies indicate that effective interprofessional collaboration between education specialists and classroom teachers generally improves the classroom teachers' job satisfaction, promotes a favorable change in the teachers' attitude toward education and commitment to innovation, enhances the teachers' self-efficacy, and produces measurable gains in student achievement (Gore et al., 2017; Kohler et al., 1997). The emerging consensus among education scholars is the need for these collaborative interprofessional development activities to be reciprocal, supportive, meaningful, and transformative (Gore et al., 2017).

Reciprocal Learning. Research indicates that teacher professional development is most effective when the collaborative relationship is based upon shared values, mutual respect, and trust (Erdem et al., 2014; Gibbons et al., 2017; Gore et al., 2017). The process of reciprocal learning is dependent upon co-teaching and co-learning, which involves co-laboring to improve the quality of instruction, which promotes student achievement (Gibbons et al., 2017).

Support and Professional Engagement. The principles of effective professional development advocated by Gore and colleagues (2017) are intended to directly support the immediate needs of the classroom teacher while indirectly supporting the teacher's feeling of self-efficacy, sense of well-being, and enthusiasm for professional engagement. Primary among these objectives is the need to overcome three major factors that influence teachers' motivation to improve: professional isolation, educational and emotional costs, and professional and personal life stages (Cameron et al., 2013). Meirink and colleagues (2010) reported that collaboration to support classroom teachers' professional development was more effective when it was innovative, temporary, and voluntary.

Encouraging Meaningfulness. Contemporary scholars reject the ineffective "drive-by" workshop model of the past in favor of evidence-based opportunities that focus on content, context, and coherence, and which are continuous and collective (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Garet et al., 2001). Interest in collaborative teaching has intensified for classroom teachers who must accommodate students with learning differences and special needs (Ghazzoul, 2018). Professional development is meaningful for classroom teachers when they collaborate to co-plan, co-instruct, and co-assess to achieve common goals (Doppenberg et al., 2012; Solis et al., 2012).

Teaching Improvement and Transformation. Improvement in teaching quality occurs when the pedagogical framework is transformed from a goal to learn new teaching skills and practices to a conceptual framework that provides structure and direction to the practice of teaching (Lampert, 2010). This conceptual framework includes structuring and expanding the knowledge base, enhancing collaboration by eliminating actual or perceived power hierarchies, and enriching professional relationships (Gore et al., 2017).

Numerous educational scholars have reported that reading specialists can positively impact classroom teachers' practices (Batt, 2010; Neuman & Wright, 2010; Rudd et al., 2009). Improving the individual classroom teachers' ability to provide inclusive reading interventions for students is a primary responsibility of literacy coaches and reading specialists (L'Allier et al., 2010). Staples and Edmister (2014) utilized a case study approach to evaluate the professional development of two teachers who expressed a desire to use technology to support their classroom literacy interventions, and identified two themes that emerged from the data: the evolving nature of curriculum reform, and the need for ongoing interdisciplinary collaboration with a reading specialist. Storie et al. (2017) demonstrated that education specialists could effectively utilize distance-coaching strategies to form collaborative relationships with early education teachers to support their professional development.

Engagement of Teachers for Process Change. If empowering teachers is the ultimate goal of coaching (Steckel, 2009), then engagement of teachers in the process of change is the key to success (Maylett & Warner, 2014). Unfortunately, most reading specialists prefer to utilize their formal training to provide intensive reading interventions for children who struggle to read after extended classroom remediation rather than acting as a change agent for a classroom teacher (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). Nonetheless, it is possible for an engaged reading specialist

to make a positive impact on the classroom teacher, and make a difference in students' academic

achievement by employing collaborative strategies best suited for each classroom teacher

(Steckel, 2009).

Maylett and Warner (2014) stressed that engagement is more important than job

satisfaction because it is an emotional state in which a person feels passionate, energized, and

committed to accomplish a goal. They concluded from the survey responses of more than 14

million employees working in 70 different countries that the five keys to employee engagement

are: meaning, autonomy, growth, impact and connectedness (Maylett & Warner, 2014).

Inspiring Meaningful Work. Teachers must have a voice in the process in their own

learning for meaningful change to occur (Stover et al., 2011). Transformational coaches can

directly and positively influence engagement in team learning activities by making them

meaningful through coaching that is relevant to the needs and interests of the teachers

(Bouwmans et al., 2017; Stover et al., 2011). Doppenberg and colleagues (2012) identified a new

category of collaboration, which they termed, "collegial support," which refers to two unique

teacher-learning activities: collegial visitation and collegial coaching (p. 561). Collegial support

represents an asymmetrical collaborative relationship between colleagues, which infers that a

reading specialist is providing meaningful help to a classroom teacher (Doppenberg et al., 2012).

Salikova (2016) performed a qualitative and quantitative analysis of data from 150

university education students to explore the concept future teachers have on meaningfulness. The

results demonstrated a higher value on self-development in the groups with a high awareness of

the meaning of life versus students who placed a value on the satisfaction of life (Salikova,

2016). Solis and colleagues (2012) reported that collaboration was meaningful for a classroom

teacher when an education specialist worked closely to facilitate curricular changes designed to

provide direct and intensive basic skills within general education and tutorial programs that benefitted students with disabilities.

Teacher Autonomy. Hermansen (2017) acknowledged that autonomy of professional educators could be understood more clearly if the topic were examined individually and collectively. The individual dimension of autonomy relates to the teacher's degree of control over every day work, and the collective dimension includes the capacity of teachers as a group to shape the characteristic of their knowledge base, governance of their profession, and influence in the design of professional development programs (Hermansen, 2017; Shalem et al., 2018).

When Vangrieken and colleagues (2017) examined the complex relationship between teacher autonomy and collaboration they discovered that teachers had two basic attitudes toward autonomy: reactive and reflexive. A reactive attitude toward autonomy was apparent in teachers who held tightly to their sense of independence and nonreliance, while teachers with a reflexive or reflective attitude toward autonomy focused on feelings of personal choice and agency, which does not include total independence and total nonreliance (Vangrieken et al., 2017). These two distinct attitudes suggest that autonomy could be a hindering or facilitating factor in successful teacher collaboration (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

In their study of 589 French-Canadian beginning teachers Fernet et al. (2016) discovered that the teachers' motivation was either autonomous (intrinsic) or controlled (internally or externally regulated). Previous studies demonstrated autonomous motivation was positively associated with healthy self-esteem, job satisfaction, and commitment (Fernet et al., 2012).

Unfortunately, there are no studies in the peer-reviewed literature specifically related to the role of autonomy in elementary teachers' expectations of independent reading specialists. Additionally, the International Reading Association (2010) has not made any recommendations,

nor established any guidelines for independent reading specialists to effectively collaborate with their students' classroom teachers. Yet, scholars have concluded that collaboration between education specialists and general education teachers is necessary for the professional development of teachers so their students who struggle to read can realize optimal academic achievement (Ellington et al., 2017; Solari et al., 2017).

Collegiality and Professional Growth. Tallman (2019) reported that collegiality is a powerful force for professional growth and teacher learning because it is very effective in helping teachers meet the needs of every student in their classroom. John-Steiner (2000) introduced complementarity as a collaborative phenomenon, which is a passionate interest in a subject that occurs when educators share skills, experience, and perspectives. Hence, collaborative relationships are essential to sustaining teachers' professional growth and development (John-Steiner, 2000).

Although most teachers readily acknowledge the benefits of collaboration with other educators, they are anxious about critical reflections or judgments on their teaching skills and methods (Wennergren, 2016). Sjoer and Meirink (2016) stated that the absence of a school culture that encourages and allocates time and resources for collaborative practices allows teachers to use those as external reasons or excuses to avoid collaboration rather than risk confronting and overcoming their internal fears.

Collaborative Planning and Impact on Student Achievement. When reading specialists and classroom teachers become engaged in collaborative planning to create and implement a coherent curriculum for each student who struggles to read, studies demonstrate this type of collaboration has the greatest impact on teaching skills and student achievement (Stover et al., 2011). Levine and Marcus (2010) explored the different collaborative activities that occurred

among one teacher team and identified that intentional focusing and structuring the teachers' collaborative activity had a positive impact on student achievement. The education specialist must hold the classroom teacher accountable for implementation of their mutual student's planned curriculum to ensure the student receives the maximum benefit from the integrated (inclusive) interventions (Sanetti et al., 2015).

 Connectedness Through Trusted Relationships. Since very few elementary school teachers take the initiative to acquire high quality literacy intervention skills, their professional development is often a result of collaboration with a reading specialist (Varghese et al., 2016). Effective differentiated literacy coaching involves building rapport and trusting relationships with teachers, and then modifying the way in which feedback is provided to promote a sense of collegial connectedness (Forsyth et al., 2011; Stover et al., 2011). In their study of teacher engagement, Eldor and Shoshani (2016) reported that expressions of compassion and empathy from professional colleagues correlated positively to teachers' enthusiasm, commitment, and job satisfaction.

 An engaged reading specialist's authentic approach to collegial collaboration can help classroom teachers find meaning in their profession, preserve autonomy in their classroom, experience professional growth, and impact the literacy and academic achievement of students who struggle to read while satisfying their personal need for connectedness with colleagues (Smith et al., 2016; Varghese et al., 2016). Regardless of the structure and frequency of their interactions, the greatest improvement in student achievement is accomplished when an engaged reading specialist and an engaged classroom teacher collaborate to plan their mutual student's classroom curriculum (Reeves et al., 2017; Xu, 2015).

Student Achievement

Hathaway et al. (2016) and others have reported that collaboration between reading specialists and general education teachers positively impacts student learning (Biancarosa et al., 2010; Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2010, 2011; Matsumura et al., 2013; Varghese et al., 2016). The survey of 104 school-based literacy coaches revealed that collaboration with classroom teachers was highly valued because it ultimately led to improved student achievement (Hathaway et al., 2016). Even indirect collaboration between an education specialist and an early education teacher will positively affect student achievement (Storie et al., 2017).

Two important factors that contribute to student achievement are teacher efficacy (Varghese et al., 2016) and collaborative lesson planning to create a coherent curriculum (Xu, 2015). Elementary school teachers typically lack adequate professional development in literacy intervention and classroom management practices to effectively cope with the unique needs of students with the emotional and behavioral disorders exhibited by students who struggle to read (State et al., 2019). Since collaboration with educational specialists is usually necessary to meet the needs of these students, it is inevitable that interprofessional conflicts will arise. A constructive approach to resolving interprofessional conflicts is essential so the participants can focus their energy and enthusiasm on the mutual goal of student learning (Bradley & Monda-Amaya, 2005). Friend et al. (2010) stated that participants who voluntarily commit to an effective collaborative relationship are more likely to embrace a constructive approach to conflict resolution.

Teacher Efficacy and Job Satisfaction. Although there was a significant correlation between teacher efficacy and teacher job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010), it was primarily

the teachers' attitudes and beliefs about their self-efficacy – the ability to make a difference in the ability of students to learn - that truly impacted student achievement (Banerjee et al., 2017). Experts reported that teachers' knowledge of the content of their lessons, and changes in the teachers' practices, both significantly and positively impacted student achievement (Polly et al., 2015). A study of literacy coaches supporting classroom teachers' implementation of prescribed literacy interventions showed a significant and positive association between teachers' classroom management efficacy and students' growth in literacy skills (Biancarosa et al., 2010; Matsumura et al., 2013; Sailors & Price, 2015; Varghese et al., 2016).

According to Heyder (2019), teachers ranked student factors, teacher factors, and family factors in descending order of importance for issues that affect student achievement. When teachers assumed responsibility for student learning, they were less likely to give up on the students who struggled to learn (Heyder, 2019). Teachers' occupational well-being is also an indicator of teacher efficacy and an indirect contributor to students' learning and achievement (Matteucci et al., 2017).

The teachers' elevated sense of self-efficacy in engaging students in learning appears to motivate them to improve the quality of their instruction (Martin et al., 2012). When teachers focus on promoting all students' engagement in learning they seem to be less critical of students who struggle to learn and usually devote more attention to helping them to become engaged in academic improvement (Martin et al., 2012; Moolenaar et al., 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). When early education teachers collaborated with literacy coaching that focused on reading interventions their students experienced measurable gains in reading comprehension, word identification, decoding, spelling and reading comprehension (Amendum et al., 2011; Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2010).

Collaborative Lesson Planning. When teachers collaborated to build their reading and math lessons into a coherent curriculum for students, and took collective responsibility for student learning, there was a positive impact on student achievement (Banderjee et al., 2017). The need for strong collegial relationships appeared to be deeper among early education teachers, which moderated the teachers' desire for autonomy and enhanced teachers' perception of job satisfaction (Stearns et al., 2014, 2015).

Cross-disciplinary collaboration was necessary to provide meaningful and effective reading interventions for students who struggled to read, and to effectually evaluate these students' progress in reading proficiency (Weiss & Friesen, 2014). Nevertheless, on the basis of a quantitative analysis of data, Thornberg (2014) concluded that interprofessional conflict is inevitable when independent (non-school) resource professionals attempt to collaborate with institutional (school-employed) teachers regarding the needs of their challenging or difficult-to-teach students. This professional ethnocentricity was due to lack of integration of the consultants with the teachers, and an inherent resistance to change among the teachers (Thornberg, 2014).

Resolve Collegial Conflicts. Since elementary school principals and teachers often held conflicting perceptions and expectations regarding the role of the reading specialist, and nature of their collaborative relationship, it was reasonable to assume conflicts will arise (Al Otaiba et al., 2008; Mraz et al., 2008; Walpole & Blamey, 2008). The majority of education scholars and school administrators embraced the basic concept of collaborative teaching between education specialists and classroom teachers because it aspired to improve student achievement within an inclusive environment (Simpson et al., 2014). Nonetheless, a comprehensive review of the literature revealed that co-teaching was only moderately effective (Murawski & Swanson, 2001),

and positive results were closely associated with a collaborative approach that was focused on teacher support, professional development, and student achievement (Ghazzoul, 2018).

The altruistic goal of collaborative professional learning and teaching was generally accepted as the best practice for improving student outcomes. Unfortunately, teachers tend to embrace a go along to get along strategy that embraced consensus, so they rarely engaged in meaningful conversations that are necessary in an authentic learning environment (Makopoulou & Armour, 2014). Moreover, classroom teaching was described as a relatively isolated environment in which the teacher's personality, pedagogy and skill set were seldom critiqued or challenged by other professional educators (Cameron, 2005). The teachers' need to protect their classroom autonomy from outside influences promoted contrived collegiality, which is the "ugly twin" of authentic interprofessional collaboration (Datnow, 2011, p. 147). When a classroom teacher functioned within a school culture where contrived congeniality was the norm, efforts by an outsider, such as a reading specialist or literacy coach, likely precipitated conflicts (Datnow, 2011).

While task cohesion, interdependence, and shared goals appeared to promote effective collaboration, research indicated that a constructive attitude toward conflict was also conducive to learning and managing the collaborative relationship (Van den Bossche et al., 2006). A flexible approach that included a sincere desire to listen to the other person's opinion for the purpose of finding common ground was the key to resolving conflict in a constructive, pro-social, and mutually beneficial manner (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018).

Interprofessional Collaboration and Autonomy. Since preservation of autonomy has been a traditional barrier to interprofessional collaboration for most teachers it also has an impact on teachers' ability to resolve conflicts when their efficacy and pedagogy were challenged

(Vangrieken et al., 2017). An effective conflict resolution strategy for a reading specialist in conflict with a classroom teacher was to redirect the teacher's reactive impulse to resist change toward a reflective attitude, which allowed the teacher to focus on feelings of personal choice and agency (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Vangrieken and colleagues (2017) suggested that a paradoxical relationship exists between teacher autonomy and interprofessional collaboration because autonomy equates to working independently, which essentially excludes working with others. In an effort to reconceptualize teachers' general view of collaboration the researchers departed from the prevailing beliefs in personality psychology that autonomy was an attitude that must be reactive, and proposed that autonomy could also be reflective (Vangrieken et al., 2017, p. 304). A reflective attitude toward autonomy enabled teachers to resist mandates that challenged embedded pedagogy, while allowing them the freedom to reflect on a specific educational challenge and embrace interprofessional collaboration to solve the problem as a personal choice (Gavrilyuk et al., 2014). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) demonstrated via quantitative analysis of data that teacher autonomy and self-efficacy were independent predictors of engagement, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion.

Teacher Personality Impact on Effective Collaboration. Since the academic achievements of students who struggled to read and learn were dependent upon the nature of the collaborative relationship between their reading specialists and their classroom teachers, Simpson and colleagues (2014) examined collaborative relationships from the perspective of individual personality traits or preferences of teachers by using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) assessment tool. Rushton et al. (2007) used the results of MBTI to link personality preferences to the teachers' effectiveness and discovered that outstanding teachers were

Extroverted, Intuitive, Feeling, and Perceiving (ENFP) because of their apparent ability to adapt, persevere, and accept change. Luckin (2010) emphasized that collaborative relationships may be formed for cognitive reasons but they always include social interrelations, which will trigger emotional reactions that will require the leader in the group to exercise appropriate mediation tools to resolve the conflict.

Unproductive Pedagogy. When traditional teacher education programs failed to prepare K-4 professional teachers with the knowledge and practical skills to manage students who struggle with reading and learning disabilities, they tended to cling to their unproductive teaching pedagogy (Moats, 2014). According to Moats (2014) the support these teachers need must initially focus on an appropriate knowledge of reading psychology, language structure and contemporary pedagogy, which should be followed by basic skills for inclusive reading interventions, and an attention to student outcomes in literacy. Collaborative relationships with low interdependency, such as that of an independent reading specialist and a classroom teacher, were effective when the two education professionals acknowledged and tolerated individual preferences or styles, and strived to utilize intermittent and informal initiatives for information exchange (Doppenberg et al., 2012).

Resistant Teacher Attitude Toward Change. McCrickerd (2012) opined that teachers who resisted adoption of more effective teaching strategies tended to view teaching ability as an innate talent that cannot be significantly improved, so they were reluctant to change out of fear of exceeding the limit of their talent. Kegan and Lahey (2001) described this fear of failure as a dynamic equilibrium, which manifests itself as a powerful internal force that exerts "countervailing balances" to keep things in life as they are (p. 59). These countervailing balances are anchored to false assumptions that are believed to be true, which create a protective barrier

that Kegan and Lahey (2001) called the immunity to change. Vasile (2013) opined that personality has a major influence on teachers' intrinsic motivation and receptiveness to improve. Vasile (2013) described ideal personality dynamics for collaboration as: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience.

