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Where Does the Buck Stop? A Framework Analysis of Systematic Barriers and Supports to Effective Literacy Instructional Practices

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One may observe teachers inwardly groan and outwardly stiffen as the media and policy makers continue the age-old tradition of pointing fingers to teachers for America's inability to have all children reading on grade level by the intermediate grades. Headlines query, "Why are we still teaching reading the wrong way?" (Hanford, 2018) Meanwhile, teachers stoically forge their way through the multitude of required assessments proving their competencies as literacy educators through college coursework, content-specific testing (e.g. Pearson and Praxis), professionally-reviewed portfolios (e.g. edTPA), continuing education units, and much more.

Regardless of the number of ways teachers have proven knowledgeable and experienced, they find themselves experiencing professional development sessions and repeated curricula changes that reiterate the state's re-enforcement of the "science of reading." Decades of research have indicated that it is not changing standards, the curricula, the textbooks, or the tests that provide effective reading instruction and student learning, it is the teachers (Author, 2015, 2019; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). This study poses that if these are the same "highly qualified" teachers who have passed national exams, portfolios, board accreditations, and more, then is it time, perhaps, to examine the context surrounding these "highly qualified" teachers that allow, or disallow, them to provide effective reading instruction? What then hinders or supports teachers from offering the most effective reading instruction? The present study sought answers to this inquiry from practicing elementary educators through an e-questionnaire.

Providing Effective Reading Instruction

What is effective reading instruction?

Effective reading instruction combines phonics-based instruction and meaning based comprehension and vocabulary instruction encompassed through explicit teacher instruction and collaborative student-centered learning (Fisher et al., 2020). From Prek-3rd grade for the last two decades has focused on the five pillars of phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Foorman et al., 2016). Further research advocates for additional components for effective reading instruction, such as focused oral language development (Konza, 2014; Wise et al., 2007), and linking disciplinary knowledge and vocabulary to informational reading strategies (Cervetti & Hiebert, 2015). Additionally, effective comprehensive reading instruction includes teacher attempts to increase students' levels of motivation, engagement, and self-regulatory behaviors while reading a text for both first and second language learners (Guthrie et al., 2012; Pressley, 2002). This research posits that effective, comprehensive reading instruction involves using a balance of both skill-based and meaning making through explicit and hands-on practices designed to support all children from a variety of cognitive, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds (Morrow & Gambrell, 2014).

Do teachers have the knowledge to provide effective reading instruction?

More knowledgeable teachers lead to higher levels of students' success in reading (Piasta et al., 2009). Previous research would indicate that teachers are not highly prepared to teach the core concepts of the five pillars of reading and therefore may not be able to provide adequate instruction and support to all learners (Clark et al., 2018; Mather et al., 2001; Pittman et al., 2020). A large-scale review of literature related to teacher preparation does indicate that the level and variation in content knowledge for reading instruction does significantly vary based on required coursework across pre-service teacher programs and institutions (Hudson et al., 2021). States and teacher preparation programs are responding to these claims by increasing literacy course requirements (e.g., South Carolina's Reading to Succeed), standardizing requirements across institutions (e.g., North

Carolina's University System Literacy Framework Study), and requiring passing literacy-based standardized assessments for degrees and licensure (e.g., Pearson Reading, Reading Praxis, and edTPA).

As of 2018, 44 states require teachers to pass edTPA, a literacy comprehension or composition based pre-service teacher planning, teaching, and assessment portfolio to receive a state teaching license. While state mandated cut scores for passing range from approximately 37-42, the national average score on the 15 rubric portfolio is a 44.65 (edTPA 2018), evidencing that on the whole teachers are prepared to implement and assess effective meaning-based literacy instruction. The Praxis II Teachers of Reading exam required score, increased in 2018, is 159 for most states, with the national average of 164.69 in 2020. Pre-service teachers' means on licensure gateway protocols that are above the required proficiency cut-scores would indicate that teachers have both the content knowledge and the instructional methods expertise to show they are classroom ready.

Multiple measures are in place to secure appropriate levels of teachers' knowledge related to reading content and teaching methods, yet teachers, while the main variable for student success (Opper, 2019), do not teach reading in a vacuum. Language and literacy learning and use are socially and contextually bound (Gee, 2012; Smagorinsky, 2018). The research presented here provides a lens as to how teachers in the field perceive the influence of contextual factors upon their ability to provide effective reading instruction. Our research operates from the viewpoint of "teachers as professionals" in their field, and seeks to discover what teachers believe to be the most significant contextual frameworks to positively or negatively influence their ability to provide highly effective reading instruction (Clark et al., 2017). This study begins with a review of the literature describing supports and constraints for teachers' literacy instruction, before moving into a description of the frame analysis and findings from our diagnostic and prognostic frames.