Hunt (2016) utilized a micro-ethnographic approach to discourse analysis to expose the manner in which literacy coaches and classroom teachers discursively enacted emotions as they addressed issues of identity, power, and positioning during video-recorded literacy coaching interventions. The participants "avoided shame, fear and guilt as they positioned themselves and each other in relation to idealized notions of best practices and good teacher, and engaged in complex emotional work within a system of pastoral power" (Hunt, 2016, p. 335). The negotiated issues of power, positioning and identity influenced how the literacy coaches and teachers co-constructed knowledge during their interactions (Hunt, 2016). Successful efforts to overcome resistance to change while transforming the quality of mathematics instruction at an elementary school were experienced when the coaches shifted focus from being an authoritative expert sent to correct deficiencies in teaching, to a supportive professional colleague who could facilitate collective sense-making of the problems through joint inquiry, and help develop shared agreements about methods to improve instruction (Gibbons et al., 2017).

School Social Culture. Social culture exerted a significant influence on interpersonal conflict and a person's conflict style preference. Rahim (2011) created the dual concern model, which relates to the balance between a person's concern for others and concern for self. Rahim's (2011) model delineates five distinct conflict styles: obliging (accommodating), avoiding (nonconfrontational), dominating (competing), integrating (collaborating), and compromising. Individualistic cultures prefer a confrontational approach while collectivistic cultures prefer a

nonconfrontational approach (Kaushal & Kwantes, 2006). Individuals who value self over others generally preferred a dominating or obliging style of conflict resolution, while people who valued others over self were more likely to use an avoiding or integrating style (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018).

Power Orientation. The perception of power in a collaborative relationship relates to the ability of one person to influence the behavior of the other person, or the ability of the other person to resist the person's attempts to influence his or her behavior (Dunbar, 2015). Power often relates to the control of resources that one person needs, values, desires or fears (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018). According to Hocker and Wilmot (2018), the individuals in conflict usually responded differently to a circumstance based upon their orientation toward power, whether it was positive, negative, or irrelevant. Although many classroom teachers function in a state of vulnerability, research suggested that a collaborative environment based upon trust and supportive dialog will make these teachers feel safer (Hunt, 2016).

Shared Goals and Values. The academic success of students who struggle to read and learn in elementary school was highly dependent upon the quality of effective collaboration between their reading specialist and their elementary classroom teacher (Ghazzoul, 2018; Reeves et al., 2017; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). Rose (2011) conducted a review of the literature and concluded that a mutual commitment to shared purposes and common goals was essential for effective interprofessional collaboration. Other researchers, who critically assessed five indicators of collaboration, found that collaboration during lesson planning was the only significant predictor of increased student achievement (Reeves et al., 2017). Nonetheless, when interprofessional collaboration occurred between a qualified reading specialist and an engaged classroom teacher there was general agreement in the literature that literacy proficiency for

students who struggled to read will be improved (Matsumura et al., 2013; Vangrieken et al., 2015). Fountas and Pinnell (2018) opined that an inspirational vision based on the common values, beliefs and goals of all members of the literacy team provided the foundation for a common language, which would facilitate collaboration and planning coherent curricula in their approach to help each student achieve proficiency in reading and writing.

    Development of Mutual Trust. Mutual trust and confidence in the reliability of the "collaborative partner" are factors that contribute to a sense of shared responsibility for successful student achievement (Rose, 2011, p. 153). Trust involved a willingness to be vulnerable to another person with the expectation their intentions and behaviors will be positive (Rousseau et al., 1998). Mutual trust is founded on depersonalized factors during the early stage, and becomes grounded in more personalized associations as the relationship grows due to internalization of mutual preferences and working styles, which contributes to the formation of shared goals (Schilke & Cook, 2013). Bstieler et al. (2017) reported that mutual trust in a mature collaborative relationship was contingent upon the individuals' disposition toward trust, demographic resemblance, reciprocal communication, and decision-making similarity.

Summary

    Experts discovered that collaborative relationships are most effective when they are voluntary and focus on the general educators' need for curricular and pedagogical autonomy rather than in response to collegial pressure or an administrative mandate (Hargreaves, 1994; Pawan & Ortloff, 2011). The setting in which collegial collaboration occurred also seemed to be important. Doppenberg and colleagues (2012) discovered that an informal setting and collegial attitude appeared to be more relevant to individual classroom teachers.

Organizational leaders and educational scholars increasingly recognized the value of collaboration, teamwork, conflict resolution and leadership (Reevy et al., 2013). Leader-Janssen and colleagues (2012) noted the need for developing collaborative relationships among educational team members within schools has increased with the trend to accommodate the special needs of students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom. They emphasized that education specialists must become effective collaborators, consultants, strategists, and leaders when working with general educators to help students with special needs achieve their academic potential (Leader-Janssen et al., 2012).

The review of the literature was organized into five categories, which were essential to understanding the nature of collaborative relationships between reading specialists and general classroom teachers. These categories emphasized: (1) that collaboration between reading specialists and the classroom teachers of students who struggled to read optimized the students' academic achievement; (2) that contemporary multitiered reading interventions were predictably effective in meeting the needs of early elementary school students who struggled to read; (3) that independent reading specialists must assume the role of engaged leader to facilitate a voluntary collaborative relationship with these students' classroom teachers when separated, differentiated and intensive reading interventions are necessary; (4) that independent reading specialists must motivate general education teachers to become engaged in a voluntary collaborative relationship to improve specialized lesson planning for each student with special needs, while preserving their sense of pedagogical autonomy; and (5) independent reading specialists must be able to lead the collaborative process and effectively resolve interprofessional conflicts with classroom teachers to optimize the academic achievement of students who struggled to read.

This information provided a clear understanding of the general context in which the collaboration between an independent reading specialist and an elementary classroom teacher took place (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). Conclusions that emerged from the literature review indicated that teacher autonomy and pedagogical integrity posed a unique barrier to collegial collaboration in educational settings, and specific strategies were necessary for independent reading specialists to establish effective collaboration with the classroom teachers of their elementary school students who struggled to read. Ultimately, the literature review demonstrated a need for independent reading specialists to discover strategies that enabled them to effectively collaborate with their students' elementary school classroom teachers so their reading interventions were coherent with the students' core classroom curriculum, which directly enhanced the students' academic success.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The problem of practice for the collective case study was the need to identify specific strategies to help guide independent reading specialists in their efforts to effectively collaborate with unenthused or reluctant elementary classroom teachers of their students who struggle to read despite the teachers' reading interventions. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of five independent reading specialists who provide separated, intensive (Tier 3) interventions for elementary school-age students in an affluent suburban, highly ranked school district in central Texas. Supplementary interviews with two institutional reading specialists, five elementary classroom teachers, and five elementary school administrators were also conducted to enable me to analyze the independent reading specialists' attempts to collaborate with elementary classroom teachers. The scholarly literature indicated that the shared goal of integrating the students' classroom lesson plans with their separated reading interventions provides the primary motivation for this important interprofessional collaboration.

I conducted the qualitative inquiry by utilizing multiple case study methodology. In addition to collecting data through interviews of the five independent reading specialists, which were selected through purposeful sampling and snowballing, I individually interviewed two institutional reading specialists, five elementary classroom teachers, and five elementary school administrators (supervisors) to obtain alternative perspectives regarding their schools' attitude toward interprofessional collaboration with reading specialists.

Chapter 1 identified the need for independent reading specialists to effectively collaborate with the elementary classroom teachers of their students who struggle to read despite traditional classroom reading interventions. Chapter 2 recognized that collaboration between education specialists and general education teachers enhances the academic achievement of

students with special needs. However, the peer-reviewed literature did not specifically investigate collaborative relationships between independent, nonemployee reading specialists and elementary school teachers in an affluent suburb of a central Texas school district. This study was designed to fill this void in the professional literature by two research questions:

Q1. How do independent reading specialists develop strategies to collaborate with their students' elementary school classroom teachers to support their students' classroom curriculum? This question sought to reveal the issue of collaboration between independent reading specialists and elementary teachers in support of the classroom curriculum.

Q2. What strategies do independent reading specialists develop to support their students' classroom curriculum? This question sought to highlight specific collaboration strategies employed by independent reading specialists to work with elementary teachers in support of their students' classroom curriculum.

This chapter provides specific details regarding the methodological decisions that guided the collective case study. Collective case study is a reliable approach to qualitative inquiry used by many educational scholars to explore collaborative relationships between school administrators, education specialists, and general educators (Cameron, 2005; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Meirink et al., 2010; Xu, 2015). The research design used to collect and analyze the data were defined. The study population was described and the identification and recruitment of the study sample was explained. Methods to establish trustworthiness of the data, clarification of the researcher's role in the collection and analysis of the data, and adherence to appropriate ethical standards will be described (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Leavy, 2017; Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). Finally, the potential effects of assumptions, limitations and delimitations on the collection and analysis of data will be explained (Terrell, 2016).

Research Design and Method

Qualitative inquiry begins with certain assumptions and questions, which enable an inquisitive researcher to discern the meaning individuals or groups attribute to a specific social or human problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Strategies for qualitative inquiry have evolved to provide researchers with six diverse approaches that are commonly utilized to scientifically explore, describe, or explain a specific aspect of social life (Terrell, 2016).

Methodology

Although case reports and case studies are valuable methods of sharing an educator's experience managing a problem, they are distinctly different (Alpi & Evans, 2019). It is noteworthy that case reports are anecdotal descriptions of a novel experience, may lack a base of applicable scholarly literature, are not generalizable, and are prone to various types of bias (Alpi & Evans, 2019). In her introduction of case study as a research methodology, Yazan (2015) described the approaches of Stake (1995), Merriam (1998), and Yin (2018). Stake (1995) described a case study as a specific, functioning phenomenon that is well bounded. Merriam (1998) viewed "the case" as a single entity of a phenomenon surrounded by distinct boundaries. Yin (2018) opined that case studies are the preferred strategy when "how and why" research questions are posed.

Case Study. The basic element of a case study is the reflection on one's personal experiences and intentions, which relates directly to the subject's personal experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A collective or multiple case study enables a researcher to answer questions related to the actual experiences of a particular group of individuals in a specific context (Yin, 2018). The logic underlying the use of multiple case studies is the potential for comparing similar results, contrasting results, and identifying outliers (Yin, 2018). Scholarly articles using

the collective or multiple case study approach to explore collaborative relationships between general educators and education specialists have appeared in various peer-reviewed journals of interest to educators (Anh, 2017; Cameron, 2005; Doppenberg et al., 2012; Hermansen & Nerland, 2014; Latham et al., 2016; Monteil-Overall, 2009; Pawan & Ortloff, 2011; Xu, 2015).

A constructionist-interpretive paradigm was the theoretical school of thought that shaped the perspective and design choices for this collective case study. This approach explored the way people construct, reconstruct and interpret meanings to conversations and situations that arise during their interactions (Leavy, 2017). The collaborative relationship between independent reading specialists and elementary classroom teachers was the topic of interest in this study. The strategy of inquiry involved collection of data from in-depth interviews with 17 qualified voluntary participants, who were selected through purposeful sampling, and who were currently practicing within the boundaries of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Data from transcribed interviews and notes were systematically analyzed through an inductive process of coding to generate relevant categories and primary themes, which supported substantive interpretations (Leavy, 2017; Patton, 2015).

Population

I identified and recruited 17 qualified volunteers in accordance with the purpose of this study, which provided adequate data to answer the research questions (Leavy, 2017). According to Terrell (2016), purposeful and snowball sampling facilitated the process of identifying a specific type of participant for a collective case study.

Study Sample

Additional parameters used to refine the selection of qualified reading specialists were: professional educators who were accredited as a reading specialist, who were currently providing

separated, intensive (Tier 3) interventions for elementary school-aged students, and who

consented to one or two 90 to 120-minute confidential interviews with the research.

Key Informants

Key informants for the collective case study were education professionals who were

currently practicing in affluent school districts in central Texas. Each informant had experience

with interprofessional collaboration to improve the academic success of their students who

struggled to read. Informants were selected on the basis of their skills, knowledge, and

understanding of the research problem (Saracho, 2017). The key informants in the context of the

collective case study were purposefully selected independent reading specialists, elementary

classroom teachers and school administrators. These reliable key informants served as proxies

for other education specialists who function in similar contexts (Parsons, 2008).

Sampling. Sampling is a primary concern in interview-based qualitative research because

it has implications for the coherence, transparency, impact, and trustworthiness of the study

(Robinson, 2014). Purposeful sampling was employed for this study due to the specific boundary

(Patton, 2015).

Sample Size. Unlike quantitative research where large sample sizes are necessary to

make the results statistically significant, the objective of qualitative inquiry is to achieve

"maximum variation sampling," (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 158) which infers that the sample

size provides an adequate number of diverse perspectives within the data without leading to

saturation.

Primary Informants. Purposeful, homogenous sampling was used to identify and recruit

five independent reading specialists and two institutional reading specialists for this study. These

credentialed education specialists served as primary informants (Saracho, 2017). The lived

experiences of these primary informants increased the probability for the collection of meaningful raw data for analysis, and also ensured that diverse perspectives from a representative sample of independent reading specialists were included. Two institutional (employee) reading specialists were added using the same sampling process to enhance the credibility and validity of the data.

Secondary Informants. Interviews of willing secondary informants, the classroom teachers and school administrators, supplemented the data collected from the five primary informants. The data collected from these 10 secondary informants enabled me to enhance the credibility and validity of the case study through triangulation (Stake, 1995; Terrell, 2016; Yin, 2018).

Saturation. Experts describe saturation as the point in data collection at which the researcher is no longer discovering new information, or that additional information may obscure clarity (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Leavy, 2017). Notwithstanding the scholarly consensus supporting the concept of saturation, O'Reilly and Parker (2012) challenged the unquestioned acceptance of saturation as the threshold for sampling adequacy. Likewise, Sim et al. (2018) proposed an alternative to the saturation method for determining appropriate sample size, which identified four distinct approaches: rules of thumb, conceptual models, numerical guidelines derived from empirical studies, and statistical formulae.

Rule of Thumb. Since there is scant evidence to support sample size justification for interview-based qualitative research in psychology, sociology, education, and medicine the results of these studies are always open to critique by readers, and acknowledged as limitations by the authors (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Robinson (2014) proposed a four-point approach to sample size determination, which included: defining the sample universe by using inclusive and

exclusive criteria, contemplating theoretical and practical concerns, selecting a specific sampling strategy, and considering sample identification and recruitment concerns. Nevertheless, Yin (2018), who is a widely respected and often cited authority by qualitative research scholars, opined that four or five participants usually provide an adequate sample size for a collective (multiple) case study because each of the cases will produce an abundance of data.

Conceptual Model. A conceptual model is commonly utilized in descriptive qualitative research to conduct an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon or the relationships between the concepts being studied (Mills et al., 2010). Single and small multiple case study research analyzing collaborative relationships between education specialists and classroom teachers have been reported by multiple authors in numerous peer-reviewed professional journals. Brown (2016) and Yarn (2014) reported single case studies; Staples and Edmister (2014) and MacLeod and Green (2009) reported case studies with only two participants; and de Vries (2015) utilized the case study model for six participants. However, five multiple case studies published more recently in the educational literature each utilized three participants (Ahmed Hersi et al., 2016; Haley et al., 2019; Naujokaitiene & Passey, 2019; Santangelo, 2009; Urbani, 2019).

Purposeful Sampling. Judgment or purposeful sampling is a strategic approach utilized by a researcher to identify and recruit the best possible cases from the designated population with the intention to collect the best data for analysis (Patton, 2015). The two prevalent types of purposeful sampling for qualitative research studies are homogenous and snowball. Homogenous sampling is used to refine the search for the best possible cases by selecting from a population that shares specific characteristics that are relevant to the study (Patton, 2015). Snowball sampling, or chain sampling, is a strategy that augments purposeful sampling because it provides links from one qualified participant to other potential homogenous recruits (Patton, 2015). The

current collective case study relied on both homogenous and snowball sampling to enable the me

to gain in-depth information from a specific type of reading specialist whose professional

experience related to a particular phenomenon that occurs in a specific context (Stevenson,

2004). Based upon a review of the professional literature and opinions of experts, I determined

that a minimum of five unique primary participants identified through a process of homogenous

purposeful sampling with snowballing would be the appropriate sample size for this collective

case study (Patton, 2015; Stevenson, 2004; Yin, 2018). Classroom teachers and school

supervisors, which were selected on the basis of their availability, are secondary participants that

were necessary for the purpose of triangulation.

Materials/Instruments

A collective case study is deemed effective when multiple sources of evidence are

utilized (Yin, 2018). Triangulation, which involves merging data collected from these various

sources, enhances reliability and credibility of the data. Triangulation of data was obtained in this

study through the five primary informants, which were independent reading specialists, and the

12 secondary informants, which were two institutional reading specialists, five elementary

classroom teachers, and five elementary school administrators.

All interviews were conducted at the convenience of the participants. The personal and

telephone semistructured interviews of all informants were audio recorded so they could be

transcribed into Word documents, and then compared to field notes. The interviews conducted

via email were transcribed into Word documents. Qualitative research typically relies on

purposeful sampling to select the best cases for a reliable study (Anh, 2017; Cameron, 2005;

Doppenberg et al., 2012; Hermansen & Nerland, 2014; Latham et al., 2016; Leavy, 2017;

Monteil-Overall, 2009; Pawan & Ortloff, 2011; Xu, 2015). Shorter interviews were conducted

with classroom teachers and school administrators based upon their availability. The school administrators declined the my request to observe collaborative meetings between classroom teachers and independent reading socialists due to time constraints, social distancing protocols, difficultly in scheduling, and concerns regarding confidentiality.

Open-ended questions in a semistructured format was used as the primary means for data collection. Follow-up questions were posed during the interviews to obtain thick descriptions of data that enabled me to clearly understand the individual informant's experiences (Mills et al., 2009). I took care to avoid the use of leading questions when probing for additional information. Moreover, I attempted to establish rapport and trust with every informant by acting in a respectful manner, by being an active listener, and by avoiding any judgmental mannerisms (Patton, 2015). Ultimately, I was receptive to diverse opinions and interpretation of the questions.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Collecting data for this for this study involved locating participants for inquiry, developing a purposeful sampling size, obtaining credible information, and securely warehousing confidential participant information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A qualitative research protocol was developed and used to guide me during the interview-based collective case study (Creswell, 2014). I, the researcher, served a key role in the collection, organization, and security of research data.

Participant Recruitment

Dyslexia is a learning disorder that affects areas of the brain in which language is processed. This neurological disorder is often described as a reading disability because it compromises an individual's ability to read (Peyrin et al., 2012). Purposeful sampling and

snowballing were used to identify and recruit the five primary key informants and 12 supplemental informants. All primary informants were credentialed reading specialists in private practice, who currently provide separated, intensive reading interventions to elementary school-age students in affluent, central Texas school districts. After the five qualified key informants agreed to voluntarily participate as research subjects for this study, each one of them was provided with a copy of the ACU Institutional Review Board's approval, a summary of the purpose for this study, definitions of collaboration and collaborative relationship, a confidentiality and secure data storage statement, and an informed consent.