Defining Effective "Best Practices" to Reading Instruction

These findings related here build upon the larger overall study that examined teachers' perspectives of "what are best practices in reading instruction" and "what supports or hinders" these practices. Teachers from this study clearly described what they believed effective literacy instruction should resemble. Rather than a simple view of reading, decoding x language comprehension = reading comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), teachers portrayed literacy instruction as complex interplay of a variety of instructional strategies. These strategies addressed more than phonological mastery, fluency, and comprehension. Teachers painted a much richer picture of instructional practice that included vocabulary instruction, reader engagement strategies, culturally relevant practices, and the ability to differentiate for a variety of students' needs. Findings conveyed that teachers were collectively describing Morrow and Gambrell's (2014) *Comprehensive Literacy Instruction (CLI)*. Comprehensive literacy instruction addresses the multiple facets of literacy and literacy learning and considers learners as individuals learning within specific contexts. This research addresses how teachers perceive CLI is supported within schools and how it is hindered.

Contextual Blockades to Effective Instruction

Literacy instruction is engulfed in a test-centric culture that mandates teachers to engage in what seems unending assessment and test-prep practices rather than sound daily pedagogical practices. In the field of education, one might note that in attempts to prove accountability, assessment often drives instructional practices, or to paint a more vivid picture, it is "the tail that wags the dog." Assessment drives literacy instructional practices. State policies and high stakes tests influence teachers' instructional practices (Dooley & Assaf, 2009). Pressure from administration and the district funnels downward, influencing structural and human resources and supports. Testing pressures cause even the most experienced teachers to push away their own beliefs, instructional practices, and knowledge about reading instruction, to make way for mandates of new policies or

curricula established as a result of testing results (Assaf, 2008; Author, 2015). All too often test prep becomes the focal point of literacy instructional practices despite teachers' views that they are negative and ineffective teaching practices (Davis & Willson, 2015). Beyond standardized testing, teachers lose time and teaching opportunities to district, school, and independent student data systems that relate to state standards and standardized measures.

Many teachers indicate that following mandated literacy curricula that follow the path of standards and assessments narrow the pathways to effective literacy instruction (Dresser, 2012; Timberlake et al., 2017). Often states and districts require teachers to use commercially made curricular products and programs with varying degrees of expected fidelity to scripted programs (Author, 2019). These curricular requirements are seen as barriers to effective instruction not only because they may not fit with a teacher's pedagogical beliefs about literacy instruction (Demko, 2010), but they also are noted by teachers as taking time away from effective literacy instruction due to lack of student motivation to engage, lack of teacher motivation to engage, time spent resisting and adapted curricula, and lack of ability to integrate literacy methods in the content areas (Sadeghi & Izadpanah, 2018). Teachers find that the aforementioned mandates around curriculum and assessments create additional contextual barriers to best practices literacy instruction. Sadeghi and Izadpanah (2018) describe these obstacles as perceived restraints and lack of desired supports. Teachers stated they lack the time, the professional teacher supports, and the motivation to continue to adapt their literacy instruction from the mandated curriculum and assessments.

Teachers also felt that opportunities to learn more effective literacy instruction methods through professional development were diminished due to mandated literacy curricula. In a four-year qualitative study of teacher professional development opportunities within a school district, Fang et al. (2004) found that after NCLB, teacher professional development opportunities within the district shifted to administrative opportunities for reinforcing top-down mandates for "scientifically-based"

instructional methods and commercially produced curricular programs. While teachers posit that professional development related to learning the new mandated curricula and assessments often detracted from time spent focusing on learning new instructional approaches to a balanced literacy practices, the opposite was described for curricula and professional development that took a more comprehensive view of literacy learning and instruction.

Administrative Supports for Effective Reading Instruction

Studies affirm that high quality, longitudinal, and scientifically sound professional development opportunities are noted as the most effective type of support to effective reading instruction. Notably, Kindall et al. (2018) argued that principals greatly influence teachers' abilities to meet the needs of their students, especially for early career teachers. They designed and distributed a questionnaire for public elementary and middle school teachers to determine what positively or negatively impacts their ability to teach effectively and found that principals, too, need to be knowledgeable about literacy instruction. Similarly, in a longitudinal ethnographic and phenomenological study of one school's change process, Peck (2010) demonstrated how significant amounts of support and professional development led the faculty to transform their school through a focus on inquiry-based learning, curriculum alignment, and assessment-based literacy instruction. These transformations led to teacher ownership of their instruction, culturally relevant teaching, and ongoing support from instructional leaders and administration. Likewise, in a quantitative multistate survey, teachers indicated that high quality professional development that spanned across the school year was the most significant factor in being able to implement the ELA CCSS and related curricula and assessments (Author, 2019). When it comes to preparedness for effective literacy instruction, high quality professional development is seen as the most influential factor.