Confidentiality of Participant Data. Each participant was assigned a unique code, which is linked to the date of the digital audio recording to clarify the source of the data. The codes were: R for reading specialist, T for classroom teacher, and A for school administrator. The recordings were saved as audio files on the my password protected laptop computer and later transcribed into Word documents for coding and thematic analysis (Patton, 2015).

Delivering Informed Consent to Study Participants. The informed consent included permission to audio record the interview session, publish findings and conclusions related to the raw data, and withdraw from this study at any time during the process (Patton, 2015). I provided this information to the informant prior to the interview, and again at the time of the initial interview. The brief opening statement provided by the interviewer emphasized that the information collected is important for students who struggle to read, and the education specialists who strive to help these students with special needs realize their academic potential (Patton, 2015). The interviewer briefly explained the purpose of the interview to demonstrate respect for the interviewees' willingness to participate (Patton, 2015). Finally, the interviewer reminded the

interviewee that his or her identity, along with the information gathered, will remain confidential and securely protected (Patton, 2015).

Reciprocity and Study Ethics. Issues related to compensation of participants in a qualitative study usually raise concerns about ethics and quality of the raw data (Patton, 2015). Since the participants selected for this study held at least one graduate degree they agreed to volunteer to participate without compensation because the purpose of study was of professional interest to them.

Data Collection Techniques. Phenomenological studies should involve individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. Every informant who participated in this study had at least five years' experience managing struggling readers, which is the topic of the collective case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I conducted preliminary communications with each participant via email correspondence, digital text messaging, and telephone to establish rapport, review the interview process, and answer all questions.

Communication Methods. I clarified the preferred methods of communication and interview format with each participant: telephone, videophone (voice over internet protocol), or in person. Then, I prepared for the interview sessions by completing a robust review of the applicable literature. The objective of the interviews was to conduct unbiased collection of as much raw data as possible from each participant's perspective. Next, I conducted follow-up interviews with each participant via telephone, digital text messaging, or email. Field notes were also made during all telephone communications and interviews, and then transcribed into a Word document on my personal laptop for secure storage and future reference.

Scheduling of Interviews. I pursued a rigorous approach to data collection via interviews with each of the five primary informants and the secondary informants' preferred format, and according to each participant's preferred weekly schedule.

Primary Interview Strategy. The semistructured, open-ended interviews were audio recorded. A list of open-ended questions was used to guide the interview for each participant (Appendix A). Patton (2015) emphasized that obtaining high quality data from the subject of a case study requires skilled interviewing. The maker of quilts was used as a metaphor to describe the necessity for the interviewer to be creative and adaptive so the various pieces of raw data could eventually be stitched together into something meaningful (Patton, 2015).

Asking and Listening. Patton (2015) emphasized that asking questions involves a grave responsibility; and listening to the answers is a privilege. He stated that an interview is an interactive process that involves establishing a relationship (Patton, 2015). In addition to asking open-ended questions and listening attentively, the interviewer should be clear, gently probative, and empathetic or neutral (Patton, 2015). Moreover, it is helpful to make smooth transitions from one question to another, as one would conduct a personal conversation (Patton, 2015).

Gaining Thick Description From Data Collection. Mills et al. (2009) described thick description as the process of paying attention to contextual detail when conducting qualitative inquiry. I employed thick description to bring attention to the contextual and experiential facets of collaborative relationships was communicated during each interview (Mills et al., 2009). A critical element of data collection was my need to focus on learning the meaning each primary and secondary informant holds about collaborative relationships (Creswell, 2014). In this manner, thick description from multiple data sources will make thick interpretation possible (Mills et al., 2009).

Reflexivity and Minimizing the Researcher's Biases. Ivanovna (2015) noted that reflection is the hallmark of good research because it done systematically and purposefully at all stages of the study. An awareness of reflexivity enabled me to maintain a distinction between her perspective of teacher collaboration and the meaning each participant holds (Creswell, 2014). Self-reflection was necessary to ensure that a holistic account of teacher collaboration was determined by the consensus of the participants' viewpoints to minimize my implicit bias (Creswell, 2014).

In addition to the in-depth interviews of the primary informants, I conducted interviews with secondary informants, observed collaborative interactions between the independent reading specialists and the secondary informants, and reviewed documents the independent reading specialists were willing to provide regarding their collaboration with specific classroom teachers and school administrators (Saracho, 2017; Stake, 1995; Terrell, 2016; Yin, 2018).

Secondary Interview Strategy. The secondary informants in this case study were the classroom teachers and school administrators with whom the independent reading specialist attempted to collaborate for the purpose of optimizing the academic achievement of their students who struggle to read. I scheduled appointments with potential secondary informants, explained the nature of the case study, and asked them to voluntarily participate in interviews and / or respond to questions via email. Secondary informants who agreed to participate were provided with an information packet that included a confidentiality agreement and informed consent agreement.

Observation Strategy. I attempted to obtain permission from the school administrators to attend collaborative sessions between the classroom teachers and independent (nonemployee) reading specialists to observe their collaborative interactions and obtain field notes. Due to

restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic, constraints on time, difficulty scheduling meetings / conferences, and confidentiality restrictions regarding nonemployees attending professional learning committee meetings, the requests were denied.

Field Notes. Field notes are contemporaneous written or typed notes taken by the researcher while she observes the dialog that occurs between primary and secondary informants during a collaborative session (Terrell, 2016). I created handwritten field notes during telephone interviews. The field notes were transcribed into Word documents and stored securely with the other data collected. The handwritten notes were destroyed by shredding.

Document Review. Fieldwork creates documentation of what the researcher observes, hears, and experiences (Patton, 2015). The independent reading specialists' professional notebooks or records, and their clients' files are potential sources of case data, which may supplement interviews and field observations (Patton, 2015; Saracho, 2017). These records may reveal strategies that facilitate collaboration among the education specialists, and strategies that enabled them to resolve interprofessional conflicts (Patton, 2015). My requests to access the files or records of the students for whom the collaborative meetings were scheduled were denied.

Data Preparation Through Transcription and Field Notes. In order to become fully immersed in the data, the digital audio recordings created during each interview were transcribed into Word documents by an independent agent and proof-read by myself (Yin, 2018). During the initial transcribing, I made notes related to emerging themes and statements that related to the research questions, which created an initial list of coding categories (Urbani, 2019). The transcribed Word documents were used for manual coding of the data (Ivankova, 2015; Leavy, 2017). An inductive and iterative process was employed to generate codes, categories and themes for each unit of data (Ivankova, 2015; Leavy, 2017). Moreover, the field notes created

during the interviews were used to review the transcribed text in the Word document from each

interview for accuracy (Patton, 2015). Participants were contacted via telephone to clarify

statements as necessary.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The textual data collected from the participants were classified via descriptive and values

coding, and then analyzed using key words and phrases to establish categories and themes that

could be triangulated to provide valid insights into useful strategies for independent reading

specialists to use when they attempt to collaborate with classroom teachers (Ivankova, 2015;

Leavy, 2017; Patton, 2015). I used an inductive process to establish a clearly defined set of

themes (Creswell, 2014). Then, I used a deductive process to reflect on the data from the

perspective of these themes to determine if more evidence is needed to support one or more

themes, or whether additional information needed to be obtained by re-interviewing the

participants (Creswell, 2014). In this regard, the research process may diverge from the original

plan and become more emergent in nature (Creswell, 2014).

Coding to Identify Themes. Coding is a transitional process that enables a researcher to

extensively analyze raw data transcribed from interviews (Saldaña, 2013). Coding and theme

development are an iterative process used in inductive qualitative data analysis to distill units of

raw data so they can be combined into categories and themes, which will give meaning to the

participants' shared experience being studied (Ivankova, 2015). Craig (2009) noted that coding

of the raw data is what truly creates the picture of the common experience in a collective case

study. Both open (in vivo) coding and selective (theoretical) coding was employed to identify

meaningful units of textual data, which illuminated the participants' experiences with regard to

their collaborative relationships with classroom teachers (Ivankova, 2015; Saldaña, 2013).

Using Permanent and Emergent Codes. Permanent codes and emergent codes are the two types of codes utilized by qualitative researchers during the coding process. Permanent coding is often used to explore problems in health and behavioral sciences. This type of coding is derived deductively through the theoretical framework upon which this study is based, and from a thorough review of the appropriate literature (Ivankova, 2015). Conversely, emergent coding is commonly used in studies of social sciences (Ivankova, 2015). This type of coding is derived inductively from the raw text data during transcribing process, initial review of the transcribed text for accuracy, and during the evolving coding process (Ivankova, 2015). When the literature does not provide clearly defined codes to study a specific problem, it is necessary to use a combination of permanent and emergent codes (Creswell, 2014).

Keeping a Codebook to Increase Data Accuracy. Qualitative researchers develop a codebook during the coding process. "A qualitative codebook presents a list of codes and their groupings into emergent categories and themes" (Ivankova, 2015, p. 240). Some qualitative researchers consider a codebook to be an essential component of inductive qualitative analysis (Guest et al., 2012). Creswell and Poth (2018) encouraged novice researchers to use "lean coding," which means the initial list of codes are limited to five or six categories or themes. Based upon the theoretical framework for this study, and a comprehensive review of the literature, permanent codes that provide a foundation for the codebook are: autonomy, professional development, collaboration, time, mindset, behaviors, common goals, mutual respect, and trust (Bradley & Monda-Amaya, 2005; Cameron, 2005; Hargreaves, 1994; Hocker & Wilmot, 2018; Little, 1982; Vangrieken et al., 2015; Vangrieken et al., 2017). Definitions for these code words and short phrases will be added to the codebook to ensure accuracy for their intended use (Urbani, 2019).

Identifying Themes From the Data. Analysis of raw data transcribed from interviews is the most challenging, yet the most important aspect of qualitative research (Basit, 2010). Since coding is a critical element in data analysis, the researcher must determine whether to use a manual or electronic method to code the data. Basit (2010) compared both methods of coding data obtained from in-depth interviews and concluded that the choice depends on the size of the project, the available resources, and the inclination and expertise of the researcher. Consequently, I elected to use a manual coding method due to small size of the project, limited resources, and lack of experience with coding.

Manual Coding. Saldaña (2013) recommended coding manually on hard copy printouts for first-time researcher or small-scale research studies because it gives the researcher a greater sense of control over and ownership of the work. Therefore, I will print hard copies of each transcribed interview and follow the eight steps provided by Tesch (1990) to hand code the transcripts:

1. Read through each transcript carefully without making notations or markings.

2. Read each document while asking, "What is this about?" Write comments in the margin of the document.

3. Make a list of all topics that emerge from the reading and cluster similar topics together. Form these major and unique topics into columns. Make an abbreviation for each of these topics.

4. Preliminarily organize the raw data by reading through each document again and placing the appropriate abbreviation for the topic that correlates to the statement.

5. Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Consider drawing lines between categories that are related.

6. Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes.

7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.

8. Recode existing data as needed.

Organization of Manual Coding. I used the Liamputtong and Ezzy's three-column approach to manual coding, which is an organized method to reduce raw data to meaningful final codes (Saldaña, 2013). The first and widest column contained complete segments of raw data that were identified through the previous eight steps (Tesch, 1990). The second column contained the preliminary code notes and jottings, which created impressions to help determine correlations to permanent codes or to formulate emerging codes. The "lumper" coding technique was used to consolidate a final list of codes in the third column (Saldaña, 2013).

Constant Comparison and Inductive Coding. The constant comparative method is a process of coding and theme development that involved comparing each new segment of data to other similarly categorized data. This iterative method supported inductive coding (Ivankova, 2015).

Intercoder Agreement and Study Limitation. I was the sole researcher who conducted this study so team members or other stakeholders were not available to independently evaluate the coding process. This is a limitation of this study.

Using Codes to Identify Themes. The list of final codes was further analyzed to identify salient categories and a primary theme (Madison, 2011). Categorizing the final codes to create the emerging theme was a cyclical process (Leavy, 2017). Memo writing was used to document my understanding of each code and its linkage to an emerging category (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). A competent researcher must take a step beyond identifying the theme in the coding

process to interconnect the categories and shape them into a general description or case study

narrative that conveys the findings of the analysis (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). The final step

in this process involved my interpretation of the case study narrative.

Data Interpretation

Qualitative data analysis is an interpretive framework designed to elucidate the meaning

and significance of the lived experience of a phenomenon by the participants involved in the case

study (Patton, 2015). This framework involves awareness of my personal bias, reduction of

external influences, exercise imaginative variation on each theme, and synthesize the meanings

and essences of the experience (Patton, 2015). Effective qualitative data interpretation requires

the researcher to use creative and critical thinking to define the lessons learned from the study

(Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). This approach enables qualitative researchers to make

generalizable claims about the social phenomenon within the context of the population that was

studied (Patton, 2015).

Generating Meaningful Research. Whereas quantitative research strives for precision,

qualitative research aspires to be meaningful (Fisher & Stenner, 2011). Therefore, the qualitative

researcher must seek to develop meaning out of the coded data. The first step in accomplishing

this objective is to look for patterns across the coded data, attempt to establish connections

between different categories that emerged from the data, and then link the relevant theme to

existing literature (Leavy, 2007).

Determining Data Significance. Since qualitative research cannot rely on statistically

significant to support the researcher's analysis and interpretation of the findings, my case study

narrative must "argue for substantive significance" in the interpretation of the meaningful

findings (Patton, 2015, p. 572). The final step in determining substantive significance of a meaningful finding involves distinguishing a relevant signal from irrelevant noise (Patton, 2015).

Qualitative Validity and Reliability. Validity and reliability rely on statistical analysis to establish the rigor of the methodological procedures used in a quantitative study (Ivankova, 2015). However, the rigor and accuracy of qualitative research is judged from the viewpoint of the researcher, the participants in the study, or the readers of the published report (Creswell, 2014). According to constructivist criteria the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings and interpretations in a qualitative study are contingent upon the researcher's ability to make the necessary provisions within the study to establish trustworthiness from the perspectives of these stakeholders (Ivankova, 2015; Patton, 2015; Shenton, 2004).

Methods of Increasing Research Credibility. A qualitative study is deemed credible if the methodology employed is consistent with similar studies, the findings are believable, the researcher's interpretation promotes confidence, and the conclusions are congruent with reality (Creswell, 2014; Ivankova, 2015; Shenton, 2004). In response to positivist researchers' reliance on internal validity, Shenton (2004) reported that adoption of established research methods, use of appropriate sampling of participants, employing triangulation in data collection and interpretation strategies, use of clever tactics to ensure honesty in informants' responses, pursuing iterative questioning to expose contradictions during interviews, employing negative case analysis to account for all instances of the phenomenon being studied, scheduling frequent debriefing sessions with researcher's advisors, seeking opportunities for peer scrutiny of the research project, practicing reflective commentary to reinforce researcher's subjectivity, enlisting team members to check accuracy of the collection and interpretation of data, including thick descriptions of the informants' real life experiences to define specific circumstances and

contexts, and establishing congruency with documents and previous research that is related to the phenomenon under scrutiny all contributed to make this study valid.

Overview of Triangulation. According to Patton (2015) the use of triangulation in research evolved from its use in surveying land. Pioneering methodologist Campbell promoted the concept of combining several methods of data collection in qualitative and quantitative research because every method has limitations (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Denzin (1978) proposed four types of triangulation: (1) using a variety of data sources in a study, (2) using several different researchers or evaluators, (3) using multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data, and (4) using multiple methods to study a single problem.

Triangulation is especially important in case study research conducted by a single researcher because it supports reliability and validity by testing for consistency within the data (Patton, 2015). The foundational work of Stake (1995) and the contemporary work of Yin (2018) identified several approaches to triangulation in case study research, which included pattern matching, data linking, explanation building, synthesis across cases, time-series analysis, inter-case analysis, intra-case analysis, categorical aggregation, and direct interpretation. I followed the suggestions of Terrell (2016) and Patton (2015) by using a combination of interviews from three distinct groups of education professionals involved with interprofessional collaboration to help students who struggle to read, and analysis of related professional literature, to effectively explain the inquiry questions.

Employing Triangulation to Validate the Findings. Data triangulation refers to the way a researcher uses multiple sources of data, such as interviews with study participants, a researcher's field and observational notes, and scholarly literature reviews, to legitimize themes identified within the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While many different forms of

triangulation exist, the researcher employs theoretical triangulation to corroborate research findings (Hussein, 2015). Theoretical triangulation describes the way a researcher uses multiple theories within the same study to support or rebut findings (Hussein, 2015). My theoretical framework outlined multiple theoretical discussions, which included the performance of classroom teachers and reading specialists in the modern educational environment, the rise of independent reading specialists to support classroom teachers' core curriculum for students who struggle to read, and the challenges associated with collaboration between elementary classroom teachers and independent reading specialists

Researcher's Application of Triangulation. I utilized three methods to achieve triangulation of the collected data: (1) interviews of the five independent and two institutional reading specialists, (2) interviews of five classroom teachers who collaborate with reading specialists, and (3) interviews of administrators who facilitate collaboration between elementary classroom teachers and reading specialists. By reviewing categories and themes identified within the primary and secondary informants' interview records, my field notes, and the review of relevant scholarly literature, I evaluated the validity of the theoretical framework prior to conveying the final interpretation and summary of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transferability of the Data. A qualitative study is deemed transferable if its findings are applicable to other contexts (Ivankova, 2017). This collective case study will thick descriptions of the participants' collaborative experiences so other researchers could identify the circumstances and context of the setting, as well as the methodology employed to collect and interpret the data transcribed from interviews (Ivankova, 2017). The clearly defined boundaries of this collective case study will enable other researchers to assess whether any findings may

apply to different individuals in similar settings, or similar individuals in different settings (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability and Reliability of the Data. In contrast to the positivist reliance on reliability to ensure reproducibility of results in the same context, the qualitative researcher strives to integrate dependability with credibility because it is impractical to reproduce the changing nature of a phenomenon (Ivankova, 2017; Shenton, 2004). This collective case study ensured dependability through its research design and the strategies used to execute the planned study (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability and Researcher Bias. Since intrusion of a researcher's implicit bias is inevitable in any methodology that relies on human skill and perception, purely objective qualitative research is impossible (Patton, 2015). Nonetheless, the qualitative researcher must make every possible effort to confirm the study findings are shaped by the participants' views and not influenced by the researcher's biases (Ivankova, 2017). Shenton (2004) opined that triangulation plays an important role in reducing investigator bias. The application of triangulation to this study forced me to admit my predispositions through a comprehensive and reflective commentary. A critical facet of confirmability was the step-by-step description or diagram (audit trail) of how the raw data were gathered and eventually led to the formation of this study's recommendations (Shenton, 2004).

Researcher Positionality. The collection, analysis, and interpretation of data in any qualitative study that relies heavily on the biases, skills, and perceptions of a sole researcher should be held to a high level of professional scrutiny. Since it is impossible to ensure validity and reliability through statistical processes in a collective case study, it is essential for a sole qualitative researcher to objectively and subjectively discuss her role in this study in terms of her

relationship with the research participants, her personal and professional biases, her ability to practice reflexivity, and her approach to bracketing personal views that may influence the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data, and recommendations based on the findings (Ivankova, 2017).

Relationships With Participants. Close relationships with one or more of the participants in a study are challenging for experienced researchers. Chenail (2011) proposed an "interviewing the investigator" technique to assess biases when the investigator has a strong affinity for the participants being studied (p. 255). I did not know the participants in the sample population.

Journaling Researcher Biases. I used a research journal to clarify her biases. Emergent themes from the data will be recorded in the journal so I can reflect on them and correlate her perceptions against them to become aware of bias (Ivankova, 2017). Increased self-awareness of my bias should increase research transparency and deter biased interpretation of participant data.

Researcher Purposeful Self-Reflection. The hallmark of good practitioner research is rigorous self-reflection that is done systematically and purposefully throughout the study (Ivankova, 2017). The quality of reflexivity offered in the report is a direct reflection of the quality of the researcher (Patton, 2015). Therefore, I created an introduction in my research journal in which I described my role in this study and reflected on how my personal background and experiences could shape my interpretation of the data and guide the direction of the study (Creswell, 2014).

Bracketing of Researcher Biases. The traditional concept of bracketing implores the researcher to transcend past experiences so everything in the study can be perceived with unblemished curiosity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although the potential for strong emotional

reactions exist in every case study, I had very little emotional attachment to the data that arose during this study. I was patient to allow the data to speak on its own without bias or coercion.

Ethical Considerations

This collective case study received approval from ACU's Institutional Review Board prior to data collection. The collection, analysis and interpretation of the data from the semistructured, open-ended interviews was based on intellectual honesty, factual accuracy, and rational thinking (Creswell, 2014; Machi & McEvoy, 2016). My fundamental role was to carefully preserve the original data communicated by research participants, scholarly literature, and the theoretical framework to produce an authentic thematic analysis supporting the statement of problem.

Neutrality. The primary purpose of qualitative interviewing is to collect data. It is not intended to change a person's opinion (Patton, 2015). Gathering high quality data required the interviewer to focus on the interviewing process, remain emotionally neutral, and avoid providing advice (Patton, 2015).

Confidentiality. The participants were education professionals and were treated with respect and courtesy throughout the process. The participants were assured their identity would be protected and the confidentiality of the data collected from them would be respected, stored securely, and disposed of properly upon completion of this study (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, these assurances were delineated in the informed consent document. However, participants were informed the results of this study could be shared with them if they request a copy upon completion of the dissertation process (Creswell, 2014).

Authenticity. All responses to interview questions were kept in the context of the interview to avoid misrepresentation (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). The participation of each subject

was voluntary and without compensation. Each participant was provided with an informed consent, which stipulated the option to discontinue involvement in this study at any time (Leavy, 2017). A reasonable effort was made to minimize the level of social reflexivity during the interviews with each participant (Leavy, 2017). Reflective oversight was accomplished by self-regulation, self-assessment, and self-correction (Machi & McEvoy, 2016).

Relevant Ethical Issues. Patton (2015) proposed a checklist of ethical issues for interviewers to consider, which included: (a) a review of the professional code of ethical conduct that was used as a guide, (b) establishing an ethical advisor through the dissertation chair, (c) explaining the purpose and methods of the study, (d) addressing concerns about reciprocity, (e) avoiding making promises regarding copies of the report, (f) assessing potential risks and liabilities, (g) explaining the concepts of confidentiality and anonymity, (h) reviewing a written informed consent, (i) clarifying data access and ownership, (j) assessing the potential for strong emotional reactions arising during interviews, (k) gauging sensitivity to data collection boundaries, (l) understanding the intersection between ethics and methodology, and (m) reporting any challenges encountered.

Data Storage. The raw data collected from the participants are owned by myself, and were stored in a manner consistent with IRB requirements. I preserved the digital audio files, transcribed interviews and field notes, email messages, and the textual work products on a password-protected laptop and a password-protected desktop computer. All digital text messages and email messages were conducted on a password-protected smartphone. Backup hard drives and thumb drives used to store data were password-protected. I will destroy data collected in this study in a safe manner at the appropriate time (Creswell, 2014).

Ethical Guidelines. Beneficence, respect, and justice will provide ethical guidance for the treatment of all participants involved in this study (*The Belmont Report*, 1979). Identification, selection and recruitment of the participants, assessment of the relative risks and benefits for each participant, and a comprehensive informed consent are three areas of special importance in this regard (Terrell, 2016).

1. Identity of participants—The identities of the participants in this study were protected in the published report. Each participant will be identified as Sub A, Sub R and Sub T followed by an appropriate numerator 1 through 7.

2. Risks and benefits—There were no significant risks for the interviewer or the participants in this study. Masking the identities of the participants protected them from any repercussions associated with their strategies for collaboration or conflict resolution.

3. Informed consent—Consistent with Patton's (2015) advice, I included an opening statement in the informed consent document, which declared the willingness of the interviewer to discuss the importance of the study, to explain the purpose of the interview, and to answer questions. In this regard, informed consent is a communication process that is summarized by a written document. The ethical principles stated in the Belmont Report (1979) recognized that individuals have a right to autonomy and self-determination, and that individuals who are vulnerable or lack the capacity for self-determination are not capable of giving valid informed consent (Biros, 2018). Participants who are members of certain minority groups, hold a position subordinate to the investigator, or have unrealistic expectations for potential benefits of participation would be vulnerable (Biros, 2018). Decisional capacity to consent relates to the ability of the individual to cognitively understand and logically process the risks and benefits

related to his or her participation in the study (Biros, 2018). The sample population in this

study consisted of highly educated adults who functioned as education professional

within the context of this study, so they possessed the decisional capacity to give

informed consent. The participants were not in a professionally subordinate position

relative to me, the interviewer, so vulnerability was not a reasonable concern. However,

confidentiality could be a concern for these participants because some of their comments

may relate to educational colleagues within their professional community, which could

place future collaborative relationships at risk.

Assumptions

The "case" in this collective or multiple case study is collaboration, and the "units of

analysis" were the five participating independent reading specialists. I assumed that case study

methodology was the most effective approach to explore the collaborative relationships between

independent reading specialists and the classroom teachers of elementary school-age students

within a narrowly defined context. This assumption was addressed through consultation with the

dissertation advisors and by reviewing the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Petty

et al., 2012).

Moreover, I assumed the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the sample was appropriate to

assure that the participants all experienced the same or similar experiences while collaborating

with elementary classroom teachers. I designed this study to gather raw data related to a specific

phenomenon that is unique to a group of independent (nonemployee) reading specialists who

engage a specific method (intensive) of reading intervention within a specific (separated)

context. This assumption was addressed through purposeful sampling of credentialed dyslexia

practitioners and reading specialists.

Also, I assumed the participants responded to interview questions in an honest and candid manner. The higher academic credentials of the participants, credentialing as reading specialists, and respect from the communities in which they practiced supported this assumption. Nonetheless, I used strategic interviewing techniques to assess the veracity of each participant during their interviews (Masip et al., 2016).

Finally, I assumed the participants had a sincere interest in the purpose of this study. The participants lacked any apparent motives that could have affected the veracity of their responses during the interview. I made it clear during recruitment and the informed consent process that participation in this study was voluntary. I did not imply any condition of reciprocity in the form of compensation, publication credit, or acknowledgment in the report. In fact, the importance of confidentiality and anonymity was emphasized (Patton, 2015).

Limitations

Limitations are especially worthy of concern when interpreting the findings of qualitative research because there are always constraints beyond the control of the researcher (Terrell, 2016). Implicit bias of the researcher is an internal factor that may inadvertently guide the direction of interviews or affect the investigator's perspective when coding, analyzing and interpreting the data despite concurrent reflexivity. A lack of veracity in the participants' comments during the interviews due to context - a desire to impress the interviewer or a fear of being judged by the interviewer - is an external factor that could adversely skew the findings in a collective case study with such a small sample size. Ideal triangulation of the data in this study was somewhat compromised by my inability to observe actual collaboration sessions between independent reading specialists and elementary classroom teachers.

Delimitations

The boundaries of this study enabled me to focus the inquiry on the nature of collaborative relationships between independent (nonemployee) reading specialists and classroom teachers of elementary school-age students who struggle to read in a specific educational context. The bounded system (Yin, 2018) for the collective case study was the lived experiences of five credentialed independent reading specialists, who worked outside the school system in an affluent and highly ranked school district in central Texas during the 2018-2019 school-year, to provide separated, intensive (Tier 3) reading interventions for elementary school-age students, and who collaborated with elementary classroom teachers to integrate their interventions with the students' classroom curricula. Therefore, this study does not include noncredentialed reading tutors, elementary students (grades K-6) undergoing inclusive (classroom-based) Tier 3 reading interventions, middle school students undergoing separated, intensive reading interventions, or reading specialists and students located outside of central Texas.

Summary

The problem of practice for the collective case study was the need for specific strategies to guide engaged, independent (nonemployee) reading specialists in their efforts to effectively collaborate with elementary classroom teachers of students who struggle to read despite traditional, inclusive Tier 2 reading interventions. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of five independent reading specialists who provide separated, intensive (Tier 3) exclusive reading interventions for elementary school-age students in an affluent, suburban highly ranked school district in central Texas. For purposes of triangulation the interviews with these five primary informants were supplemented by interviewing two institutional (school

employees) reading specialists, five elementary classroom teachers, and five elementary school administrators.

The research design for this study was based on qualitative inquiry. Qualitative inquiry begins with certain assumptions and questions, which enable an inquisitive researcher to discern the meaning individuals attribute to a specific social or human problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although strategies for qualitative inquiry have evolved to provide researchers with six diverse approaches to scientifically explore, describe, or explain a specific aspect of social life, I determined that a collective (multiple) case study would be the preferred strategy for determining the "how" and "why" research questions for this study (Terrell, 2016; Yin, 2018).

Basic elements of a case study are a reflection on one's personal experiences and intentions, which relates directly to their personal experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A collective or multiple case study enables the researcher to gather data that will answer questions related to the actual experiences of a particular group of independent reading specialists working in a specific context (Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), the logic underlying the use of multiple case studies is the potential for comparing similar results, contrasting results, and identifying outliers.

The results of this research may be especially helpful for independent reading specialists who practice in affluent school districts in central Texas and aspire to develop effective collaborative relationships with the classroom teachers of their students who struggle to read. Early education teachers also may benefit from the results of the research because independent reading specialists could be increasingly motivated to develop collaborative relationships with elementary classroom teachers. Furthermore, the results could motivate elementary classroom teachers to pursue professional development to enhance their literacy skills, which could increase

the success of their classroom-based (inclusive) reading interventions and improve the academic

achievement of their students who struggle to read. Finally, the results of the research may

provide insightful strategies that could enable me to collaborate more effectively with the

classroom teachers of my separated reading intervention students who struggle to read.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to explore the leadership and conflict resolution experiences of five independent reading specialists who used specific strategies to facilitate collaborative practices in an attempt to enhance the academic achievement of their early elementary school students (Compton et al., 2015; L'Allier et al., 2010; Xu, 2015). This study explored the role of independent reading specialists within the setting of their students' public and private elementary schools in an affluent community. The role of independent reading specialists was investigated from a leadership and conflict resolution perspective. Specific emphasis was placed on the independent reading specialist's leadership role in the context of effective collaboration with their students' elementary classroom teacher. The independent reading specialist's role in promoting collegial collaboration with elementary classroom teachers was examined through the lens of Deutsch's (1983) theory of cooperation and competition in conflict resolution, which advances two basic ideas: the type of interdependence among the goals of the people involved in a given situation; and the type of action (cooperative or competitive) the people involved take to resolve the mutual problem (Deutsch, 2014).

This study used a process of purposeful sampling and snowballing to identify 17 participants who satisfied this study's parameters. These participants were identified as school administrators (A), reading specialists (R), and classroom teachers (T), and were classified as separate collective case study groups. There were five participants in the administrator case study group, five participants in the teacher case study group, and seven participants in the reading specialist case study group, which included five participants who were independent (private) and two participants who were institutional (employee) reading specialists.

This chapter provides the results of the three collective case study groups. It begins with a review of factors that contribute to trustworthiness of the data collected, and an explanation of how the validity and credibility of the findings were established. Next, the demographics of the participants are discussed, and the results of the interviews of the three case study groups are provided. Study results are described and discussed in relation to the two research questions. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Trustworthiness of Data

Trustworthiness of data is especially important in qualitative studies because reliability cannot be established by statistical analysis (Ivankova, 2015). Hence, the credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability of the findings and interpretations in a qualitative study are contingent upon my ability to make the necessary provisions within this study to establish trustworthiness from the perspectives of the researcher, the participants, and the readers of the report (Ivankova, 2015; Patton, 2015; Shenton, 2004; Yin, 2018). Research findings deemed to be true and accurate are credible (Yin, 2018). If the results of this study could be applied in other contexts, they are deemed transferable (Yin, 2018). Confirmability is established when the researcher employs reflexivity to expose potential bias (Patton, 2015). Finally, dependability is established if this study could be repeated by other researchers and produce similar results (Yin, 2018).

Credibility

Triangulation of the collected data increases the credibility of the results. The participants in this study were purposely selected on the basis of their respective education and skills, and classified into one of the three distinct case study groups: administrators, reading specialists, or teachers. These distinctions enabled me to capture the perspectives from three different types of

education professionals regarding the same phenomenon. This methodology also enabled me to increase the level of knowledge regarding independent reading specialists' strategies for collaboration and compare their data with the viewpoints of school administrators and classroom teachers who share the same student population of struggling readers.

Transferability

Including thick descriptions in the collection of data enhances the transferability of the phenomenon being studied to other contexts, situations, and applications (Yin, 2018). All interviews were conducted at the time and convenience of the participants. Since the interviews were voluntary the highly educated participants expressed an interest in sharing their knowledge about a topic of professional interest. Informed consent forms, confidentiality, and secure storage and disposal of data were discussed with each participant. Participants were informed they could withdraw from this study at any time without consequences. These safeguards were communicated to enhance the probability that responses to the interview questions would be thorough and truthful.

Confirmability

A research journal was used during this study. In addition to making contemporaneous notes, my comments included notations regarding potential bias during the creation of interview questions. I was careful to avoid using the word collaboration during all written and oral communications with the participants. The transcripts were typed by another individual, who reviewed the Word documents for accuracy.

Dependability

The backgrounds and experiences of the three separate groups of participants, which constituted three distinct collective case studies, contributed to the dependability of the results.

The demographics of the participants in each group demonstrated distinctive differences in education and skills but similar focus on students in K-4 grade level who struggled to read despite classroom-based reading interventions. Triangulation of data from the perspectives of the participants in these three case study groups further strengthened dependability. Moreover, the semistructured interview questions were shared as an appendix (see Appendix D) so any researcher could replicate the interviews. The questions were open-ended so participants had opportunities to share different lived experiences through their responses.

Overview of the Study

This study sought to reveal a greater understanding of the strategies employed by independent reading specialists to improve collaboration with their students' classroom teachers. Additionally, this study desired to advance the concepts of leadership and conflict resolution as it relates to the collaborative practices employed by independent reading specialists and classroom teachers to enhance academic achievement in early elementary students. To accomplish this understanding, I conducted a collective case study inspired by intensive literature reviews and corroborated through 17 semistructured interviews with independent readings specialists, on-campus reading specialists, classroom teachers, and school administrators.

For purposes of triangulation of data, the qualitative study was divided into two components: (1) the primary semistructured interviews with the five independent (nonemployee) reading specialists, and (2) the supplemental interviews of school-based reading specialists, administrators and classroom teachers who are closely involved in the collaborative processes deemed by scholarly literature to be essential to optimize the academic success of elementary students who struggle to read (Gore et al., 2017; Kohler et al., 1997). These secondary interviews

included two institutional (school employee) reading specialists, five elementary school administrators, and five elementary classroom teachers.

All participants in this study were voluntary. Each participant was provided with an introductory set of documents that included: a brief explanation of the purpose of this study, a comprehensive informed consent and confidentiality agreement, and options for conducting the interviews by telephone or via email correspondence. The methods for protection of the participants' identity, and secure storage and eventual destruction of data were explained.

To augment the data collection findings and streamline coding and thematic analysis, I maintained a research journal. It is common for a qualitative researcher to create and maintain a diary or journal during the research process. The importance of a reflexive journal was introduced by Guba and Lincoln (1982) to improve the reliability of qualitative research and expose biases held by the researcher. I created and maintained a journal in a Word document. My journal was used to log evolving perceptions, day-to-day procedures, methodological decision points, and personal reflections.

Additionally, I manually coded hard copy printouts of the interview transcriptions as recommended by Saldaña (2013). Then, I hand coded each transcribed interview by following the eight steps provided by Tesch (1990). Key words and phrases from the list of permanent codes were highlighted in yellow and numbered. Recurring words and phrases from thick descriptions were initially underlined in pencil, and then highlighted in pink and numbered during the following reading. The analysis of the permanent and emergent codes allowed the researcher to identify emerging themes.

As the themes and descriptions gathered from interview transcriptions yielded decreasingly relevant differences, I established that the collective case study research achieved

saturation. The resulting themes were prepared categorically and organized in multiple tables to illustrate this study's findings. Multiple collaborative practices and strategies were revealed in the process.

Results

At the onset of this project, I sought to learn the answers to two key research questions. First, I desired to know how independent reading specialists developed strategies to collaborate with their students' elementary classroom teachers to support their students' classroom curriculum." This inquiry was assisted by two minor queries, which looked at the process of collaboration between independent reading specialists and classroom teachers, and the factors that motivated independent readings specialists to collaborate with classroom teachers. The second research question intended to learn what type of strategies independent reading specialists developed to support their students' classroom curriculum. This inquiry employed two minor enquiries to discover the mutual benefits of cooperation between independent reading specialists and classroom teachers in supporting students' classroom curriculum, and to identify assumptions independent reading specialists make about the collaboration process with teachers to support students' classroom curriculum. The data gleaned from 17 interviews conducted with various education professionals, along with an intensive literature review, fulfilled this study's major and minor research questions. I prepared the findings of this study to increase academia's understanding of the collaborative strategies and practices utilized by independent reading specialists to work with their students' classroom teachers in support of the students' classroom curriculum and overall academic achievement.