Framework and Research Questions

Educators teach reading through a varying multitude of nuanced educational environments in which a myriad of external mediating influences upon teachers' instruction (e.g., materials, schedules, assessments) (Scales et al., 2017). This research seeks to examine the mediating influences surrounding teacher's instruction of reading through collective action frames. Collective action frames allow us to develop "a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615). Through frame analysis we examine the situation (i.e. providing effective literacy instruction) through a set of frames that identify the problems and put forth possible solutions (how to support teachers in doing so).

Diagnostic frames are meant to examine data related to the designated problem in an effort to diagnose the actors and factors that are culpable, or have a hand in creating, the current situation. What are the problems that teachers face in offering effective reading instruction? Where are they coming from (eg. state, district, or school)? Given that teachers involved in this survey were from a variety of schools across multiple districts and states, we expected variation in pathways in which contextual factors might be enacted (Author, 2015, 2019), but sought to see if there was commonality in factors and the stakeholders who influence how these contextual factors are implemented.

Prognostic frames, in contrast, apply the "fix it" mentality, in which one analyzes data with the goal of creating proposed solutions. Prognostic frames may be applied at multiple levels within a system to create an overall cultural or social change related to the situation that is proving problematic. In this research, we proposed to examine the root causes of problems teachers felt were impediments to effective literacy instruction practices, and propose changes and adaptations

to mandates coming from varying levels of administration that better aligned to what teachers described as supportive in carrying out effective practices.

To address the collective frames around barriers and supports to effective literacy instruction, we decided to investigate what teachers believed to be best practices in literacy instruction and what either stood in the way of or supported the use of these practices. The research reported here focuses on collective frames that represented barriers and supports with the following research questions presented to participants as part of an electronic questionnaire:

- (1) What hinders your ability to provide effective literacy instruction?
- (2) What supports your ability to provide effective literacy instruction?

Methods

Data Collection

The research participants were emailed an open response questionnaire that queried their beliefs about effective practices in literacy instruction. It asked for responses related to what they believed most (1) hindered and (2) supported their ability to provide this instruction. Each of the authors emailed an electronic questionnaire to 20 educators that taught K-6 literacy standards, and received a 27% return rate. Initial findings from the first round of questionnaires were presented at an international literacy conference. Further data were collected as colleagues within the literacy research special interest group shared the electronic questionnaire with K-6 literacy educators. The final number of fully completed questionnaires totaled 44. The 44 respondents taught in the Eastern and Midwest United States. They ranged from first year teachers to 20+ year veterans. There was representation from rural, suburban, and urban schools, of which, 40% were Title I.

Frame Analysis

Responses to perceived barriers and supports were recorded, tallied, and categorized in multiple iterations of thematic coding. The first and second authors conducted the initial coding of

participants’ responses using descriptive coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) by assigning phrases that summarized passages of participants’ responses. Next, they employed pattern coding based on commonalities that was applied to create consolidated categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, these categories were examined using Benford and Snow’s (2000) defined characteristics of diagnostic and prognostic frames. The diagnostic frames examined what actors (who) were noted as having a hand in complicating one’s ability to provide effective literacy instruction as well as what contextual factors (what) presented limitations. The first and second author coded 20% of the data independently, reaching a ninety percent interrater-reliability.

The first diagnostic frame related to administrative barriers: school structures and administrative mandates. School structures included data that related to perceived impediments due to the ways in which administration set up temporal, logistical, and student-related structures within the school. Whereas administrative mandates were data that indicated barriers administration imposed to actual in-class instructional practices and curriculum implementation.

The second diagnostic frame is related to the lack of access to what teachers deemed essential to effective literacy instruction. Two categories are documented within this frame: lack of access to appropriate instructional materials and the lack of access to personnel within the school to aid in the support of both teacher knowledge and instructional implementation.