The collaborative relationship between independent reading specialists and elementary classroom teachers was the primary topic of interest in this study. I discovered that the data

produced from interviews with 17 education professionals from various roles and responsibilities provided three emergent categories: curriculum, strategies, and barriers. These categories coalesced into two prevailing themes. The strategy of inquiry involved collection of data from semistructured, non-face-to-face interviews with 17 highly qualified voluntary participants, who were selected through purposeful sampling, and who were currently practicing within the boundaries of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Purposeful sampling and snowballing were used to identify and recruit the five independent (not school-based) reading specialists, who provided Tier 3 (separated) reading interventions and two institutional (school-based) literacy coaches, five elementary classroom teachers who routinely provided Tier 1 and Tier 2 (inclusive) reading interventions for struggling readers, and five elementary school administrators who were advocates of classroom-based multitiered systems for reading support.

All the primary informants were credentialed reading specialists in private practice, who currently provide separated, intensive reading interventions to elementary school-age students in affluent, central Texas school districts. Triangulation of data was achieved by overlaying a diversity of interview data gathered from primary and supplemental components. The data collected from the primary component of this study, independent reading specialists, was cross-referenced with data collected from a supplemental component, which was comprised of on-campus reading specialists, classroom teachers, and school administrators.

Data from transcribed interviews conducted via telephone and email correspondence, and related field notes were systematically analyzed through an inductive process of manual coding to generate relevant categories and themes (Leavy, 2017; Patton, 2015). The analysis of the permanent and emergent codes allowed me to identify two relevant themes.

As the insights gathered from interview transcriptions yielded decreasingly relevant differences, I established that the collective case study research had become saturated. The resulting themes were analyzed descriptively and then organized in multiple tables to illustrate the findings. Multiple collaborative practices and strategies utilized by independent reading specialists to work alongside their students' classroom teachers were revealed in the process.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The data revealed two emergent themes. The emergent themes were discovered through a process of manual coding, which revealed frequently cited words and descriptions. These two themes were: (1) collaboration is key to student success, and (2) educators discuss collaboration in terms of curriculum, strategies, and barriers. Consequently, the following qualitative data were organized by the two emergent themes. The data were supported by primary and supplemental, first-person descriptions, and augmented by scholarly literature.

In keeping with the confidentiality of the participants of this study, I used a method of coding, which refers to each participant by an alpha-numeric label (e.g., independent reading specialist #1 is referred to as "R1," classroom teacher #1 is "T1," school administrator #1 is "A1," and so forth). Moreover, five data tables illustrate this study's findings in a concise overview of the data as it relates to participant demography and emergent themes. The subsequent analysis of the data enhances the greater body of work on the collaboration phenomenon, and the strategies and practices independent reading specialists use to collaborate with their students' classroom teachers.

Demographics of Interviewed Education Professionals

I interviewed 17 education professionals who were currently practicing in affluent school districts in central Texas. Each informant had experience with interprofessional collaboration to

improve the academic success of their students who struggled to read. Informants were selected on the basis of their skills, knowledge, and understanding of the research problem (Saracho, 2017). The key informants in the context of the collective case study were purposefully selected independent (private practice) reading specialists, institutional (employed by school) reading specialists, elementary classroom teachers, and elementary school administrators.

Participants Provided Depth and Diversity of Professional Education Experience. The demography of the participants revealed a diversity of education perspective and illustrated a wealth of education experience. Although there were four different groups of education professionals, the five independent reading specialists were classified as primary informants, and the two institutional readings specialists, five classroom teachers, and five school administrators were classified as supplemental informants. These informants combined to offer 260 years of professional education perspective. The average professional experience of independent and institutional reading specialists was 21 years. This was followed by classroom teachers at 15 years and school administrators at 8 years of professional service.

Participants Produced Primary and Supplemental Research Cohorts. A total of 17 education professionals participated in this study and inspired the composition of two distinct research cohorts: primary and supplemental. Five independent reading specialists served as the primary informants—the primary focus of this study's statement of the problem. The two institutional reading specialists, five classroom teachers, five administrators combined to serve as supplemental informants—triangulating perspectives on the statement of the problem. An overview of the participants' roles and experience can be viewed in Table 1.

Table 1

Professional Experience of Participants

Reading Specialists	Years in Current Field
R1 (Institutional)	8
R2	21
R3	47
R4	20
R5	15
R6 (Institutional)	17
R7	20
Classroom Teachers	
T1	8
T2	9
T3	25
T4	26
T5	5
School Administrators	
A1	6
A2	5
A3	7
A4	3
A5	18

Theme 1: Collaboration is Key to Student Success

Despite the fact I never mentioned the word "collaboration" throughout the interviews,

each participant used the words "collaborate," "collaboration," or "collaborating" in their

respective interviews. While the focus of my interview guide was to reveal descriptions relevant

to the collaboration phenomenon, the unprompted utilization of the term by participants offered

philosophical significance. Participants may have varied in their perspectives on curriculum,

strategy, and barriers, but thematically, they all supported the relevance of a collaborative

professional relationship.

Independent and Institutional Reading Specialists' Perspective on Collaboration.

Five independent reading specialists and two institutional reading specialists produced two

emergent perspectives on collaboration. First, all reading specialists referred to the importance of

producing workshops and training sessions for teachers to augment teachers' understanding and appreciation for specialists' reading intervention techniques. Second, all reading specialists emphasized the importance of understanding a teacher's classroom curriculum and learning how to incorporate specialist techniques in a way that supports the teacher's classroom methodology. Third, all reading specialists discussed the importance of parental involvement in student achievement.

Conducting Workshops and Training Sessions for Teachers. Independent reading specialist, R3, conducted workshops and training sessions for classroom teachers so they could appreciate the multisensory approach that works well for dyslexics. Due to her stature in the community and collegial relationship with generations of classroom teachers, R3 has occasionally been "invited to sit in on collaborative meetings" held at the school. When a reading specialist collaborates with classroom teachers the importance of teaching at the students' grade level, rather than their current reading level, is emphasized because it impacts vocabulary and comprehension, which contribute to academic success.

One institutional reading specialist, R4, stated, "I expect the classroom teacher to work with me on helping me figure these kids out and help me support them, and to know more about what they're doing in the classroom." Coincidentally, this reading specialist also expected the school administrator to provide her with the resources she needs to help the students and their classroom teachers. Just as independent reading specialists query students about what they are learning in class to help make their reading interventions more coherent with their curriculum, the institutional reading specialist can readily observe the classroom, contact the teacher directly, or access the curriculum via the school network.

A distinct advantage that instructional reading specialists have over their independent colleagues is the ability to collaborate with everyone involved with the student during regularly scheduled meetings. When discussing conflicts or barriers that interfere with effective collaboration with reading specialists, R4 stated, "Not listening to [teachers]. Not showing respect. Not using the information, they provide."

Taking Initiative to Support Teachers and Their Classroom Curriculum. A reading specialist, R5, who held a Ph.D. in reading instruction, stated emphatically, "Reading instruction needs to compliment and correlate to the classroom instruction material." During her collaborative efforts with classroom teachers and school administrators, she uses evidence-based results from her assessments of students' progress to emphasize consistency and support of the struggling reader's classroom curriculum.

Another reading specialist, R6, with 17 years of experience also emphasized the importance of collaboration with classroom teachers and school administrators when she said, "Working together and collaborating is big!" Regarding her strategies to enhance collaboration she explained that communication and good relationships were essential. Therefore, she embraced the classroom teacher as a "partner" in solving the struggling reader's problems. The upside to total collaboration is that students' advance much faster because they are hearing the same things from both partners. This reading specialist also emphasized that the collaborative partners must share the same goals and similar foundational beliefs about what is needed to help struggling readers. Reading specialist R7 stated,

> It's the leader of the group that inspires the passion in the others. It takes a team.
> Multi-tiered [reading] systems require everybody. It takes all of the different
> pieces of the puzzle working together to support the student.

Reading Specialists Express That Parental Involvement is Vital to Student

Achievement. R2 discussed the importance of consulting the student's parents about what

"actions" have been taken at school to support the student. Since parents tend to see their child's

improvement first, and have the deepest concern for their child's academic performance, R2

believed parental feedback serves as a type of surrogate on behalf of the student's classroom

teacher. R4, R5, and R7 also believed communicating student progress with parents was an

important way to solicit parental involvement and develop an expectation for feedback.

Classroom Teachers' Perspective on Collaboration. The data revealed that classroom

teachers mostly collaborate with other teachers. Additionally, they consider institutional (on-

campus) reading specialists and administrators an important part of the team, and they will

collaborate with those entities when necessary to improve student performance. Unfortunately,

classroom teachers displayed very little understanding of the independent reading specialists'

role in supporting their school's struggling readers. Their collaboration with independent reading

specialists was found to be non-routine.

Classroom Teachers Collaborate Most With Other Classroom Teachers. A classroom

teacher, T1, with 8 years of experience, collaborates more with other teachers than reading

specialists and the school administrator. This teacher proudly described the highly structured,

systematic, multitiered, inclusive reading intervention program at her school. Collaboration with

other education specialists occurs at the beginning of the year when struggling readers, who have

been identified through testing, are assigned to either Tier 2 or Tier 3 reading interventions with

close monitoring of progress toward established goals by members of the RTI committee.

Although this teacher rarely meets with a reading specialist, she relies on updates regarding her

students' progress during separated reading interventions. Moreover, she agreed that different perspectives and experiences can be shared to benefit the student.

Another classroom teacher, T2, with 9 years of experience, also works in an elementary school with a highly structured reading program. T2 explained that her "teaching team" for struggling readers is composed of other teachers, but she collaborates with the school administrator or a reading specialist whenever a need arises. Although her students are "pulled out" for Tier 3 interventions, this teacher views the reading specialist as a resource rather than a member of her co-teaching team. Since she prefers to work individually with her students "her way" she admitted that it has been challenging for her to "learn to open my mind to other people's ideas and be willing to try new strategies, even if I think they wouldn't work." When asked about the potential benefits of involving reading specialists she stated, "Ideally, this cooperation would result in the students' success. But it's imperative that there is constant communication so that everyone is on the same page."

T3, who has 25 years of experience and also worked with a team of teachers in her school, explained that communication channels with reading specialists and the school administrator, as well as other resources, training and workshops related to reading interventions were available for her when she needed them. T3 commented that whenever a students has been "pulled out of her class" for Tier 3 interventions with a reading specialist it does precipitate some interprofessional communication to "discuss what skills they're working on and what skills I'm working on so we can tag team and both hit the same skills but I'm doing it in my classroom and she's doing it in her classroom." Much of this communication occurred via email. This teacher agreed that it was important for the reading specialist to be aware of her students' classroom curriculum so the teaching the student gets from both of them is coherent and consistent.

Classroom Teachers Collaborate With Institutional Reading Specialists and

Administrators. A classroom teacher, T4, who had 25 years of experience, appreciated the multitiered approach to reading intervention and agreed that regular collaboration between reading specialists and classroom teachers was important. She expressed that collaboration between these entities could be achieved during regular, structured Professional Learning Committee meetings, unstructured brief meetings, and email correspondence, which helped everyone "be on the same page, working on the same skill with different activities or skills that build on each other." This teacher emphasized, "We are a team with one ultimate goal: helping our students become better readers."

T5, who had 5 years of experience has always worked with struggling readers in her classroom. Since her school emphasizes inclusive reading interventions this teacher stated, "I work closely with our campus reading specialist to prepare interventions that directly meet the students' individual needs." This teacher relied heavily on "my administrators and reading specialists to support me in this process to help my kids succeed." While reflecting about the importance of collaborating with her administrator and the reading specialist she stated, "I share my lesson plans with them and involve them in instructional decisions for struggling readers."

Classroom Teachers do not Routinely Collaborate With Independent Reading

Specialists. Little interview data supported classroom teachers' awareness of their students' utilization of independent reading specialists. While very comfortable speaking about their relationship with institutional (on-campus) reading specialists, classroom teachers displayed an obvious lack of experience when speaking about the intervention of private (off-campus) reading specialists. T1, T3, and T4 even lamented they did not "know of any" independent reading specialists supporting their school's struggling readers.

School Administrators' Perspective on Collaboration. The data shows that school administrators see themselves as facilitators of specialist-teacher collaboration. Openly acknowledging their role in putting those two professional groups together, administrators seek to develop a master school schedule that makes that possible. Furthermore, administrators express the importance of providing reading specialists and teachers with the physical resources and professional training required to improve the specialist-teacher synergy.

School Administrators are Facilitators of Specialist-Teacher Collaboration. There was a consensus among the five school administrators that they were expected to make provisions in the school schedule for interprofessional collaboration, and support the collaborations with appropriate resources, but they were not expected to become directly involved in routine collegial collaborations. Simply stated, these administrators were facilitators of collaboration rather than actively participating in the collaborative processes they deemed to be very important to student success.

An administrator, A1, with six years of experience as an assistant principal, participated in some reading intervention meetings during which data were presented to evaluate student progress; however, the primary role was to support the efforts of the teachers and reading specialists with adequate resources and opportunities for professional development. An indirect way of providing support was to "improve my knowledge by learning and reviewing best practices" through a variety of sources, including reading specialists on other campuses in the school district. Speaking philosophically this administrator remarked, "I believe a culture built on more collaborative measures when it comes to interventions and student success would make it easier since it would be a common understanding and expectation." However, in her school she saw "teachers work collaboratively with their grade-level team more often than with the other

intervention providers and administrators." She concluded her interview by stating, "I believe I have developed the way to focus conversations on the goal and problem we're trying to solve as a collaborative group." The primary focus of the conversations in this administrator's school was that "we all share the common goal of proficient, on-level / above-level readers in our classrooms."

Another school administrator, A2, opened the interview by stating, "I serve as an administrator at an elementary school and I see my role as helping teachers and reading specialists do their job in helping the kids." The job included providing the resources, the time, the structure, and the consistency of support rather than direct involvement in their interprofessional collaborations. This administrator echoed the comments of others by stating the goal of "developing a plan so everyone's working together to benefit the kids" and "being on the same page." One of the major challenges faced by this administrator was discovering creative ways to find time in the teachers' schedule so they could collaborate with reading specialists and pursue professional development opportunities.

Providing Structural Support Through Physical Resources, Training, and Scheduling. When reflecting on her job as an assistant principal, A3 commented that her role was to provide the structural support across campus for the multitiered reading program, which was managed by four reading specialists, whom she described as "master interventionists." These reading specialists collaborated with the classroom teachers on a daily basis. This administrator's philosophy was, "Reading specialists can help struggling readers but also help struggling teachers." The administrator's primary responsibility is to "design the master schedule to accommodate collaboration." In fact, the master schedule is designed "with collaboration in mind – teacher collaboration in mind." The focus of these collaborative meetings at this

administrator's school was to enable "reading specialists, classroom teachers, administrators, and counselors all be knowledgeable about what's going on with the kids." This administrator elaborated by stating, "When our [reading] specialists and teachers plan reading curriculum together it creates better consistency of instruction across classrooms."

Another school administrator, A4, described herself by stating, "I'm a collaborative teammate and team member, and I make sure the teachers have the resources and materials they need." The focus at this administrator's school is on setting essential standards and doing whatever it takes to help every student reach those standards. Hence, the Professional Learning Community is central to the collaborative efforts to achieve this objective within each classroom. Therefore, the reading interventionists collaborate with the teachers in their classrooms because the teachers "are the one who knows the child best." This administrator's strategy was to promote consistent collaboration, and clarity of purpose during collaboration. It was clear to everyone in this administrator's school that "reading drives everything," and the courses of action must be "systematic and purposeful."

Another school administrator, A5, with 18 years of experience, was the senior member of this group of participants. Just as the others administrators stated, "My role is to support our teachers and to make sure they have the resources and training that they need." This administrator employed the manage by walking around leadership strategy wherein she checked on teachers' lesson plans, observed classroom activities, and attending the training sessions arranged for the teachers. She described the collaborative goal in her school was "just being on the same page" and following through "with the very best course of action for each individual student." The foundation for the school's collaborative strategy was the beginning of the year Professional Learning Committee meeting, in which "purposeful and intentional" goals were

established for every student. An overview of the primary and supplemental participants'

perspective on collaboration can be viewed in Table 2.

Table 2

Primary and Supplemental Participants' Perspective on Collaboration

Reading Specialists	Perspective on collaboration
R1 (Institutional)	Understanding what each other does, sharing knowledge from training events, looking at concepts or issues from student/teacher perspective
R2	Learning from parents about "action" taken at school to assist student, parental feedback a surrogate for teacher feedback, involve teachers and administrators in specialist techniques when time-permitting, be flexible in scheduling with parents for students' reading intervention
R3	Present workshops for teachers to understand specialist framework and skills, learn how to support lessons plans and specific grade-level curriculum, lead discussions at teacher in-services
R4	Facilitating specialist perspectives at professional learning community meetings, working with parents to communicate student progress, working with teachers to adopt best practices for supporting struggling readers
R5	Developing instruction that compliments the classroom instructional materials, sharing lessons learned from trainings, training teachers in simple techniques, providing feedback to teachers and parents about student progress
R6 (Institutional)	Developing instructional material that is compliant with state standards, involve admin with any issues, consult teachers when assistance needed, partnering with others to develop best solution for student
R7	Contributing to professional learning communities, working with others to identify patterns students follow, facilitate RTI training for teachers, communicating with parents

Classroom Teachers	Perspective on collaboration
T1	Meetings with other teachers and specialists, walkthroughs from admin
T2	Conferences with other teachers, build relationship with student, communicate with parents and specialists

T3	Receive training and workshops, work with team of other classroom teachers, seek reading specialist when have low-level reader, meet with admin beginning and middle of year
T4	Staff development trainings, meet with PLC's, communicate with specialists and admin through email and brief meetings
T5	Group professional development and training activities, share training from offsite workshops, work closely with campus reading specialist, work with team to educate them about the specific needs of my students

School Administrators	Perspective on collaboration
A1	Find resources to accommodate specialist-teacher training, ensure teachers and students have right materials and curriculum to support state/district standards, making time for specialist-teacher-admin meetings
A2	Providing resources, time, structure, and consistency for teachers to serve students, help specialist-teacher collaboration by making time for them to meet with each other, develop relationships with the students and share any important information with respective teachers/specialists
A3	Conduct classroom walkthroughs and offer feedback to teachers, work with reading specialists to understand what resources they need to serve the students better, find ways to give teachers more "non-teaching time" to prepare lesson plans and collaborate with specialists
A4	Determine curriculum standards and equip teachers and specialists with appropriate resources to support students, stay up to date with best practices, ensure campus professional development days, make time for professional learning communities to meet and share knowledge
A5	Supporting teachers to make sure they have the right resources and training to do their job, support students who need additional resources, participating in group trainings, ensuring everyone is on the same page, making time for group meetings.

Theme 2: Participants Discuss Collaboration in Terms of Curriculum, Strategy, and Barriers

The primary and supplemental participants delivered responses to interview questions

that could be categorized into three basic concepts: curriculum, strategy, and barriers.