Table 1

Diagnostic Frames

Administrative and System Level Barriers

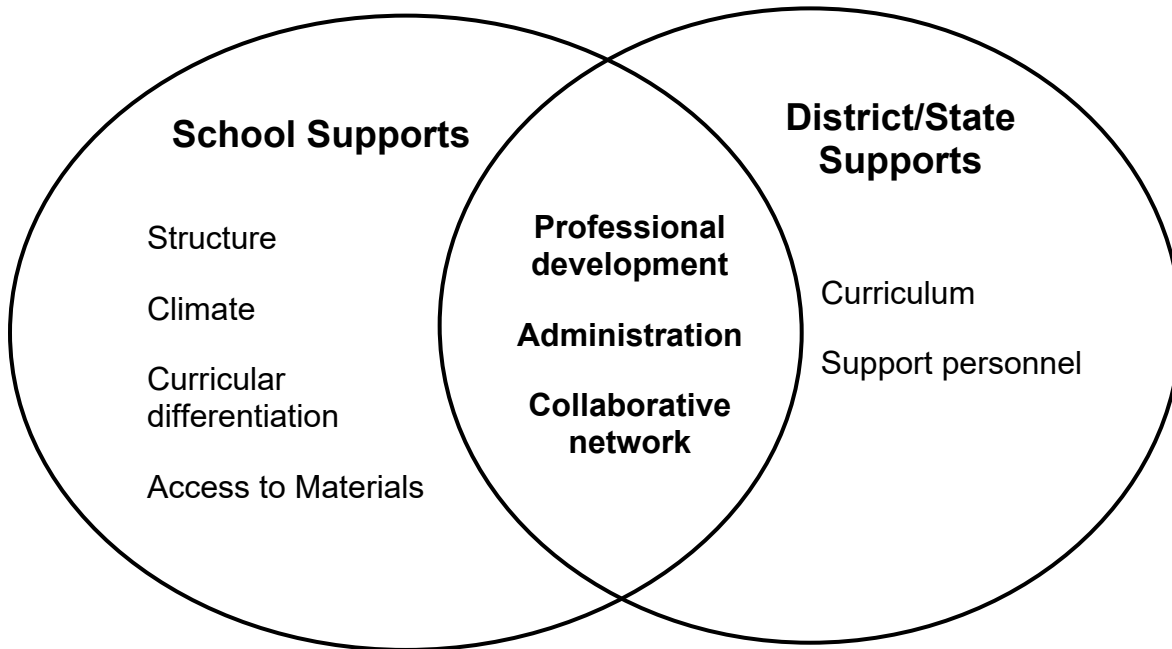
Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of built-in differentiation block ● Instructional Interferences ● Student Services (pull-out interruptions of student learning)
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Class size/structures
Administrative Mandates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mandated literacy curricula ● Mandated curricular materials ● Lack of academic freedom ● State, District, and School-based testing mandates
Accessibility to District and School Resources	
Tangible Resources (Lack of)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Texts for children ● Teaching materials ● Technology and digital access
Support Personnel (Lack of)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Literacy coaches ● Interventionists ● Teaching assistants and Substitutes ● Specialists (Inclusive Education, ESOL, etc)

Data that were categorized as supporting actors or factors in providing effective literacy instruction were examined through prognostic frames. The prognostic data frames convey the ways in which teachers feel the most administrative and contextual supports in implementing effective literacy instruction. The levels of support are separated by district and school, though some decisions are clearly delineated at both levels. These findings are summarized by Figure 1.

Figure 1

Prognostic Frames



Findings

The findings presented here are grouped by commonality within responses. Responses within the themed subheadings are from a variety of educators across schools, districts, and states. The educators' comments reflect the variety of contextual backgrounds in which literacy instruction occurs, while highlighting the common themes of supports and barriers they experience. The findings first diagnose the perceived barriers to comprehensive instruction, then offer prognostic solutions posed by the educators.

Diagnostic Frames: Blockades to a Comprehensive Literacy Instruction Approach

The most influential structures that put forth barriers to teachers' best practices all fell within the realm of administration. Administrators held the power to the majority of decisions related to what was taught, what curricular mandates existed, what flexibility there was within the mandate, and "when" and "by whom" the curricula would be taught. This was broken into the two main

prognostic administrative frames of “curricular mandates” and “structures.” The prognostic frames for administration were analyzed further to try to determine at what level of administration teachers’ perceived these decisions to have occurred. This was the most difficult aspect to discern within the data analysis, as many teachers were unclear in their descriptions as to where in the administrative hierarchy the decisions were actually made, and in one case simply labeled them “the powers that be.” Additionally, different districts had different hierarchical systems. Some districts allowed individual school administration to make curricular and structural decisions, whereas others reported that the district determined everything but how flexible the school administration was with structures and curricular mandates.

Administrative Structural Mandates

The lack of time to teach and time to plan adequate literacy instruction was a limiting impediment. “Barriers [to CLI] involve the limited amount of time we have throughout the day [particularly for writing]” one teacher stated. Another expanded that “Time [as always] has become a barrier to implementing a full [reading] workshop with balanced literacy.” Additionally, “having inflexible time [structures] across the day” and the “lack of support to be creative with time schedules” made it difficult to provide the depth of instruction they believed necessary for CLI. Teachers indicated that the teaching day is not long enough and full of “frequent interruptions” or “redundant paperwork.” One participant summarizes, “Time is always a concern. Even with the best of intentions there are always things that come up and interrupt your teaching day.” Another reports that teachers are frequently “being pulled here and there for meetings, trainings, fire drills, tornado drills, TESTING, etc.” and this greatly detracts from needed instructional time. Several teachers noted their school provided very little “common planning time” making it problematic to engage in collaborative planning with grade level teams.

The teachers indicated that classroom structures such as the quantity of children assigned to their class and the broad range of students' literacy levels proved to be problematic. Teachers proposed that due to the lack of time available to differentiate instruction, that children were often asked to work on reading tasks not appropriate for their reading levels which led to an increase in problematic behaviors resulting in a greater reduction of instructional time. They claimed that the quantity and make-up of assigned students often prevented them from providing necessary small group and individualized instruction. This teacher summarized concerns about time structures and class structures related to "not having enough time to meet needs for every student" by stating, "Time [is a barrier], we have several lower students that need extra support, so many of the average to above average students do not get extra attention." Teachers reported frustration with school structures related to "scheduling with ESOL/ EIP pull-outs for most of the RELA block and [students] missing important (reading) components." As a whole, teachers indicated large numbers of students with what one teacher referred to as "an insurmountable range" of reading abilities and not enough time built into the assigned reading block to differentiate as needed or provide other best practices instruction.

Administrative Curricular Mandates

The Administrative Mandate frame relates to instructional impositions to actual literacy instruction rather than the context around the instruction. This category constitutes the largest body of barriers to CLI in that relates to the district and school mandates related to the reading curriculum, curricular materials, instructional mandates in using the curriculum, and how and when the curriculum is assessed.

Curricula. Teachers portrayed a deep sense of frustration related to the mandated curriculum from the district and indicated that they were in opposition with the selections, "As a district- the curriculum purchased does not directly align with state standards," and the frequency

of district changes to the curriculum was overwhelming, “We have switched literacy models and curriculum often and it is hard to keep up and build our practice when everything keeps changing.” More than one teacher reported that the curricula changed rapidly and that often they were asked to switch from one to the next without the resources being ordered yet or having had any training on the new curricula, “We are supposed to review materials for ELA instruction, but it is not scheduled until next year. In the meantime, we are using the EngageNY materials, which are not adequate nor appropriate.”

Curricular materials. The curricular materials and their mandated use was a frequently mentioned barrier. As indicated above, teachers were not always in agreement with the materials and selected curriculum. One wrote,

Wherever I've been, it's been 'here's the curriculum...teach.' There is no understanding of the actual curriculum. There is so much extra in the manuals that it loses its meaning. I think teachers should be able to follow a guideline and design their instruction around the class they are given.

Teachers indicated that such curricular materials “keep us locked into what reading content” by providing too many specifics, “mandatory basals”, or other “poorly written materials” they are required to use. Many claimed dissatisfaction with curricular tools required by administration and the lack of flexibility with use of resources, “the lack of authentic instructional tools/resources (is a barrier). There used to be a time when each school was allowed to select their own teaching resources. Now the district selects the teaching resources for all of the schools.” Curriculum assessment was described as the largest curricular restraint of all.

Curriculum assessment. Teachers eloquently spoke to the barriers caused by reading assessments. Teachers felt that tests took time away from effective reading instruction, “*I feel like the state testing puts a huge barrier on literacy instruction. And the state testing drives our admin*

to expect students to achieve high scores, which puts pressure and barriers on classroom instruction.” Others felt reading assessment focus took time away from caring for the “whole child,” as seen in this statement, “test scores seem to overshadow the students' emotional needs.” Another concurs by stating, “Teaching students how to be successful on the assessments also impedes good instruction. Test-taking practice is not good literacy instruction but we are under pressure to make sure students score as well as possible.” Furthermore, teachers questioned the efficacy of some of the mandated assessments and corresponding instruction,

Istation testing is required, but seems to be inconsistent. I worry about the accuracy of student results. One day a student may be proficient, then the next the child may be shown in “red,” way below grade level. I wish I could move around my scheduled times for literacy instruction. I do like Letterland, but I wish I had more one-on-one training with the program.

As a whole, teachers indicated that there was “way too much assessing and not enough time on task [literacy instruction].”

Access to Resources

Teachers described the difficulty of adequately providing CLI due to a lack of resources. The lack of access to resources varied from having access to tangible resources to teach to having access to personnel to support literacy instruction. The lack of both tangible and support personnel resources were described as being due to a lack of funding at the district and school levels.

Lack of Tangible Resources. Money, funds, and resources were noted by teachers as obstacles to being able to fully implement CLI. One teacher describes the difficulty, “Money is always a barrier. It is difficult to get new novel sets and resources when funding from the district and state is being cut.” Another further specified, “Not having resources needed to integrate

[content areas and literacy] and having to take personal time to create/tweak what we do have.”

Also problematic was the, “money for support of ESE and ELL resources.”

Lack of People/Personnel. Furthermore, teachers reported not having access to essential school personnel, such as interventionists, teacher aids, or other instructional support specialists. One teacher stated the school was “Lacking of substitute teachers and TA's causing the specialists to be pulled for substitute coverage leaving these struggling students with no additional supports frequently. These students should be prioritized to get tier 2 and 3 interventions regularly.”