Curriculum referred to the way participants viewed "what" needs to be accomplished (e.g.,

supporting state/district-level standards for student achievement). Strategy referred to "how" these standards would be supported and to what extent participants would need to collaborate with each other to ensure a positive outcome. Barriers referred to the elements that hindered the "what" and "how" these participants could achieve their ultimate aim of supporting struggling readers. Each of these concepts delivers particular insight into the nearly universal language educators use to describe their roles and responsibilities in working together to support student achievement.

Primary and Supplemental Participants' Description of Coherent Curriculum. There was an obvious consensus among reading specialists, classroom teachers, and school administrators that teaching children to read according to state and school district standards determined the effectiveness of intensive reading interventions for students who struggled to read at grade level with comprehension. Reference to the "TEKS," or Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills assessment, proved a vernacular term across all participant groups. The TEKS is the standard for what students should know and be able to do (Texas Education Agency, 2020). Additional references to district-level professional learning communities reinforced the concept that adherence to state and district level curriculum standards was important to all participant groups.

Independent and Institutional Reading Specialists Emphasize Coherence. All reading specialists stressed the importance of integrating their separated reading interventions with each students' individual lesson plans and the classroom curriculum to optimize academic achievement at their age-related grade level rather than at their current reading level. One independent reading specialist, R1, stated, "So, in the long run I'm supporting the curriculum because I'm actually teaching them specific strategies how to read those words instead of just

guessing." Another independent reading specialist, R2, commented, "My job is to enable the students to have the skill set, reading, to carry over to the other subjects in their class."

An independent reading specialist, R3, with 47-years' experience, quoted Chall (1967), author of *Learning to Read, The Great Debate* when she stressed, "We must not use a second-grade reader [book] to teach a fifth grader to comprehend. If we do, we will make them a cognitive cripple, for they will not receive the vocabulary or the comprehension skills they need to succeed at their grade level." When commenting on the school's beginning of year (BOY) assessments of struggling readers this experienced teacher, T3, said, "In addition to the data we share, we also have to submit our lesson plans so they [administrator and reading specialists] know what we are doing." In response to a query about a coherent curriculum for struggling readers another teacher, T5, acknowledged that it was very important, but "reaching a consensus on the instructional plan for a child could take longer." When asked about a system to make reading interventions coherent with the struggling readers' classroom lesson plan one administrator, A5, related that she actually walked into classrooms to observe the teacher and check on the lesson plans of specific students.

All Participants Expressed Reading Intervention Must be Individualized. There was universal agreement among reading specialists, teachers and administrators that every struggling reader was unique. One reading specialist, R1, suggested that remediation doesn't mean to reteach the same thing, it means "each kid learns differently, so you need to teach them a different way." In addition to teaching each kid differently, a classroom teacher, T1, explained it was sometimes helpful for students to hear the same thing from a different teacher, "since we can start to sound like the Charlie Brown teacher." While discussing the importance of individualized

reading intervention one school administrator, A1, stated, "We need to realize that all readers need different skills and support."

Independent and Institutional Reading Specialists Address the Need for Accommodations. Reading specialists are the best equipped to suggest appropriate accommodations for students who struggle to read, but classroom teachers are reluctant to implement them. While reflecting on the topic of providing appropriate accommodations, such as extra time for reading assignments, or having someone read grade level assignments to them so they can improve comprehension, R1 stated, "It takes the pressure off them and lets them do their best work." R3, a reading specialist with considerable experience, strongly recommended the "regular classroom teacher allow the dyslexic students to have a reader [person read to them], or be able to listen to the classroom books utilizing some form of audio books." This reading specialist also recommended someone "use grade level science or social studies books to read to the [dyslexic] students. An overview of the primary and supplemental participants' description of curriculum can be viewed in Table 3.

Table 3

Primary and Supplemental Participants' Description of Coherent Curriculum

Reading Specialists	Description of coherent curriculum
R1 (Institutional)	Specific to student, intense remediation, students should be given appropriate accommodations
R2	Shared perspective with teacher, Phono-Graphix methodology, based on student's interests, accommodations for students
R3	Stress student comprehension, consistency with classroom curriculum, at appropriate level for student
R4	Supports TEKS, try to see everyone's perspective, identify child's strengths
R5	Balanced literacy approach, mindful of student's specific intervention needs
R6 (Institutional)	Learn to work with classroom teacher, know child's strengths, balance with teaching and assessing, observe accommodations required by struggling students
R7	Systematic approach, know the right thing for each individual student, balance curriculum with TEKS expectations

Classroom Teachers	Description of coherent curriculum
T1	Share different perspectives and experiences to improve student performance, get familiar with classroom curriculum
T2	Communicate with specialists and parents, keep everyone on same page, know specific needs of struggling reader
T3	Tackle one skill at a time, set clear goals for student, know student's curriculum
T4	Encourage students' passions, make learning a positive experience, support the effort of all reading entities
T5	Incorporating other's knowledge, perspectives, and instructional ideas into lesson plans

School Administrators	Description of coherent curriculum
A2	Important to follow state and district standards, work together to learn others' insights about struggling students
A3	Standardization with TEKS, support teachers with resources, set clear expectations
A4	Standardized curriculum with state and district support, use data to develop best practices
A5	Classroom curriculum follows the TEKS, state standards

Primary and Supplemental Participants' Collaboration Strategies. Every classroom teacher and school administrator cited the "Lucy Calkins" technique as the most effective model for classroom-based reading intervention in their school. The independent reading specialists utilized established multisensory methodologies, such as Orton-Gillingham or Phono-Graphix, for their separated, intensive reading interventions. The data indicated that independent reading specialists who were aware of the benefits and limitations of the Lucy Calkins model facilitated rapport by "speaking the same language."

All Participants Express Student Success as a Shared Goal. The shared goal of "doing whatever it takes to help students succeed" was an often-repeated aspiration by reading specialists, teachers and administrators. Finally, an attitude of mutual respect among the various education professionals promoted greater trust in the reading specialist, who was viewed as an "outsider" by the teachers and administrators. One of the reading specialists, R6, opined that a challenge arises during collaboration with classroom teachers "when you're working with someone that doesn't necessarily have the same foundational beliefs. When you're not working on the same goals, or don't have the same opinions. Several teachers and reading specialists stressed the importance of 'being on the same page,'" which infers that collaboration involves shared or mutual goals. R1 explained how being on the same page prevented students from manipulating the system. In reference to meaningful collaboration she said,

> I think that just makes it come alive for the kids because they know everybody's on the same page because they can't play us against each other. We're there to make it work for them. I've had kids that deliberately try to be sent to independent school suspension (ISS) because that way they won't have to go to dyslexia class.

Regarding shared goals and listening to everyone's feedback, one administrator, A1, said, "You can't take it personally, but know we all share the common goal of proficient, on-level / above-level readers in our classrooms."

All Participants Explain That Meetings are Key to Collaboration. There was universal agreement that collaboration between the students' classroom teacher and reading specialist was essential to optimize academic success, and that the school administrator was responsible for scheduling structured meetings during which teachers, institutional (employee) reading specialists, psychologists, and that administrators should promote creation of lesson plans for each struggling reader based upon "best practices." However, no administrator allocated time for meetings between classroom teachers and independent (nonemployee) reading specialists. One administrator, A2, stated,

> Since I don't actually do reading instruction, I make sure we have time to get
>
> together so that teachers and reading specialists have time together to develop
>
> plans for the kids and assess where they are. There are creative ways to find
>
> teacher planning time whether it be early release days, or staff development days,
>
> or bringing in volunteers to cover class or using instructional assistants to allow
>
> time for those meetings to occur.

Another administrator, A3, echoed the concerns of others when she stated, "Teachers are so limited in the amount of time they have to spend talking and collaborating… it gets back to the administrators and their ability to design the master schedule to accommodate collaboration."

Independent and Institutional Reading Specialists Lead Collaborative Efforts. It was incumbent upon both institutional and independent reading specialists to assume the leadership role in collaborating with the classroom teachers of students who struggled to read. A3 observed

when struggling readers were transferred to reading class it prompted the reading specialists to seek alternative ways to make their separated, intensive reading interventions coherent with each student's classroom curriculum. Institutional reading specialists could access the classroom curriculum and the student's lesson plan via the school's internal network. Some independent reading specialists utilized indirect strategies such as asking students to show them their homework assignments, or request they bring class textbooks or laptops to their sessions so the reading specialist could integrate the reading intervention with the classroom curriculum. One proactive independent reading specialist, R2, explained how she took an indirect approach in her collaborative effort to integrate her interventions with the students' curriculum by stating, "Students bring their packets from school for the week of various assignments. I can parallel my lesson codes to match what the teacher is focusing on for the week, so there is reinforcement but in a way the child can better process it." Institutional reading specialist, R6, adopted the direct approach by arranging meetings with teachers "to go over details," but with administrators "I have to reel it in and not talk about details and just give them the bottom line."

Specialist-Teacher Relationship is Key to Mutual Respect and Collaboration. The data indicated that mutual respect was the foundation of a collegial relationship. T2 commented about the institutional reading specialist in her school by stating, "She is an expert resource when I have questions or need help working with specific students." A "let's learn from each other" approach was most effective for institutional reading specialist, R4, who aspired to improve her relationship with experienced classroom teachers whom she thought were guarding their autonomy or defending their pedagogy." R4 elaborated on this stream of thought by stating, "I try to put myself in [the teachers'] place to understand their position." Yet, another teacher, T2,

who looked favorably on the collaborative relationship with reading specialists by stating, "I think it would be difficult if you didn't trust those people or have relationships with them."

Independent and Institutional Reading Specialists Emphasize the Importance of Personalizing Students' Reading Instruction. According to R2, who has 21-years of experience as an independent reading specialist stated, "When I personalize sessions to each student, typically by their interests, they can achieve a higher level of reading than expected." Institutional reading specialist, R1, confessed that she relied heavily on the classroom teacher to help her "understand what's going on with the kid." By knowing more about what's going on in the student's personal life the reading specialist can provide more effective reading interventions for the student. Other reading specialists felt strongly about the need for teachers to personalize reading accommodations for students in the classroom. Reading specialist, R1, stated, "Sometimes I think [teachers] are reluctant to give the accommodations that the kids need. Some people think of it as a crutch… But if the kids need extra time, they really need extra time." The same reading specialist, R1, also felt strongly about assessing the unique reading problems in each kid and personalizing their interventions when she said, "I think we have to dive deeper to understand these kids because one size doesn't fit all."

Specialist-Teacher Collaboration Increases Collective Educator Knowledge and Maximizes Student Success. Although optimizing student success was a universal aspiration the reading specialists were the only education professionals with the specialized skills and requisite knowledge to diagnose, assess, and manage students with dyslexia and other severe reading disorders. Effective collaboration with their students' classroom teacher was essential to integrate appropriate accommodations and techniques that enhanced the students' self-confidence and fostered a "love for reading." Speaking about collaboration, another teacher, T2,

stated, "Ideally, this cooperation would result in the students' success. But it's imperative that there is constant communication so that everyone is one the same page."

Independent and Institutional Reading Specialists as Valuable Resources. Most classroom teachers viewed the reading specialist as a valuable resource for professional development. One teacher, T2, advised, "Remember that there's always more to learn, so your own experiences and opinions may have worked for you, but they're not the end-all, be-all. Teachers should always think of themselves as students, too." Certainly, teachers with a growth mindset would embrace reading specialists as a valuable resource (Dweck, 2006). When asked about advice for colleagues one teacher, T3, stated, "Probably just keep learning, keep growing, and keep training. There's always more to learn. Especially with struggling readers." An overview of the primary and supplemental participants' collaboration strategies can be viewed in Table 4.

Table 4

Primary and Supplemental Participants' Collaboration Strategies

Reading Specialists	Collaboration strategies
R1 (Institutional)	Finding time is biggest commodity, work with administrators to make time for meetings and one-on-one student conferences, work with teachers to see the specialists perspective—"I'm not a tutor", support mutual understanding of specialist-teacher goal to improve student performance
R2	Support teachers' classroom curriculum, solicit parental involvement, learn students' interests, consult best practices from other specialists, take time with reading intervention process
R3	Work with teachers to develop strategies, reinforce classroom curriculum, find interests of students, train staff in best practices
R4	Scheduling and time a constraint for collaboration, expect classroom teachers to work with me to figure kids out, require resources from administrators to serve students, use meetings to collaborate with reading entities, put myself in their [teachers'/students'] shoes
R5	Finding time for proper reading intervention, be sensitive of others' egos, get administrators and reading specialists on same page, seek evidence-based results
R6 (Institutional)	Need to find time for meetings, organize schedules when meetings are difficult to arrange, get buy-in from students by establishing trusting relationship, communicate and collaborate with other reading entities, teamwork
R7	It takes a team to teach struggling students, leadership to manage meetings, administrative buy-in required, use professional learning communities to share knowledge

Classroom Teachers	Collaboration strategies
T1	Be flexible and learn from others what might work best for a struggling reader, use meetings to discuss student progress, be sensitive to emotional needs of students, keep data on students' needs and strengths
T2	Build relationships with students and specialists, share records of student progress with admin and specialists, learn the strategies that have worked for the struggling student, find time to work with struggling student, constant communication and cooperation with other reading entities

Classroom Teachers	Collaboration strategies
T3	Discuss progress of child with admin and specialists, share skills we're working on student with, find time to meet with specialists when schedules are different, work together as a team
T4	Working together, communicate updates to specialists, use email and brief meetings to give updates and feedback, find time to work with students, find time to meet with specialists
T5	Making time for reading specialists, making time for student progress, sharing lesson plans with specialists, soliciting specialist advice and instructional ideas about struggling readers

School Administrators	Collaboration strategies
A1	Hold focused conversations on the problems/goals, practice communication that doesn't hurt others' feelings, bring ideas for growing and learning
A2	Finding time, setting planned meetings, being on the same page
A3	Try to find time for meetings, get in the trenches with teachers and specialists, learn how to help struggling teachers and struggling students, observations, workshops, learn how to help teachers and specialists better
A4	Use professional learning committees to share best practices, get everyone involved, mindset of school focused on success
A5	Work as a team to find best course of action for students and teachers, bring in district coordinators and curriculum director if needed, be on same page, find time for meeting with reading entities.

Primary and Supplemental Participants' Perspective on Barriers to Collaboration.

The data indicated that insufficient time, closed-minded attitude, collegial status, misaligned

goals, and lack of trust were the primary barriers to effective collaboration between classroom

teachers and independent reading specialists. One institutional reading specialist, R1, lamented,

"I wish administrators understood the importance of us getting as much time as we can. But time

is a huge commodity in school." R3 explained that some classroom teachers project a resistive

attitude toward her suggestions to try new or different tactics that might help specific students

with a unique reading problem. One administrator, A1, stated, "The greatest challenge is

working with educators who are close-minded and think they know it all." Another reading

specialist, R3, surmised that her status as a school literacy coach made teachers more receptive to her suggestions because they have established roles in the school, and developed collegial relationships. T2 admitted that it has been difficult for her to "open her mind to other people's ideas and be willing to try new strategies." Several participants from the three case study groups implied that a lack of buy-in, the failure to be on the same page, and absence of trust that all people were on the same team would compromise effective collaboration. Reading specialist, R1, bemoaned, "It's a struggle to get the teachers to buy-in to [the reality that] this kid is dyslexic and needs to be in a special class." When asked about her difficulty accepting a reading specialists' perspective regarding an appropriate intervention strategy classroom teacher, T2, stated, "I think it would be difficult if you didn't trust those people or have relationships with them."

All Participants Expressed That There is not Enough Time. "I wish we had more time to work on it" was a repetitive refrain that was echoed by all participants. There was consensus among all participants that lack of time was the greatest constraint to effective collaboration and student success. Lack of time was also the default response from classroom teachers who functioned with a fixed mindset, and resisted the need to consider alternative strategies to intervention in their classroom literacy program. Reading specialist, R2, opined that teachers were also impatient regarding the amount of extra time struggling readers required to complete class work, as well as the length of time a systematic, intensive reading intervention required.

Independent Reading Specialists Lack Institutional Status and Recognition. Institutional (on-campus) reading specialists experienced considerably fewer barriers to collaboration with classroom teachers and accessing the students' curriculum than independent (private/off-campus) reading specialists. In terms of identity, the institutional reading specialist is

"one of us" and the independent reading specialist is considered to be "not one of us." On a more practical note, the school administrators scheduled "all hands-on deck" professional learning committee meetings on a regular basis, which the institutional reading specialists were required to attend. Conversely, independent reading specialists are not employees of the school so they were routinely excluded from participation in these collaborative meetings during which the assessments of the struggling readers were discussed.

Classroom Teachers' Mindset not Open to Specialist Intervention. Independent and institutional reading specialists noted that some classroom teachers were not receptive to their help. One teacher, T2, stated, "I am personally a bit of a control freak. So, it can be hard for me to let go of my lessons or give my students away when I really want to work with them myself." Rather than view the reading specialist as a professional development resource the teacher, T2, responded, "I really just expect them to be there as an expert resource when I have questions or need help working with specific students." One teacher, T3, reiterated the opinions of colleagues who felt that teachers' unwillingness to "try whatever it takes and be willing to take advice from others" would be the biggest mistake a teacher could make.

Importance of Trust in Developing Collaborative Relationships. T5, who only had five years of classroom experience, and who considered herself to be a "life-long learner," felt her greatest challenge was feeling vulnerable when a superior judged her lesson plans. However, this younger teacher found it easier to accept advice from a reading specialist "if I trust we are all on the same team working in the best interest of the child." Two of the five teachers emphasized the importance of trust in interprofessional relationships.

Specialist-Student Relationships Built on Trust. R1 explained that the most important noninstructional elements that support reading interventions for struggling students is developing

a good relationship and earning their trust, so they are willing to take risks that lead to academic progress in the classroom. An assistant principal, A1, echoed this perspective when she said, "It is also important for the intervention provider to have a trusting relationship built with that student. Students work harder for people they trust and feel more connected with." This assistant principal concluded her remarks by stating,

Closed-mindedness is one element, but it also has to do with trusting the other individual as an educator. If teachers don't trust their colleagues, it doesn't matter how good their ideas are, they will never take the time to listen and adjust their instruction or learn anything new.

Teacher-Student Relationship Built on Trust. An administrator, A2, also stressed the importance of a good relationship between the teacher and the student because it promotes trust. She concluded that it was highly beneficial to have a trusting relationship with the child because it would motivate the child to work harder to achieve success. Another administrator, A1, stated, "It's also important for the intervention provider [teacher or specialist] to have a trusting relationship built with that student. Students work harder for people they trust and feel more connected with." An overview of the primary and supplemental participants' barriers to collaboration can be viewed in Table 5.