Multiple schools were described as having, “insufficient numbers of reading specialists and special educators” with some teachers stating they only received help from a reading specialist if they had students with IEPs. Beyond reading specialists, others described difficulties due to “Lack of assistance with instruction from instructional assistants, ESL specialists, and other specialists.” On the whole, not having sufficient personnel to provide the differentiated instruction teachers viewed as best practices appeared across multiple school contexts.

Prognostic Frames: Solutions that Work

Despite the numerous barriers that teachers reported as hindering their ability to enact best literacy practices in their classroom, teachers were in agreement on best types of support for CLI. The analysis of the level of hierarchy of administrative decision-making had more clarity in teachers’ descriptions of supports than perceived barriers. While recognizing that what comes from the school level in some states may come from the district or state level in others, the following themes from the educators’ responses have been organized based upon what the majority reported. When asked about what supports their CLI, the prognostic frames took multiple forms in responses about people, time, materials, and space. In some ways, it mirrored a positive reflection of the aforementioned diagnostic frames such as providing the school with support personnel, the “access materials and curriculum,” “length of class periods” for adequate instructional time, and

development of “a great school climate.” In the following sections, we describe which supports teachers reported at their school level, the district and/or state level, and across both levels.

School Level Supports

At the school level, teachers described how the overall school environment and the way their school days were structured were helpful for CLI and student learning. Teachers primarily discussed the most important support given by administration was a structured school day that allowed teachers adequate time to meet the needs of individual students in their instruction. They also discussed how the general climate of the school affects their day ability to enact best practices. Also, teachers expressed appreciation for being able to access a wide variety of materials for CLI.

School structure. Time was one of the most prominent barriers cited by teachers, so, naturally, the converse was true for teachers that felt supported when instructional time frames for their literacy blocks were substantial. One teacher, for example, stated that “longer class periods” enhanced their ability to deliver effective literacy instruction to students. Others appreciated having designated chunks of time set aside for preferred instructional methods, for example, “The amount of time for guided reading is a great support.” Having an established “time for differentiation” and “RtI” across the building to be focused on students that needed additional supports made teachers feel as if they could enact best practices.

Many of the time related supports teachers received from administration consisted of general school structures. Some expressed that their principal worked hard to “reduce the amount of disruptions” and let them know of disturbances in advance so teachers can plan around them. Teachers appreciated a thoughtful school schedule that incorporated long, designated blocks for CLI and protection of that designated block from interruptions. Lastly, teachers appreciated being in a school that had a “positive school climate for both the teachers and students.” Although this does not seem to be an obvious support for CLI, being in a space where teachers felt they had time

to design their instruction impacted how they felt about their literacy curriculum. Some wrote about how they knew when additional support staff would be present in their classroom or when students would be pulled out for additional support. A further discussion on the benefits of a supportive administration and the ability to collaborate can be found below, but teachers clearly appreciated being in a positive school climate where the staff supported one another.

Curricular differentiation. Teachers described being able to differentiate instruction as an important support for their instruction. Having specific time set aside to help struggling students was a support teachers felt greatly enhanced their instruction. One respondent wrote, “We have a remediation block where all students are given differentiated supports and interventions to help meet gaps.” Others cited larger structures specifically designed to target students that need additional assistance as a support for their teaching. For example, one respondent said, “[Response to intervention] helps enhance our instruction. Bringing students up to where they need, if they are falling behind.” Although the structures for differentiation looked different among the responses from teachers, it was clear that having a designated time and space to work with students who needed additional assistance in literacy was something teachers felt supported by. Just like the school climates affected teachers’ ability to enact CLI, teachers commented that having school personnel available to them helped with curricular differentiation. One teacher commented “we have enough literacy coaches as well as extra help when it comes to pulling our struggling students.” A further discussion of the supports school personnel provide teachers is included, but it was clear from respondents that differentiation was an essential component of a CLI and having school structures such as time and personnel in place to assist them with this goal was paramount.

Access to materials. Similar to how teachers reported access to curriculum materials as being a barrier to their instruction, some believed this to be a support for their CLI. Respondents wrote about “school book sets,” “district resources,” and “an abundance of books for a strong

classroom library.” The emphasis on “The availability of a wide range of reading materials and resources,” was mirrored throughout the other respondents who reported curriculum materials as a support for their teaching.

Teachers not only need access to materials, but they want materials in multiple forms, as one wrote, “My school has a book room for teachers with books, lessons, games, etc. for literacy instruction.” Some teachers reported appreciation of their access to curricular materials via technology as a support for their instruction. “I have multiple forms of technology at my disposal that I can utilize to enhance what I am doing in the classroom.” Providing a wide variety of materials in both traditional and digital formats was a prominent prognostic frame to support CLI.

District and/or State Supports

Even though many of the prognostic frames teachers supported stemmed from systems in place at their schools, some of the supports stemmed from decisions made at the district or state level. In the following sections we describe the prognostic frames that clearly supported teachers from district or state levels.

Curriculum. In addition to having support personnel, teachers described the curriculum as being helpful for their ideal literacy instruction. Some teachers reported that the mandated curricula from their district or state were helpful for students. “We have strong curriculum materials [Fountas & Pinnell, Lucy Calkins].” Similarly, one respondent wrote, “I am required to teach a program called Letterland, which has helped many of my students.” Another commented that a helpful support for their instruction was “the Journey’s curriculum, used by our school district. There is an insane amount of stuff in this curriculum, but it seems to be pretty all encompassing.” Although many respondents felt restricted by these curricula, as is evident by the diagnostic frames, it was clear that some teachers believed these materials supported their CLI. Another teacher confirmed the appreciation of curricular resources saying, “Pacing guides, curriculum maps, State standards”

were supportive to their literacy instruction. Interestingly, access to curricular materials may be seen by teachers as a blessing [support] or a curse [barrier] depending on the degree of fidelity and mandates of use, not to mention teaching experience and personal preferences.

Support personnel. One prognostic frame almost everyone agreed on was having access to great personnel. Overwhelmingly, teachers acknowledged that this job takes many people and expressed how having an abundance of support personnel assisted them in a variety of ways. Teachers recognized that they needed additional help from support staff in order to do their job well and reported a variety of positions that they felt supported their instruction. Some teachers reported specific support personnel as “reading specialist/coach and district coaches,” while others reported general “Title 1 staff” as being supportive for their ideal CLI. One teacher recognized that having one person as a support was not enough for an entire school and that “many specialists to support instruction for struggling readers” is important.

Some participants highlighted support personnel practices that supported teacher instruction. One respondent wrote, “the literacy specialist at our school helped me form my guided reading groups.” Another teacher reported that the largest support as a teacher was having a “readily available and knowledgeable instructional coach.” At the top of the support list for one teacher was “a fantastic, fabulous, wonderful academic specialist who is ALWAYS ready to come to bat for those she knows are doing our best.”

Another support specialist highly sought after was the reading interventionist. Teachers receiving support from Title 1 reading interventionists that work directly with students reading below level at the school indicated they appreciated the students being removed from daily classroom instruction to receive direct intervention from the interventionist rather than in-class, teacher-led intervention as that allowed more time to differentiate for other class members.

Comprehensive Supports

Finally, the following describes the prognostic “powers that be” teachers reported as supporting their instruction that span both the school and district/state levels as a part of this questionnaire.

Professional Development. Many teachers cited professional development as a support for their CLI, but notably, respondents often included professional development alongside coaching and other experiences with support personnel. For example, one respondent cited, “lots of professional development, coaching, and time to collaborate with peers” as supports for their instruction, while another cited “modeling peer observations” as supportive of their work. Respondents were also quite specific about the kinds of professional development they found most helpful. They preferred professional development that included the latest research and helped them stay informed. One teacher reported, “we have regular professional development that usually goes along with the latest research on the topic.” They also wrote about getting to choose the topics for professional development as being particularly helpful. One teacher wrote about her district’s Literacy Academy, run by reading specialists in the county, that occurred once a month for 4 hours. During the sessions, the respondent reported, “ideas are shared out, resources are looked through, very informative and meeting needs are determined by the group!” Allowing the teachers to determine what would be most useful for them to spend their time learning about and engaging with resulted in supportive professional development for their CLI.

Supportive Administration. Many teachers described administration as either being a barrier or a support, depending on their particular circumstance. In general, teachers appreciated administration that trusted them to do what they felt was best for their students. Academic freedom or, “the ability to teach any readings that I would like” was key. Teachers reported that support felt like “the ability to try new things” or “having the ability to learn new skills or interventions.” Another respondent discussed how their principal supported their literacy practices when they

wrote, “my principal supports our use of guided reading.” Other teachers replied that they feel most supported when they have “an accessible administration team that works hard to get us the supplies we need to teach to the best of our ability.” Administrative influence, of course, is evident in multiple prognostic frames discussed such as a school structure, curriculum, and the overall climate of a school. Teachers clearly felt most supported when they had administration that trusted them as professionals and worked to get teachers what they needed for CLI.

Collaborative Network. Lastly, teachers cited being able to collaborate with peers as one of the strongest supports for their CLI. If this questionnaire has proved anything, it is that teachers feel they are most successful when they work with others who share similar beliefs about teaching, who are willing to share what works well and what does not, and help teachers with their planning. For example, when citing the supports they felt for a CLI, a respondent wrote, “we are given a lot of collaboration time to discuss best practices within our classroom.” Another, when asked what supports their literacy instruction, wrote, “a supportive grade level team that works together, shares and builds off one another’s experiences and ideas.” This was echoed by yet another teacher, who replied, “my strong teacher team is very supportive and we share effective materials and practices. I am also fortunate to have a co-teacher which absolutely enhances my instruction.” Another commented that the most support they feel in their literacy instruction included “collaboration in monthly PLC meetings.” Collaboration with a variety of knowledgeable professionals and being surrounded by supportive teachers and administrators allowed teachers to enact a CLI to the best of their ability.