Table 5

Primary and Supplemental Participants' Perspectives on Barriers to Collaboration

Reading Specialists	Barriers to collaboration
R1 (Institutional)	Time for meetings and collaboration, viewed as a tutor by teachers, teachers too focused on standardized tests, teachers slow to trust specialists' perspective on struggling student
R2	Mindset of teachers too limited, viewed as dyslexia teacher, when admin/teachers collaborate then they like the specialist strategies
R3	One-on-one instruction of student limited, time for teacher to focus on student needs, teacher not able to introduce elementary skills to struggling reader, convincing teachers to try new strategies
R4	Finding time to balance schedules and hold meetings, agreeing with teachers on method to support struggling students
R5	Ensuring enough time dedicated to proper reading intervention, training simple techniques to classroom teachers, managing egos in a group meeting
R6 (Institutional)	Finding time to coordinate schedules for meetings, not making assumptions about the tendencies of students, working with others who do not share same foundational beliefs
R7	Bringing others to meetings and respecting differences of opinions, alleviating time pressure for teachers, making time to support struggling readers

Classroom Teachers	Barriers to collaboration
T1	Keeping good data on students and finding ways to share it, learning new style of teaching for students' specific needs, learning differences of perspectives and experience from other reading entities
T2	Never enough time to meet with specialists, lack of time to dedicate to struggling readers, learning from specialists' experiences and incorporating into classroom
T3	Finding appropriate reading materials for the students, finding time to meet with others, providing parents with enough feedback, being consistent with student expectations
T4	Time for professional learning communities, holding brief meetings with specialists, continuing to learn best practices from others

Classroom Teachers	Barriers to collaboration
T5	Finding time available to meet with specialists and administrators, meeting the struggling reader at the appropriate level, finding consensus with specialists about best strategies, collaboration in a timely manner

School Administrators	Barriers to collaboration
A1	Ensure standard instructional methods, find resources to support teachers and specialists, develop master schedule to support meetings
A2	Finding enough time for struggling students to received specialist-teacher attention, finding time to allow specialists and teachers to get together to plan and collaborate
A3	Limited resources, more money needed for more reading specialists, finding time for student-specialist time, producing master schedule that supports teacher-specialist meetings
A4	Time for meetings, timely feedback on struggling students, getting everyone to understand their specific roles in supporting the student
A5	It takes a lot of time to support struggling readers, time, resources, money, developing timelines for performance of our students, communicating with parents

Evaluation of the Findings

The results included descriptive findings from the transcribed interviews of the 17 educators who volunteered to participate in this study. The data collected from these purposefully selected participants were divided into the primary collective case study group, which was composed of the five independent reading specialists, and the supplementary collective case study groups, which consisted of two institutional reading specialists, five elementary school administrators, and five elementary classroom teachers.

Emergent Themes

After analyzing the coded data, which was collected from these 17 participants, two themes emerged. Theme 1, which stated participants recognized collaboration as a key to student success, provided insights that addressed the first research question: "How do independent

reading specialists develop strategies to collaborate with their students' elementary classroom teachers to support their students' classroom curriculum?" Theme 2, which stated participants communicate in terms of curriculum, strategy, and barriers, offered insights that addressed the second research question: "What strategies do independent reading specialists develop to support their students' classroom curriculum?" See the insights gleaned from the thematic analysis shared previously and how these insights address this study's two research questions in Table 6.

Table 6

Emergent Themes

Research Question Addressed	Insights from Thematic Analysis
Q1. How do independent reading specialists develop strategies to collaborate with their students' elementary classroom teachers to support their students' classroom curriculum?	1. Reading specialists advise classroom teachers on best practices and strategies for supporting struggling readers. 2. Reading specialists understand their role to support teachers' classroom curriculum and do not fight for the spotlight. 3. Reading specialists seek to overcome the barriers that prevent teacher-specialist collaboration.
Q2. What strategies do independent reading specialists develop to support their students' classroom curriculum?	4. Reading specialists share technical knowledge with classroom teachers. 5. Reading specialists understand their role in supporting coherent classroom curriculum.

Answer to Research Question 1. Research question 1 asked the following: How do independent reading specialists develop strategies to collaborate with their students' elementary school classroom teachers to support their students' classroom curriculum? All of the independent reading specialists in this study recognized the need for development of classroom teachers' literacy skills, and they appreciated the need to integrate their separated, intensive reading interventions with their students' classroom curriculum to optimize the students' ability to perform a grade-level vocabulary and reading comprehension. Yet, it was noteworthy that the

school administrators and the classroom teachers had a different perspective about collaboration than did the reading specialists. It appeared that collaboration was important for each group of participants, but for different reasons.

Reading Specialists Advise Classroom Teachers on Best Practices and Strategies to Support Struggling Readers. Four of the five elementary school administrators in this study placed literacy as the highest priority because children who cannot read cannot learn. The administrators held their school's reading specialists in high esteem because they ensured the best practices in reading intervention would be followed by the classroom teachers. According to one administrator, A1,

> Reading specialists provide the professional learning committee with the benefits of new intervention ideas, ways to collect data, ways to focus on the skills [teachers] need to better support the students, ways of looking at data differently and more fine-toothed to get an idea of what skill is the best to start with, along with building best practices to better support all readers in the classroom curriculum.

Another administrator, A2, stated, "I make sure we have time to get together… that the teachers and reading specialists have the time to get together to develop plans for the kids and assess where they are." Administrator A3, said,

> The reading interventionists I work with are master teachers. They are master interventionists. A lot of times we would allow one of our specialists to come into the reading class and model for a general education classroom teacher how to manage a small group. This helped align best practices from specialists to the general education teachers for reading intervention.

Reading Specialists Understand Their Role to Support Teachers' Classroom

Curriculum and do not Fight for the Spotlight. All classroom teachers viewed collaboration

with reading specialists and the school's learning committee as very important. However, most

classroom teachers in schools with successful multitiered reading programs viewed reading

specialists as a potential resource to supplement their classroom-based reading interventions

whenever they deem it to be necessary. One classroom teacher, T1, described her role in Tier 2

and Tier 3 reading intervention for struggling readers by stating,

> The teacher decides on an appropriate goal to help close the gap in the student's
>
> reading. She then presents this goal and student observations to the RTI
>
> committee. After the goal is set and if the committee [principal, interventionists
>
> and other teachers] agrees, the teacher conducts quick and intense skill instruction
>
> before each guided reading lesson. This takes place for 15 minutes at least four
>
> times a week. Every two weeks the teacher conducts a quick assessment, inputs
>
> the results, and continues with the same goal or creates a new goal for the student.

Although this teacher, T1, embraced collaboration she stated, "Teachers discuss strategies they

use that help with certain skills… I rarely meet with the reading specialist… administrators

sometimes share strategies, but not very often." In response to a question about this teacher's

expectations of a reading specialist, she stated, "It would be nice to have more time to

collaborate. I expect for them to do walk-throughs for observation of students and teacher, hold

meetings to discuss best practices to improve student reading, and provide data on the students'

needs and strengths."

Another teacher, T2, admitted during the interview that cooperation with reading

specialists and administrators is beneficial for student success, but she went on to relate that "it

would be difficult if you didn't trust those people or have relationships with them." This teacher also stated,

> Our reading specialists are pulling struggling readers [out of class] during that WIN [What I Need] time to work on skills like fluency and comprehension… There's never enough time, first of all. But also, I am personally a bit of a control freak, so it can be hard for me to let go of my lessons or give my students away when I want to work with them myself.

Yet, this same teacher was very complimentary about reading specialists when she said, "They always build relationships with the kids, rather than just jumping right into a lesson. They consistently work with them and keep records of their progress and report back to the classroom teachers."

Both teachers, T2 and T3, acknowledged that they benefitted from abundant literacy resources in their respective school districts. They received literacy training and attended workshops along with having access to literature and online resources. They relied heavily on the Reading Workshop Model using Lucy Calkins Units of Study and followed the TEKS [Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills] guidelines to assess student progress. Just as the other teachers related, T3 stated her primary source of collaboration was with a team of teachers, "and that's how I always want to teach." Although this teacher, T3, never mentioned that some of her students were pulled out of class for intensive reading interventions she stated,

> As far as reading specialists, usually what we do [during team planning sessions] is discuss what skills they're working on and what skills I'm working on so we can tag team and both hit the same skills but I'm doing it in my classroom and she's doing it in her classroom.

Later in the interview teacher, T3, made complimentary comments about reading specialists and

their separated, intensive interventions when she stated,

> I think they're able to provide those kids who need the support a quiet place to
>
> focus on what they need to work on. They also have specialized instruction… I
>
> can do that in the classroom as well but they work with those kids everyday
>
> across the grade levels. I think that's a benefit for those kids.

Reading Specialists Seek to Overcome the Barriers That Prevent Teacher-Specialist

Collaboration. Every administrator and every classroom teacher interviewed for this study stated

that lack of time was a direct barrier to effective collaboration with reading specialists. All five

administrators stated that one of their primary responsibilities was to schedule time in the master

schedule for professional learning committee or other team meetings during which everyone

involved in helping struggling readers could effectively collaborate.

Lack of opportunity was cited by Tichenor and Tichenor (2019) as another direct barrier

to collaboration with elementary classroom teachers. The five administrators who emphasized

the need to "make time in the master schedule" for collegial collaboration only considered the

institutional reading specialists. Lack of time in the schedule for collaboration between

classroom teachers and their students' independent reading specialists was another direct barrier

to collaboration in schools with highly successful classroom-based literacy programs.

The "us and them" professional identity that some classroom teachers (T1 and T3) in this

study held against reading specialists and school administrators appeared to be an indirect barrier

to collaboration. Although teachers T1 and T3 acknowledged the expertise of their institutional

reading specialists, and the positive impact they had on their students, these teachers stated that

they "rarely met with them," or "didn't trust them." Scholarly articles indicate that the

underlying basis for these attitudes is most likely the teachers' need to preserve their autonomy and defend their pedagogy (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

Lack of shared goals, mutual respect, trust and insecurity were also expressed or inferred by some of the teachers as indirect barriers to effective collaboration with reading specialists. These barriers to collaboration among elementary school teachers were also identified in a recent qualitative study by Tichenor and Tichenor (2019). Therefore, it is reasonable to understand why the teachers in this study gravitated toward collaborating with other teachers in their grade level rather than reading specialists.

Answer to Research Question 2. Research question 2 asked the following: What strategies do independent reading specialists develop to support their students' classroom curriculum? The barriers to effective collaboration that were revealed by the first research question seemed to guide the development of strategies employed by the independent reading specialists in this study to collaborate with their students' classroom teachers. It was obvious from interviews with all seven reading specialists that their primary motivation to collaborate with their students' classroom teachers was to integrate their separated, intensive (Tier 3) reading interventions with the students' classroom curriculum. The basis for this motivation was data from scholarly literature, and the personal experiences of the reading specialists, which emphasized that integration of reading interventions with the students' classroom curriculum optimized the students' academic success (Reeves et al., 2017).

Reading Specialists Share Technical Knowledge With Classroom Teachers. Only one independent reading specialist of the five participants in this study were invited to an elementary school by an administrator. This independent reading specialist, R3, was an outlier because she was also a highly respected co-owner of a business that conducted professional development

training programs for classroom teachers during the summer months. Despite her highly regarded reputation in the community she was never invited to participate in any regularly scheduled literacy meetings to collaborate with the classroom teachers of her students.

All administrators and teachers who participated in this study functioned in elementary schools with well-funded exemplary literacy programs that were led by their school or district reading specialist. Therefore, it would be unusual for these school administrators and classroom teachers to look outside their institution to collaborate with an independent reading specialist regarding the classroom curriculum of their students who struggle to read. Hence, opportunities for independent reading specialists to engage in effective collaboration with their students' classroom teachers are very limited when the elementary school has an exemplary literacy program.

Nevertheless, one of the independent reading specialists in this study, who served students from three different elementary schools, found her students' classroom teachers to be more receptive to collaboration regarding the students' lesson plans and classroom curriculum. The unfortunate downside to this context was the lack of organized multitiered classroom-based literacy programs in the schools due to lack of time, inadequate resources, and insufficient emphasis on professional development for classroom-based literacy intervention. Therefore, the literacy skills learned by her students during their intensive private interventions were not reinforced in the classroom.

Reading Specialists Understand Their Role in Supporting Coherent Classroom Curriculum. Several of the independent reading specialists who participated in this study had developed effective strategies to effectively integrate their separated, intensive reading interventions with their students' classroom curriculum. These indirect sources were the school

districts online curriculum (TEKS), the students' backpack, which usually contained textbooks and homework for current assignments, and the students' parents.

Every independent reading specialist assumed a leadership role in the pursuit of indirect collaboration. The primary motivation for the reading specialists was to help their students achieve grade-level proficiency in vocabulary and reading comprehension. In the role as an advocate for their students some reading specialists made suggestions for classroom reading accommodations to their students' parents, which they would communicate to the classroom teachers.

Summary

The goal of this study was to identify the strategies that independent reading specialists developed for collaboration with the classroom teachers of their students. The problem of practice for this study was the need to identify specific strategies to help guide independent reading specialists in their efforts to effectively collaborate with the elementary classroom teachers of their students who struggle to read despite the teachers' traditional, inclusive reading interventions. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of five independent reading specialists who provided separated, intensive (Tier 3) interventions for elementary school-age students in an affluent suburban, highly ranked school district in central Texas. A constructivist-interpretive paradigm was the theoretical framework for this study. Two research questions supported this study's theoretical framework and were developed to guide the collection of data for the qualitative research study. Seventeen (17) participants volunteered to contribute to this study and represented one of three professional educators involved in reading intervention for elementary students: independent or institutional reading specialists, classroom

teachers, or school administrators. Manually coded transcription data generated from the participants' responses to a standardized interview guide yielded two emerging themes.

This study's thematic discoveries support academia's fields of education leadership and conflict resolution. The first theme, which stated that participants agree that collaboration is key to student success, delivered three insights about how independent specialists develop strategies to collaborate with their students' classroom teachers to support classroom curriculum. These three insights include: (1) reading specialists advise classroom teachers on best practices and strategies for supporting struggling readers, (2) reading specialists understand their role to support teachers' classroom curriculum and do not fight for the spotlight, and (3) reading specialists seek to overcome the barriers that prevent teacher-specialist collaboration. The second theme, which stated that participants communicate in terms of curriculum, strategy, and barriers, produced two insights about what strategies independent reading specialists use to collaborate with their students' classroom teachers to support classroom curriculum. These two insights include: (1) reading specialists share technical knowledge with classroom teachers, and (2) reading specialists understand their role in supporting coherent classroom curriculum.

Overall, the unprompted utilization of the term "collaboration" by all participants in the three case study groups legitimized the presence of the phenomenon in this study. The perspectives revealed by participant groups indicated different motivating factors to pursue a collaborative professional relationship in support of students' classroom curriculum. In general, the reading specialists and school administrators in this study placed greater emphasis on collaboration for the purpose of enhancing student success than was expressed by the classroom teachers. Moreover, classroom teachers revealed significant mindset barriers to specialist-teacher collaboration.

During the past two decades the political and educational mandate for inclusive classroom education for students with special needs exposed the demand for interprofessional collaboration in elementary education (Austin et al., 2017). Hence, reading specialists evolved to become de facto leaders of multitiered classroom-based literacy programs. The multitiered model for reading intervention became the gold standard in contemporary elementary literacy education (Abbott & Wills, 2012). The collaboration between reading specialists and the classroom teachers to integrate separated intensive (Tier 3) reading interventions with the students' classroom curriculum is deemed essential to optimizing the students' academic success (Weiss & Friesen, 2014). Unfortunately, the mandate supporting interprofessional collaboration for students who struggle to read failed to include independent reading specialists. The current study explored the consequences of that shortcoming.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The problem of practice for this study was the need to identify specific strategies to help guide independent reading specialists in their efforts to effectively collaborate with the elementary classroom teachers of their students who struggle to read despite the teachers' traditional, inclusive (classroom-based) reading interventions. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of five independent reading specialists who provide separated, intensive (Tier 3) interventions for elementary school-age students in an affluent suburban, highly ranked school district in central Texas. Supplementary interviews with two institutional (on-campus) reading specialists, five elementary classroom teachers, and five elementary school administrators were also conducted to enable me to further analyze how independent reading specialists' attempts to collaborate with the elementary classroom teachers differ from institutional reading specialists.

The findings of this study indicated that each participant viewed collaboration as a key contributor to student success. Despite the fact I never used the word collaboration in the participants' interviews, participants universally utilized words like "collaborate," "collaborating," or "collaboration" at various points in the interview. While it appeared that the collaboration was a singularly agreed upon element of student success, the participants shared differing opinions about what collaboration meant to them. Consequently, it is important to consider collaboration as a word that means different things to various people within the education profession.

While this study sought to examine the specific strategies independent reading specialists utilized to support classroom teachers and their students' classroom curriculum, it also illuminated academia's understanding of the collaboration phenomenon. The fields of education

leadership and conflict resolution benefit from this study's findings, which examines the collaboration phenomenon as it relates to educational professionals' support of struggling readers. To inspire continued discussion about this study's findings, this chapter reviews the findings of this study in relation to past literature, describes the limitations with regard to interpretation of the findings and their validity, provides recommendations for practical application of the findings to current practice and future research, and explains the role of this study in the context of existing literature.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Past Literature

The scholarly literature established that the shared goal of integrating the students' classroom lesson plans with separated, intensive reading interventions provides the primary motivation for voluntary interprofessional collaboration between reading specialists and elementary classroom teachers to optimize student achievement (Egodawatte et al., 2011; Slavit et al., 2011; Vangrieken et al., 2015). However, none of these peer-reviewed journal articles identified a difference between institutional (on-campus) and independent (private) reading specialists. Although the peer-reviewed journal articles relating to the collaboration of reading specialists and classroom teachers support the premise that integration of separated, intensive (Tier 3) reading interventions with the students' classroom curriculum optimized the students' academic success, the elementary school administrators did not provide a structure that acknowledged or encouraged classroom teachers to collaborate with the independent reading specialists of their struggling readers.

When reviewing past literature that related to collaboration between reading specialists and classroom teachers it is important to recognize the distinction between institutional reading specialists and independent reading specialists. Institutional reading specialists are usually

literacy coaches who are employed by a school or school district to supervise the prescribed inclusive (classroom-based) multitiered reading intervention programs. Institutional reading specialists are responsible for assessment of students who struggle to read despite Tier 1 and Tier 2 reading interventions provided by the classroom teachers. They are also responsible for facilitating professional development programs for classroom teachers, being available as a resource for teachers who provide more intensive classroom-based reading interventions, and providing separated, intensive (Tier 3) reading interventions for students. Hence, collaboration between the institutional reading specialists and classroom teachers is an inclusive process that is designed into the school system. More importantly, meetings for the purpose of collaboration between all faculty members involved with helping struggling readers are usually scheduled in advance by the administrator.