Implications and Conclusions

Administration holds the keys that either lock or unlock the door to effective comprehensive literacy instruction. District and school level administration most often control decisions around finances, curriculum and curricular materials, accountability assessments beyond that of the state,

professional development access, and personnel. Findings from this study clearly delineate how administration's decision making can either be the largest support to CLI or the largest barrier.

Low to No Cost Supports to Literacy Instruction

Environmental structures within a school require no additional funding. Teachers believe that there are too many interruptions during the literacy block, with too many things competing for the children's time (Klingner et al., 2003). Creating a school structure that allows for no interruptions (e.g., drills, student services, ceremonies, etc.) during the literacy block, holding space for an uninterrupted instructional time. Teachers believe that effective administration will safeguard their literacy instruction time so they have the highest level of focus for the longest period of time allowed (Blase & Blase, 2004). Teachers also preferred to have an additional block of instructional time set aside that was specifically dedicated to intervention to allow them to work with students in ways that the typical literacy block does not afford. When every teacher serves as a reading interventionist, additional dedicated time is beneficial.

In addition to students' uninterrupted literacy learning time, teachers seek their own uninterrupted instruction-based literacy learning time. Teachers requested uninterrupted, collaborative professional learning work days for self-selected literacy learning opportunities to explore instructional methods and to study the curriculum more in-depth (Bergmark, 2020). Teachers indicated that learning collaboratively both within the school and across schools at the district level was highly beneficial for their own development. Allowing for collaborative, inter-school collaboration within and across districts that allows for teachers to select and solve their own inquiries around literacy instruction provide high quality, long-term gains for teachers (Short et al., 2012). In short, teachers are asking for time and space. Time and space to teach without interruptions and to learn collaboratively without mandatory structures dictating that time.

Well Informed Administrators

Teachers believe administrators need to be highly informed in research-based literacy practices so they may best advocate for them in their schools. Teachers describe the desire for administration that seeks to be informed and actively turn to literacy leaders within their schools and school districts to help better understand the literacy related needs of students and schools which will help them in turn advocate for the most appropriate literacy curricula and mandates (Menteşe, 2021). When faced with literacy related decisions, administration should work in partnership with literacy specialists, local university literacy faculty, experienced teachers, and other relevant stakeholders. This includes engaging in trainings (e.g., LETRS, PALS), attending district level literacy meetings amongst the reading specialists, taking questions during staff training sessions, and participating in the other literacy related mandated professional development that applies to teachers. Other sources of high quality literacy learning opportunities for administration include familiarizing themselves with free resources for up to date research, such as What Works ClearingHouse (<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>), Reading Rockets (<https://www.readingrockets.org/>), or ColorínColorado (<https://www.colorincolorado.org/>). Developing a deep level of knowledge related to literacy development allows administrators at all levels to advocate for appropriate policies for teachers and students.

Administrators at all levels of decision making, from state to individual schools, should examine opportunities for improving literacy learning that are described by educators rather than policy makers or for profit corporations. Literacy learning is far too complex to have all the solutions come from a boxed set curriculum (Gee, 2001). Educators should have a large role in making decisions related to the literacy curriculum and curricular materials (Dresser, 2012). Too often the choices for materials are made for educators, or educators are allowed to choose but from a narrow pre-set selection of materials provided by administration (Author, 2019). Those who are certified to teach reading through degrees, national exams, and national boards and who teach reading on a daily

basis should be trusted to select their own instructional materials.

Teachers also want an administration that believes teachers will provide effective literacy instruction (Dresser, 2012), who trust teachers' instructional decision-making, who allow teachers the choice of their own curricular materials, and believes they will select the professional development that is the most necessary for the teacher at the time. Overall, teachers believed supportive, well-informed, administration works in partnership with its teachers to create best-fit literacy curriculum and instruction for students.

Findings from this study may not be generalized to every teacher and school setting, though participants in this study come from a wide variety of geographical locations and school districts. This study allowed for open ended responses, but research would benefit from further inquiry through interviews or small group discussion sessions. Further research on highly effective administrations in high performing and diverse school districts would serve to complete a more complete picture of how administration can minimize barriers and support highly effective comprehensive literacy instruction. Ultimately, this research highlights numerous ways administrators can effect positive change for their schools' CLI. They do not need exhaustive funding, or even new materials to make it happen. They just need to listen to teachers and trust the professionals inside their own buildings and district.

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