Abundant evidence in the scholarly literature validated the numerous benefits of interprofessional collaboration in education. Furthermore, collaboration between institutional reading specialists and elementary classroom teachers enumerated the following benefits: resources for classroom reading interventions (Quatroche et al., 2001; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009), professional development (Tallman, 2019), student success (DeLuca et al., 2017; Ellington et al., 2017), teacher engagement and job satisfaction (Van den Bossche et al., 2006), mentor and role model (Tatum, 2004), and enhancement of teacher efficacy (Klassen & Tze, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Conversely, there is a dispiriting void in the scholarly literature regarding collegial collaboration between independent reading specialists and the elementary classroom teachers of their students who struggle to read. Since the academic success of these students who struggle to read is greatly impacted by effective collaboration between their reading specialists and

classroom teachers, there is a need to identify how independent reading specialists develop strategies to collaborate with their students' classroom teachers, and a want to define the strategies that promote effective collaboration.

Limitations

This study revealed two main limitations. First, the narrow lens utilized to capture very specific participant data and achieve saturation limited the collaboration phenomenon to a tightly bounded demographic. This study focused on collecting data from participants working in highly affluent central Texas elementary schools. It is likely the collaboration phenomenon would present differently across different geographic regions, socioeconomic environments, and different grade school levels. This study's findings on collaboration are unique to the population it researched and cannot be extrapolated to define all collaborative efforts between independent reading specialists and classroom teachers.

Second, the COVID-19 pandemic, which occurred during the collection of data for this study, was a unique phenomenon that caused participants' schools to implement stringent social distancing guidelines, which eliminated the potential for face-to-face interviews with the primary and secondary participants. The lack of in-person contact effected my ability to gain firsthand observations of the collaboration phenomenon. While ample data were collected to support this study's findings, I believe some descriptions could have been thicker given more in-person opportunities to observe the collaboration phenomenon.

Recommendations

If this study were to be repeated in the future, I could change the manner in which the interviews were conducted. When social distancing precautions related to the current coronavirus pandemic no longer risk interpersonal contact, the interviews could be conducted face-to-face. It

is reasonable to assume the face-to-face interactions would enhance rapport between the interviewer and the participants, which would increase the number of thick descriptions. Nonetheless, the findings from the current study seem relevant and provided me with an opportunity to make recommendations for practical application and future research.

Recommendations for Practical Application

Thematic analysis of the data revealed five key insights:

1. Reading specialists advise classroom teachers on best practices and strategies for supporting struggling readers.

2. Reading specialists understand their role to support teachers' classroom curriculum and do not fight for the spotlight.

3. Reading specialists seek to overcome the barriers that prevent teacher-specialist collaboration.

4. Reading specialists share technical knowledge with classroom teachers.

5. Reading specialists understand their role in supporting coherent classroom curriculum.

These insights offer basic principles for how independent reading specialists must engage classroom teachers to support classroom curriculum and struggling readers.

While these insights shed important strategies for successful collaboration between independent reading specialists and classroom teachers, it is far from complete and exemplifies a certain one-sidedness. There is considerable variation among education professionals regarding the nature of effective collaboration, despite the fact educational scholars seem to agree that effective collaboration between reading specialists and the elementary classroom teachers of students who struggle to read has a positive impact on those students' academic success. Perhaps, this is because the idea of collaboration differs from teacher to specialist to

administrator. Working together sounds appealing in theory, but the practical application of this ethic manifests itself less obviously. Consequently, the results of this study should be relevant to independent reading specialists who encounter barriers whenever they attempt to initiate collaboration with their students' classroom teachers.

It is important to note that the insights gleaned from the data do more to highlight effective strategies for independent reading specialists in overcoming collaborative barriers in the specialist-teacher relationship than it does to explain the responsibility a teacher or an administrator may equally possess in a collaborative relationship with an independent reading specialist. These insights offer successful ways reading specialists demonstrate leadership and resolve conflict when collaborating with their students' classroom teachers. Yet, if this study were reversed and I were to examine what collaborative strategies a classroom teacher uses to work with an independent reading specialist, the results of this study would be nullified. The collaboration phenomenon, as observed in this study, is not a reciprocating and evenly returned element. Just because one professional group desires to collaborate with another, it does not also imply that the other professional group will return the collaborative effort in kind, or at all. The practical application of collaboration across a host of disciplines is dependent upon a foundation of shared goals, mutual respect, and collegial trust.

This study observed the practical application of collaboration is dependent upon the creation of reading interventions that are coherent with lesson plans clearly focused on assisting students' success in the teachers' classroom. The consensus of the five independent reading specialists who participated in this study was the independent reading specialist must assume a leadership role to initiate and perpetuate effective collaboration with their students' elementary classroom teachers. The data from the five respective case studies of the key participants

indicated that direct, and more frequently indirect, strategies to promote collaboration for the purpose of integrating reading interventions with the students' classroom curriculum are warranted to optimize students' academic success.

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study suggest a variety of directions others may consider for future research. A collective case study methodology was utilized for this study because the goal was to describe and understand a specific phenomenon in great detail. Scholars support the effectiveness of a collective case study when multiple sources of evidence are available to gather phenomenological data related to the lived experiences of purposefully selected informants (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Due to the adaptive nature of reading intervention and the independent and institutional professionals who support such interventions, a future researcher could examine this study using a phenomenological or narrative-based qualitative study to further examine the collaboration phenomenon in education.

Examine the Difference Between Independent and Institutional Reading Specialists and the Implications on Educating Future Reading Specialists. The critical role of reading specialists in multitiered, classroom-based (inclusive) elementary school literacy programs has evolved during the past two decades (Al Otaiba et al., 2008; Bean et al., 2002; Dole et al., 2006; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; Vaughn et al., 2010; Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009). The unfortunate assumption in the scholarly literature is the lack of differentiation between contemporary reading specialists who function within schools and school districts as literacy coaches who support teachers with classroom-based reading interventions, and traditional independent reading specialists who provide separated, intensive reading interventions in a private practice setting (Bean et al., 2002; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). There is a need to study

this dichotomy between institutional and independent reading specialists, and then consider the implications of the findings on the education of future reading specialists.

Focus on Identifying Direct Collaboration Strategies Used Between Independent Reading Specialists and Classroom Teachers. The current study highlighted the importance of collaboration between reading specialists and elementary classroom teachers for the purpose of integrating the separated, intensive reading interventions of students who struggle to read with their classroom curriculum. Due to the lack of data related to strategies for direct collaboration between independent reading specialists and the elementary classroom teachers of their students, there is a need for researchers to further examine this important facet of contemporary reading intervention.

Discover Ways Administrators can Eliminate Barriers to Independent Reading Specialist and Teacher Collaboration. Independent reading specialists were identified as leaders in the context of the current study because they initiated all interprofessional collaborations with their students' classroom teachers. Conversely, in schools with exemplary reading programs the administrator assumes the leadership role for designing time for collaboration in the master schedule, which allows for institutional reading specialists and classroom teachers to create coherent curricula for their students who struggle to read. This study exposed a need for school administrators to consider independent reading specialists when they allocate collaborative and literacy skill development time in the classroom teachers' master schedule.

Examine Negative Impacts of Noncollaborative Educational Environments on Struggling Readers' Success. The perspective of this study was focused on strategies that independent reading specialists could utilize to enhance their effectiveness for students who

struggle to read. Yet, the most important stakeholder in the context of this study was the student who struggles to read. Further research is needed to address how students' academic success is impacted by insufficient collaboration between their independent reading specialists and their classroom teachers. A comparison of the academic success of students enrolled in inclusive (institutional) reading interventions versus exclusive (independent) reading interventions could encourage school administrators to design their master schedules accordingly.

Conclusions

As more school districts and elementary school administrators have adopted the inclusive reading intervention model, the roles of reading specialists have changed. The ability to leverage the knowledge and skills of an institutional reading specialist is the basis for exemplary literacy programs in elementary and middle schools (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). Nonetheless, many elementary schools, and their students who struggle to read, are being left behind due to a lack of adequate knowledge and resources. The findings of the current study could motivate school administrators to allocate time in their master schedule to facilitate collaboration between independent reading specialists and the classroom teachers of their students who struggle to read.

The results of this study may be especially helpful for independent reading specialists who practice in affluent school districts in central Texas and aspire to develop effective collaborative relationships with the classroom teachers of their students who struggle to read. Early education teachers may also benefit from the results of the research because they could be increasingly motivated to develop collaborative relationships with their students' independent reading specialists. Finally, the results of this study could motivate elementary classroom teachers to view collaboration with independent reading specialists as an opportunity for

professional development, which could increase the success of their classroom-based reading interventions.

All participants in this study agreed with the maxim, "If the child cannot read, the child cannot learn." Teaching children to read is the primary responsibility of all stakeholders in an effective school literacy program. The ultimate goal for these stakeholders is to identify the leader in their quest to help every child learn to read at grade level so they can achieve success in school, and in life. Until school administrators include independent reading specialists as an equal stakeholder in their schools' literacy programs, it will be necessary for independent reading specialists to exercise leadership in advocating for their students' academic success. On behalf of their struggling readers, independent reading specialists must take a leadership role in initiating relationships and resolving collaborative barriers with classroom teachers and administrators.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

[Insert Date]

[Recipient]
[Title]
[Company]
[Address 1]
[Address 2]
[Address 3]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Educational Leadership at Abilene Christian University, I am conducting research to better understand the role Independent Reading Specialists, Elementary School Classroom Teachers, and Elementary Administrators play in supporting elementary readers who read below grade level. The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership and conflict resolution experiences of Independent Reading Specialists, Elementary Classroom Teachers, and Elementary Administrators who work together to serve their struggling readers, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you currently serve the education field as an Independent Reading Specialist, Elementary Classroom Teacher, or Elementary Administrator and have experience serving elementary readers who read below grade level, you will be asked to accommodate an in-person, telephone, or email interview, and respond to future research discussions intended to clarify your interview information and experiences. The initial interview should take approximately 60 minutes for you to complete and follow-up phone calls, email, or text messages (at the convenience of the participant) are intended to be concise and minimal. Your name and/or other identifying will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, complete and return the attached consent form to the researcher and contact me to schedule an interview at xxxxxxxxxx or xxxxxxx@acu.edu.

A consent form is attached to this letter and contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent form and return it to me via a .pdf file at xxxxxxxxx@acu.edu. If you prefer, you may also submit it personally at the time of our interview

I think you will find the subject matter discussed in this study worth your time and very thought-provoking. I am grateful for your participation and look forward to learning from your education experience!

Sincerely,

Lindsay Hawbaker
Doctoral Candidate, Abilene Christian University School of Educational Leadership

Appendix B: Interview Screening Guide

Pre-Interview Screening Guide

*Qualitative Study of Collaboration Between Independent Reading Specialists and Their Students'
Elementary Classroom Teachers*

Time of screening:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Participant:

Introductory Statement: The purpose of this study is to explore the role Independent Reading
Specialists, Elementary Classroom Teachers, and Elementary Administrators play in supporting
elementary students who read below grade level. A study of leadership and conflict resolution
experiences of these independent reading specialists, elementary classroom teachers, and
elementary administrators should add depth to academia's understanding of the network that
supports elementary students who read below grade level. The following screening questions
were designed to ensure that your participation in today's interview satisfies this study's rigorous
research requirements.

Questions:

1. Is the participant older than the age of 18?

2. Does the participant currently serve in the field of education as an Independent Reading
    Specialist, Elementary Classroom Teacher, or Elementary Administrator?

3. Does the participant have experience serving elementary student who read below grade
    level?

Concluding statement: Thank you for your participation in this screening. You (do)/(do not)
satisfy this study's requirements. (1) I look forward to learning more about your experiences in
our following interview! (2) I'm sorry for the inconvenience, but you do not meet the study's
requirements. Thank you again for your time!

Appendix C: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM
Qualitative Study of Collaboration Between Independent Reading Specialists and Their
Students' Elementary Classroom Teachers
Lindsay Hawbaker
Abilene Christian University
School of Educational Leadership

You are invited to participate in a research study, which seeks to address the role Independent
Reading Specialists, Elementary Classroom Teachers, and Elementary Administrators play in
supporting elementary readers who read below grade level. You were selected as a possible
participant because you are currently serving in the field of education as an Independent Reading
Specialist, Elementary Classroom Teacher, or Elementary Administrator, and have experience
working with elementary students who read below grade level.

Lindsay Hawbaker, a doctoral candidate in the School of Educational Leadership at Abilene
Christian University, is conducting this study.

Given your background, you may be able to take part in this research study. This form provides
important information about that study, including the risks and benefits to you as a potential
participant. Please read this form carefully and ask the researcher any questions that you may
have about the study. You can ask about research activities and any risks or benefits you may
experience. You may also wish to discuss your participation with other people, such as your
family doctor or a family member. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You
may refuse to participate or stop your participation at any time and for any reason without any
penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

PURPOSE & DESCRIPTION: Despite an abundance of effective reading intervention
methods available to elementary educators, the National Assessment of Educational Progress
reports that one-third of fourth grade students in American schools still fail to read at grade level.
Scholars attribute this percentage of struggling readers to a scarcity of administrative resources
and a lack of effective collaboration between educational specialists and classroom teachers.
This purpose of this study is to explore the leadership and conflict resolution experiences of
Independent Reading Specialists, Elementary Classroom Teachers, and Elementary
Administrators who work together to serve elementary students who read below grade level.

PROCEDURE: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. **Accommodate a 60-minute in-person, telephone, or email interview**. In-person and
   telephone interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. These interviews will be
   recorded to ensure responses are reported accurately. If an interview can only be
   accommodated via email correspondence, I will email you the interview questions for
   completion and email return at your earliest convenience.
2. **Accommodate follow-up discussions via telephone, email, or text message.**
   Depending on research insights gained by your interview responses, I may need to reach
   out to you to clarify specific experiences or information. These discussions can be

conducted flexibly in a communication method (e.g. phone call, email, text message, in-person) that is most convenient for you. In-person and telephone calls will be recorded for reporting accuracy.

3. **Permit my attendance at Department Head meetings and/or Professional Learning Community Meetings for observational study.** "Field notes" gained from the participant's working environment would deliver firsthand observations of processes and communication methods used to convey support to the network responsible for aiding students who read below grade level. These observational field notes are taken to augment the responses provided through participant's interviews and seek to enhance perspective and reporting accuracy of themes emerging from a participant's interview.

RISKS & BENEFITS: The risks involved in this study are minimal. Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include enhancing the support of elementary students who read below grade level through improved collaboration techniques utilized among Independent Reading Specialists, Elementary Classroom Teachers, and Elementary Administrators.

PRIVACY CONFIDENTIALITY: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. In-person interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. Information provided by research participants will not be shared with other participants.

CONTACTS & QUESTIONS: The researcher conducting this study is Lindsay Hawbaker. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at xxxxxxxxxxx and xxxxxxx@acu.edu. If you are unable to reach the lead researcher or wish to speak to someone other than the lead researcher, you may contact the researcher's Faculty Advisor, Dr. Amy Barrios, at xxxxxxxxx or xxxxxxxx@acu.edu. If you have concerns about this study, believe you may have been injured because of this study, or have general questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact ACU's Chair of the Institutional Review Board and Executive Director of Research, Megan Roth, Ph.D. Dr. Roth may be reached at
xxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxx@acu.edu
xxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxx, ACU Box xxxxx
Abilene, TX 79699

STATEMENT OF CONSENT: Please sign this form if you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. Sign only after you have read all of the information provided and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. You should receive a copy of this signed consent form. You do not waive any legal rights by signing this form.

_____   _____   _____
Printed Name of Participant   Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____   _____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining   Signature of Person Obtaining   Date
Consent   Consent

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Qualitative Study of Collaboration Between Independent Reading Specialists and Their Students' Elementary Classroom Teachers

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Participant:

Introductory Statement: The purpose of this study is to explore the role Independent Reading Specialists, Elementary Classroom Teachers, and Elementary Administrators play in supporting elementary students who read below grade level. A study of leadership and conflict resolution experiences of these independent reading specialists, elementary classroom teachers, and elementary administrators should add depth to academia's understanding of the network that supports elementary students who read below grade level.

Questions:

1. What has been your role in serving elementary students who read below grade level (e.g., independent reading specialist, classroom teacher, administrator… to what extent, how long)?

    a. How does this role compare to that of colleagues that support other classroom subjects (e.g. math, science, social studies)?

2. Describe how you prepare teaching material to serve elementary students who read below grade level?

    a. How do you ensure your instructional methods support the student's classroom curriculum?

    b. What resources do you consult to develop best practices and improve your

instruction?

    c. What other teachers, administrators, or independent reading specialists do you involve in the preparation of your reading instruction?

3. What elements do you credit for the successful instruction of students who read below grade level?

    a. What elements have surprised you about the process of instructing struggling readers?

    b. What elements do you believe are lacking or incomplete in the successful instruction of struggling readers?

    c. How are you able to include [independent reading specialists, classroom teachers, administrators] into your reading instruction?

        i. What elements make inclusion of these entities difficult? How could it be improved?

    d. How do you expect [independent reading specialists, classroom teachers, administrators] to support your reading instruction?

        i. When these entities support struggling readers well, what do you notice they do well?

        ii. When these entities do no support struggling readers well, what do you notice they do not do well?

4. What strategies have you developed to incorporate the perspective of [independent reading specialists, classroom teachers, administrators] into your reading instruction?

    a. How were you able to implement what you learned from this strategy into future reading instruction for struggling readers?

    b. What was the greatest challenge of incorporating [these other entities] into your

strategy to support struggling readers?

    c.   What elements (if any) make it difficult to receive their perspective and/or include their participation in the process?

5. What benefits may be shared between independent reading specialists, classroom teachers, and administrators in cooperating to support students' classroom curriculum?

    a.   What drawbacks may arise from the cooperation of these entities to support students' classroom curriculum?

6. What advice would you give to [independent reading specialists, elementary classroom teachers, elementary administrators] for preparing reading instruction that supports struggling readers' classroom curriculum?

    a.   If they could avoid making a specific mistake when developing their reading instruction, what would that mistake be?

7. What advice would you give to [independent reading specialists, elementary classroom teachers, elementary administrators] for supporting other reading instruction entities in the support of struggling readers?

    a.   If they could avoid making a specific mistake when supporting their other reading instruction entities, what would that mistake be?

Concluding statement: Thank you for your participation in this interview. I assure you that your confidentiality is paramount during this process. I am so grateful for the opportunity to learn from your experiences.

Appendix E: IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

April 9, 2020

Lindsay Hawbaker
Department of Education
Abilene Christian University

Dear Lindsay,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Qualitative Study of Collaboration Between Independent Reading Specialists and Their Students' Elementary Classroom Teachers",

was approved by expedited review (Category 6 & 7) on 4/9/2020 (IRB # 20-034). Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Request Form within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make any changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Study Amendment Request Form.

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs