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First Grade Teachers' Literacy Instructional Practices Influence on the Learning of Elementary School Students in English Language Arts (ELA) and Reading

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First Grade Teachers' Literacy Instructional

Practices Influence on the Learning

of Elementary School Students in

English Language Arts (ELA) and Reading

by

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development at the College at

Brockport, State University of New York, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

of Master of Science in Education.

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Abstract

This qualitative case study investigated the literacy educational practices of five general education first grade teachers in a charter school in Western New York. Charter schools typically higher teachers with less experience; therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how first grade teachers in English Language Arts (ELA) and reading modified their literacy instruction to support all students, including, but not limited to, students with a variety of different disabilities. Through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, this study focused on how specific literacy instructional tools and teaching methods, such as the arts and/or technology, impacted students' literacy learning.

Introduction

"She wanted everyone to be treated equally, but a lot of other white women didn't. How

did the students stand up by sitting down? What about when other African Americans

marched and boycotted?....What did we learn from Helen's point of view that we didn't

learn before? Turn and talk with your partner about Helen's point of view....Turn and talk

with your partner about why African Americans marched and boycotted." –Data Excerpt

The preceding is data collected during three observations from Ms. Smith (pseudonym), a first grade teacher at Oakwood Elementary (pseudonym). Ms. Smith asked questions and made reading connections through discussions, such as these, with her students during daily-shared reading time. Ms. Smith used a literacy curriculum written by her school; this means Ms. Smith's fellow first grade teachers, as well as her school's literacy specialist, carefully decided these in-depth discussion questions and reading connections on a weekly basis during curriculum writing sessions. Ms. Smith believed these discussion questions went beyond rote-recall and memorization. She was excited that her students enjoyed reading about historical figures who initiated changes in the world, such as Helen Keller and Martin Luther King. Throughout this research study, I focused on how five first grade teachers changed their literacy instruction to meet the needs of his or her students. Classroom observations and interviews, as mentioned above, provided an in-depth view into each teacher's literacy instructional methods.

Research Problem

Shared reading lessons, such as the example from Ms. Smith's class, highlighted a typical first grade literacy lesson at Oakwood Elementary (pseudonym). As a charter school, Oakwood Elementary prides itself on recruiting highly qualified teachers to instruct their students

("Careers," 2017). Research has shown the importance of elementary teachers' ability to identify students' reading needs early on in order to jump start early literacy intervention (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Oakwood Elementary aligns itself with the idea of early literacy intervention because they believe each teacher should: 1) Possess the ability to analyze student data in order to identify students' learning needs; 2) Know and apply effective teaching practices; and 3) Differentiate instruction according to students' needs. ("Careers," 2017). Since each teacher was required to follow these teaching expectations, I wondered if teachers at Oakwood Elementary were indeed following these guidelines through their English Language Arts (ELA) and reading instruction. In particular, I was interested in how each teacher modified their literacy instruction to meet the literacy needs of his or her general education students, as well as his or her students with a variety of different disabilities. Furthermore, I sought to discover how specific literacy instructional tools and/or teaching methods already used by Oakwood Elementary, such as the arts and/or technology, impacted students' literacy learning.

According to Exstrom (2012), teachers in charter schools are typically less experienced, with 30% of teachers in their first three years of teaching and 75% teaching for less than ten years. When compared to public school teachers, about 15% are in their first three years of teaching and 43% teaching for less than ten years (Exstrom, 2012). When the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was passed, innovative programs, such as charter schools, were endorsed because charter schools were seen as a way to force public schools to raise their academic achievement (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2006). All the teachers in this study are new teachers (e.g., three years or less of teaching experience); therefore, I was interested in discovering how these new teachers navigated their instruction to meet the needs of their

students. Understanding the context of how teachers work in charter schools is relevant because this paper explores how teachers modified their ELA and reading instruction at Oakwood Elementary to meet the literacy needs of their students.

Another important Act to be made aware of is the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). In 1997, IDEA was amended, resulting in an emphasis on changing the academic content to meet the needs of students with disabilities ("Building the legacy," 2004; Klein, 2015; Petersen, 2016). Given the following: 1) IDEA emphasis on academic content for students with disabilities; 2) The push for charter schools; and 3) Charter school teachers' limited teaching experience, I wondered how charter school teachers managed. It is plausible to think that charter school teachers' inexperience could impact elementary school teachers' knowledge of effective ELA and reading instructional modifications for all students, including, but not limited to, students with a variety of different disabilities.

Topic

For this study, focused on first grade teachers' instructional modifications in ELA and reading. Developing solid foundational literacy skills and receiving early reading intervention is vital in the elementary school grades (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). According to The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2010), "Reading proficiently by the end of third grade…can be a make-or-break benchmark in a child's educational development." (p. 9). From Kindergarten to third grade, most students are learning to read, but by fourth grade, students are "reading to learn" (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010, p. 9). At Oakwood Elementary, about 16% of students qualify for special education services ("Academics/staff," 2016); therefore, teachers at Oakwood

Elementary must recognize their students literacy needs (including students with a variety different disabilities) and apply effective literacy instruction.

An effective teacher must have a solid understanding of how to impact each students' literacy learning needs in his or her classroom (Jensen, 2009). McGee and Richgels (2012) highlight the importance of differentiated literacy instruction in order to meet student's individual literacy needs. Teachers must set aside time and explicitly teach literacy skills, such as fluency, phonological awareness, vocabulary, comprehension, and phonics, to his or her students because research has shown that many students will not learn these essential literacy skills without support from adults (Jensen, 2009).

The first grade teachers in this research study instructed students in a general education setting, where the majority of their students were not diagnosed with disabilities. However, some of their students were English as a New Language (ENL) learners or were diagnosed with a variety of different disabilities, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Learning Disabilities (LD). Therefore, each teacher, in this study, was potentially in a position to discover meaningful ways to make his or her classroom environment accessible to each student's specific literacy needs. This study explored various ways in which each teacher modified his or her ELA and reading instruction to meet the literacy needs and background needs of each student. Furthermore, I explored each teacher's literacy instructional awareness. Meaning, was each teacher aware of the impact of his or her literacy instructional modifications? Could each teacher identify the literacy supports that are in place to promote his or her students' diverse literacy learning needs?

According to Jenson (2009), sometimes individual student's needs are not readily apparent because behaviors, such as acting out or impulsivity, may be misinterpreted as a

disengaged student or a bad student, when in reality students may be dealing with constant stressors at home. However, when left unchecked, these stressors may inhibit learning in school (Jenson, 2009). I believe teachers who are unfamiliar with "how" to teach students, may resort to ineffective teaching methods, which may subsequently impact students' literacy growth. Nevertheless, "the better the school environment is, the less the child's early risk factors will impair his or her academic success" (Jensen, 2009, p. 44); therefore, as a teacher myself, it was important for me to observe and understand the thinking behind other teachers' literacy instruction. Morrow (2012) notes that teachers should always inform his or her instruction (formally or informally) based on the needs of his or her students. Furthermore, appropriate assessments, geared towards individual student's needs, will serve as a guide for future instruction (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2010).

Rationale

A massive amount of literacy resources and literacy programs exist; nevertheless, how do teachers choose the "right" program or resource? One Google search about best teaching practices and literacy resources can confuse and frustrate teachers (such as myself). As a new teacher, I often reviewed literacy programs for any number of reasons: 1) The availability of resources; 2) A colleague's recommendation; or 3) A program is required by my school, school district, and/or state. Nonetheless, I often find myself questioning the impact of these resources or literacy programs on students' literacy learning. Ducan-Owens (2009) also questioned the impact of scripted reading programs. However, Ducan-Owens (2009) says "the critical factor in successful reading instruction is not the program, but teacher quality" (p. 27). Therefore, how do I know which resources or programs work best for "my" students? Furthermore, are my colleagues asking these same questions? In the context of this study, I stepped back and focused

solely on the teaching practices of the first grade teachers with whom I worked directly with every day. Specifically, my research focused on the varieties of instructional modifications teachers report are in place, in the areas of English Language Arts (ELA) and reading, to promote students' literacy learning; I discovered ways each teacher influenced his or her students' literacy learning.

This study is important because it analyzes teachers' literacy instructional practices across three first grade classrooms. Other educators may be interested in this study if they work with students in a similar classroom environment or context. This study is also of personal significance to my practice because I will have my own classroom one day; thus, it is important for me to use the information I learn from this study to help me become a better teacher.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how first grade teachers in English Language Arts (ELA) and reading modified their literacy instruction to support all students, including, but not limited to, students with a variety of different disabilities. Approximately 93% of the students attending Oakwood Elementary (pseudonym) are from an urban setting, and 93% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch ("Academics/Staff," 2016). Additionally, about 16% of the students qualify for special education services ("Academics/staff," 2016). As a result, it was essential for me to discover how each first grade teacher changed his or her instruction to meet each student's specific needs.

Research Questions

This study focused solely on five first grade teachers' literacy instructional practices in three separate first grade classrooms within the same school (Oakwood Elementary). I gathered

information over six weeks through daily classroom observations and through a series of semi-structured interviews with each teacher (e.g., an initial semi-structured interview, a final semi-structured interview, and weekly semi-structured interviews). After I interviewed each teacher one-on-one and observed each teacher in his or her classroom, I analyzed the semi-structured interviews and observations against the following research questions:

1. What do first grade teachers report as the literacy instructional practices that most influence and promote literacy learning in their classrooms?

2. In what ways do teachers report that technology and/or the arts influence the literacy learning environment in English Language Arts (ELA) and reading?

Literature Review

The following literature review focuses on literacy instructional practices relevant to teaching elementary school students in a general education setting. The information included in this literature review could be useful for teaching a variety of learners, such as English as a New Language (ENL) learners or students diagnosed with a variety of different disabilities (e.g., ADHD and LD). This literature review also focuses on the role of technology (e.g., digital literacy) and arts integration, since many of the teachers who instructed students at Oakwood Elementary (pseudonym) placed a strong emphasis on arts integration and technology use. Consequently, the information provided in this literature review will serve as a comparison for best literacy teaching practices for instructing students with a variety of needs, including specific needs (e.g., ENL learners) and/or students diagnosed with a variety of different disabilities (e.g., ADHD and LD).

Technology in the Classroom

The term "digital technology in literacy" has increased rapidly over the years (Hutchison & Colwell, 2014, p. 147); thus, it is important to see how educators have used digital technology as a means to promote literacy in their classrooms. In the context of this study, each teacher used technology in a variety of ways during English Language Arts (ELA) and reading instruction. Many teachers today, including teachers in this study, use digital technology as an integral part of their ELA standards; however, Hutchinson and Colwell (2012) note that many educators are unaware of the extent in which technology should be used in the classroom. McGee and Richgels (2012) emphasize the importance of meaningfully integrating technology in response to various literacies activities, instead of using technology tools as a workbook style exercise. Furthermore, Vogt and Shearer (2011) note that relying solely on technology, such as computer-based teaching programs, is "not a substitute for literacy instruction" (p. 206). The teachers at Oakwood Elementary used a combination of computer-based literacy programs, such as myLexia and myON (iPad compatible literacy applications), as well as other digital technology resources, such as Blast Foundations (SMART board compatible phonics program). Despite the use and availability of these digital literacy programs and resources, teachers at Oakwood Elementary had a solid understanding of the extent and purpose of every literacy instructional tool in his or her classroom.

A noted above, technology is a fact of life in today's classroom; however, teachers also need to use technology in a thoughtful and meaningful manner. According to Vogt and Shearer (2011), in order for teachers to remain current in today's technology heavy world, teachers must: 1) Understand how to work commonly used technology resources (e.g., PowerPoint and SMART board); 2) Know how to adapt evidence-based teaching with technology; 3) Feel supported with

using new technology; and 4) Understand how their students are using technology outside of the classroom. Research shows that teachers are unlikely to learn the best ways to use technology in the classroom through isolated workshops (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997). Instead, Vogt and Shearer (2011) advocate for professional development geared towards each teacher's learning, experience with hands-on learning, and continue to receive support from other colleagues. Technology is ever changing; therefore, I believe teachers need to take the initiative and constantly improve their own technology learning.

The first grade teachers at Oakwood Elementary each had varying levels of experience with integrating technology within their literacy instruction. Oakwood Elementary requires their teachers to use literacy technology (e.g., myLexia, myON, and Blast Foundations) in ELA and reading instruction; however, the school does not provide explicit training in the use of these literacy programs. Consequently, some teachers may have a limited understanding of the full capacity of technology use in ELA and reading instruction.

E-books. Technology is changing the way educators view and use the classroom literacy environment. When I was in first grade, my teacher created a reading corner where we could choose a book, relax on a pillow, and quietly read. Some of today's 21st century students have the opportunity to read differently by using electronic books (e-books) to read (Larson, 2015). E-books and tablets are now part of the new digital technologies implemented in classrooms alongside the traditional printed text (Larson, 2015). The teachers at Oakwood Elementary already use e-books, such as myON, as a way to foster their students' independent reading skills at school and at home. Students can choose their own "online library" of books on myON. myON is simply one technology-based educational tool used by teachers and students. Although

the teachers at Oakwood Elementary use myON to promote independent reading skills, I wondered if e-books truly helped improve students' independent reading skills.

Boushey and Moser (2014), state the importance of allowing students to practice struggling with reading during guided reading time. Clay (2001) adds that students must engage in "frequent successful problem solving" in order to strengthen their reading system (p. 134). Even though educational tools, such as e-books, allow for a more individualized educational experience (Larson, 2015), are students still receiving the same quality literacy instruction? Larson (2015) suggests that the use of audiobooks allows students to experience the benefits of a teacher directed read-aloud, since many e-books have audiobook features that are narrated by professional actors or authors.

Boushey and Moser (2014) note the importance of e-books for improving students' pronunciation, expression, fluency, and reading motivation. E-books are versatile for a number of reasons: 1) E-books allow students to perform at their reading grade level; 2) E-books help English as a New Language (ENL) learners navigate English; and 3) E-books help older students who can comprehend beyond his or her reading level (Boushey & Moser, 2014). Further research suggests that students using an animated e-book to learn English reported that the e-book improved their English skills and increased their reading motivation (Yoon, 2013). Pre and post-tests of the students showed a marked improvement in the students' overall reading and vocabulary skills (Yoon, 2013). The preceding truly shows that the classroom environment has changed. Oakwood Elementary is proactive with including technology in the daily classroom environment; subsequently, many of the teachers already use e-books to engage and motivate their students in the act of reading and as a way to model fluent reading.

Larson (2015) notes that some parents and educators fear the change that audiobooks bring because the audiobooks take away from the true reading experience. Nevertheless, Larson (2015) believes that many beneficial literacy skills, such as fluent reading, correct cadence, and accurate reading, can be successfully taught from audiobooks. Educators today have the ability to pick and choose the appropriate forms of technology to enhance their own literacy instruction. In the context of this study, the first grade teachers at Oakwood Elementary primarily used e-books (e.g., myON) and literacy iPad applications (e.g., myLexia) as additional literacy teaching tools. The teachers in this study noted that their students enjoyed reading along with the audiobooks and enjoyed playing the interactive games on myLexia. The first grade teachers felt as if these tools sometimes motivated their students, and unavoidably caused unwarranted competition amongst the students. Despite these inconsistencies, the teachers at Oakwood Elementary reported that these technology tools (e.g., myON and myLexia) served as a two types of literacy instructional resources and these resources, in isolation, would not replace traditional literacy instruction.

Multiliteracies and technology. In order to gain a better understanding of the role of technology in the classroom, it is imperative to understand the meaning and origins of "multiliteracies" (The New London Group, 1996). The New London Group (1996) first coined the term "multiliteracies" in 1996 as a contrast to the conventional "page-bound" version of reading and writing (p. 60-61). The New London Group consisted of a group of ten educators and researchers from New London, New Hampshire who collectively drew from each other's experiences to widen the view of the literacy pedagogy, hence the development of "multiliteracies" (The New London Group, 1996). According to Healy (2016), "multiliteracies"

is defined as "the skills and capabilities of those who interact with and make meaning from

multimodal texts within and across contexts" (p. 7).

The relevancy of the "multiliteracy" pedagogy is ever more evident as schools rely more

on the use of technologies in the classroom. Our young children are already "growing up in a

digitally connected, media-rich world" (O'Rourke, 2005, p. 1). Technology is simply under the

umbrella of "multiliteracies" because "multiliteracies" acknowledges the "diverse forms of

literacy practice required for work and leisure, citizenship and community participation, personal

growth and cultural expression" (O'Rourke, 2005, p. 1). Technology has already become

engrained in our day-to-day culture. Many students in our schools today, including students in

this study, already live and breathe technology, so the idea of schools embracing the

"multiliteracies" pedagogy makes sense. Furthermore, in order for our 21st century students to be

successful, schools must begin to see literacy in multiple ways (Hutchinson & Colwell, 2014;

O'Rourke, 2005; The New London Group, 1996). "Multiliteracies" fills the "gap" in literacy by

highlighting the need for a new literacy pedagogy that encompasses a diverse ever-changing,

global society and accounts for a variety of text formats (e.g., iPads, computers, and SMART

boards).

Nevertheless, teachers can use "multiliteracies" in a way that positively impacts students'

literacy development. As literacy is constantly changing and evolving, teachers encounter unique

challenges as they are searching for new reading and writing instruction aligned with the

"emerging technologies" (Larson, 2015, p. 177). Teachers can incorporate and embrace the

"multiliteracy" pedagogy as a new literacy model to meet the unique literacy needs of their

students. The term "multiliteracies" can be thought of as multimodal text (Healy, 2016); teachers

can begin to see literacy as dynamic (Bailey, 2009) and begin to value the many ways of literacy meaning-making through the use of multimodal texts (Treasure, 2015).

Educators should no longer view literacy in the traditional pen and paper method; consequently, educators who still hold this view, risk their students missing out on a wide range of literacy learning opportunities (Treasure, 2015). Makin, Dias, and McLachlan (2007) emphasize, "A modern educator is called to move forward into graphics, imagery, and interactive forms of communication" (p. 58). Moreover, this modern shift in the use of "multiliteracies" and multimodal texts in the classroom is evident in the context of this study because many of the teachers are already using many modes of literacy in their instruction, such as iPads, SMART boards, page-bound texts, and arts integration. However, for the sake of this study, I focused on elements of "multiliteracy" that were most relevant to the educational setting/environment at Oakland Elementary.

Arts Integration and Literacy

The interest in arts integration as a teaching approach to improve students' learning in other subject areas, such as mathematics, social studies, science, and English Language Arts (ELA), has increased over the years (Silverstein & Layne, 2010). Oakwood Elementary has adopted the arts integration teaching model as part of their core curriculum design; Oakwood believes in teaching students "about" the arts and as well as "through" the arts by teaching students to construct meaning in a content area (e.g., ELA) through an art form (e.g., music, dance, drama, or visual arts). In order to understand arts integration in education, it is important to have a clear definition of arts integration.

Doyle, Hofstetter, Kendig, and Strick (2014), note "several researchers, arts advocacy groups and arts education professional organizations have published variations on what arts integration is" (p. 3). Since many definitions of arts integration exist, schools utilizing an arts integration teaching model, such as Oakwood Elementary, must clearly define their arts integration teaching model. I found that Silverstein and Layne's (2010) definition of arts integration aligns with Oakwood's definition of arts integration, as well as my definition of arts integration: "Arts integration is an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject area and meets evolving objectives in both" (p. 1). The first grade teachers at Oakwood Elementary were instructing their students using Silverstein and Layne's (2010) definition of arts integration because each teacher was teaching their students: 1) About the arts; 2) About the content area; and 3) Instructing through the arts. Therefore, all students were engaging in a creative process to meet both the content standards and arts standards. Doyle et al. (2014) say Silverstein and Layne's (2010) definition of arts integration provides "a comprehensive working definition for the arts integration concept" (p. 3). I believe schools utilizing the arts integration teaching model (such as Oakwood Elementary), must have a clearly defined schoolwide model of arts integration to ensure teachers, administrators, and students engage in arts integration in a meaningful and purposeful way.

Goldberg (2012) describes the differences between two key aspects of arts integration: learning "through" the arts and learning "with" the arts. Learning through the arts requires students to learn content (e.g., ELA or math) by using the arts as an avenue for demonstrating their learning (Goldberg, 2012). Peterson (2010) further emphasizes that learning through the arts means students are using an art form to learn more about a content form. For example,

students in an ELA classroom can learn more about a character in a story by becoming that

character (Peterson, 2010). In contrast, learning with the arts is described as a type of teaching

method in addition to the regular instruction. Doyle et al. (2014) describe learning with the arts

"as a complementary method of teaching…used as one type of curriculum resource to teach

broader concepts" (p. 3). Peterson (2010) emphasizes how teachers can use the concept of

learning with the arts to make explicit connections in curricular areas. The teachers at Oakwood

Elementary typically tried to instruct their students "through" the arts; however, sometimes each

teacher collectively relied on both forms of arts integration (e.g., "with" and "through") to

instruct their students.

Burnaford, Brown, Doherty, and McLaughlin (2007) highlight three ways to describe arts

integration: transference, connections, and collaboration. Transference in arts integration refers

to the transfer of skills learned in the art form to the content form (Burnaford et al., 2007). Eisner

(1999) notes that many educators want to know the value of the arts in relation to academic

achievement. In other words, how do the arts help contribute to our students' academic success?

However, research has shown that it is difficult to accurately measure the transfer of art concepts

to specific content skills and concepts (Catterall, 2002; Rabkin & Redmond, 2004). Moreover,

connections in arts integration refers to opportunities for educators to incorporate arts integration

across the school's curriculum (Burnaford et al., 2007). In order for true curricular connections

to occur with arts integration, educators must work towards meaningfully integrating a common

idea when planning instruction (Kelner & Flynn, 2006). Finally, collaboration in arts integration

calls for a cooperative effort to plan and include arts integration in the curriculum. In a school

setting, this might be interpreted as classroom teachers and arts specialists frequently planning

arts integrated instruction (Burnaford et al., 2007). The teachers at Oakwood Elementary applied

transference, connections, and collaboration in arts integration on a daily basis. The first grade teachers focused on identifying and creating cross-curricular connections with the arts; therefore, frequent collaboration meetings (with classroom teachers and the arts specialist) were necessary to align the art form with the content form.

With a solid understanding of arts integration, it is important to question the relevance of arts integration in education. Some educators may ask: Why should we use arts integration in education? Before understanding meaning and relevance of the arts and arts integration, I would have asked this same question. Douglas (2009) concluded that the arts play a crucial role in keeping high school students in school. Douglas (2009) found "that schools offering students the most access to arts education have the highest graduation rates" (p. 19). Furthermore, an arts based curriculum helps students practice "sustained inquiry", which is an important skill for students to master in both the arts and reading (Coleman, 2011, p. 1). Bradshaw (2016) also emphasizes that the arts allow students to "readily construct meaning from unfamiliar material" (p. 6) and encourage discovery. Finally, the constant exposure to arts infused lessons may contribute to higher test scores on non-art related tests (Lackey & Huxhold, 2016). Most of the first grade teachers at Oakwood Elementary understood the relevance of arts integration and knew the educational impact; however, some teachers questioned if arts integration was working in their school. These teachers believed in the idea of arts integration, nevertheless they were discouraged by the limited results in their school

Despite the positive reasons for including the arts and/or arts integration in a school's curriculum, some researchers and educators questioned many claims of arts integration (Bradshaw, 2016; Eisner, 1999; Winner & Cooper, 2000). Bradshaw (2016) recognized the lack of organization and direction when co-teaching arts integration. During arts integration lessons,

Bradshaw (2016) found that some teachers were willing to collaborate with an arts specialist, while other teachers misunderstood the goals involved in the arts integration collaborative process and chose to exclude themselves entirely. Furthermore, Bradshaw (2016) saw how classroom behaviors interfered with students' ability to fully engage in an arts integration lesson. Bradshaw's (2016) findings mirrored many struggles of the teachers at Oakwood Elementary. I also experienced similar struggles on a daily basis, despite my passion for arts integration in schools.

The teachers at Oakwood Elementary are not alone in their questions about arts integration in education. It is natural for educators in arts programs and non-arts programs to disagree on the relevance of the arts or arts integration in schools (Eisner, 1999). Eisner (1999) explains that some arts educators feel the need to justify how the arts impact academic achievement; however, Lackey and Huxhold (2016), note that research fails to address how or why positive academic achievement may occur because it is difficult to measure "what" impacted each student's academic achievement. Winner and Cooper (2000) note that many claims about the arts improving academic achievement are made without examining the "causal link" (p. 13). Additionally, specific cognitive skills learned in the arts, such as divergent thinking, independent thinking, and critical thinking, may transfer to other subject areas; however, these transfers are unlikely to occur without explicit directions from the teacher (Winner & Cooper, 2000).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

There has been a shift in special education over the years due to changes in federal laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ("Building the legacy," 2004; Petersen, 2016). IDEA highlights the importance of including students with disabilities within

academic content areas ("Building the legacy," 2004; Petersen, 2016). Teachers must apply the

necessary educational tools in order to narrow down the instructional methods that work for their

students. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is one instructional method used by many

teachers as a comprehensive teaching model designed to educate all students (Al-Azawei,

Serenelli, & Lundqvist, 2016; Smith Canter, King, Williams, Metcalf, & Potts, 2017).

The concept of UDL came from an architect named Ronald Mace, who coined the term

Universal Design (UD) in the 1970s (Al-Azawei et al., 2016; Smith Canter et al., 2017; The

Center for Universal Design, 2008). UD helped individuals with disabilities by changing the

design of products and making buildings accessible for all individuals regardless of their

differences (Al-Azawei et al., 2016; The Center for Universal Design, 2008). Stemming from the

idea UD, the aim of UDL is to reduce educational barriers (Al-Azawei et al., 2016) and provide

specialized educational support for all students, including students with disabilities (Ok, Rao,

Bryant, & McDougall, 2017). In the context of this study, the teachers at Oakwood Elementary

frequently used elements of UDL through strategic grouping with differentiated instruction (e.g.,

guided reading and literacy centers) and one-to-one technology at each student's level (e.g.,

myLexia).

UDL has grown in popularity over the years, and research on UDL has expanded. UDL is

defined as "a learning approach that designs curricular materials, activities, and instruction with

the flexibility to meet individual learners' strengths and needs so all students can have access to

what is being learned in the class" (Smith Canter et al., 2017, p. 2-3). UDL consists of three

guiding principles: "multiple means of representation, expression and action, and engagement"

(Ok et al., 2017, p. 116). Furthermore, UDL focuses on critical thinking skills instead of rote

recall and memorization, which, in turn, promotes student independence and eventually reduces

teachers' workload over time because students are immersed in their own learning (Al-Azawei et al., 2016). UDL also draws on multiple theories such as brain research, cognitive-social learning, and multiple intelligences (Alnahdi, 2015; Hartmann, 2015; Smith Canter et al., 2017;).

As noted previously, the use of UDL as an educational framework has grown in popularity over the years primarily due to its inclusive nature (Smith & Lowrey, 2017). With the increase of students with disabilities in the general education setting, teachers are seeking creative ways to meet the educational needs of all their students (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014); therefore, UDL serves as a way to design instruction for all students. When using UDL, teachers must design lessons to meet the unique needs of their students, such as students who require enrichment or students with disabilities (Smith & Lowrey, 2017). Despite the growth of UDL, much of the current research on UDL focuses on advocacy rather than "assessing and measuring UDL outcomes" (Smith Canter et al., 2017, p. 1).

I believe the UDL framework is a powerful educational tool; however, knowledge alone is not enough. Many of the teachers at Oakwood Elementary knew how to use elements of the UDL framework (e.g., differentiation); nevertheless, some of the teachers inconsistently applied the UDL framework through literacy instructional modifications. Smith and Lowrey (2017) emphasize that teachers must use the knowledge of the UDL framework to effectively create lessons for all their students. UDL serves as a guide, while the teacher decides which instructional modifications work best for their students.

Summary of Literature Review

The classroom environment has changed over the years; teacher instruction has shifted from the "one size fits all model" to differentiation and inclusion tool (Hutchinson and Cowell,

2012). Therefore, teachers and administrators have sought out new ways to teach students

through the use of various teaching models and resources such as: 1) Technology resources

(iPads, Chromebooks, SMART boards, and ELMO); 2) Research based technology programs

(my Lexia, Blast Foundations, myON); 3) The arts integration teaching model; and 4) Universal

Design for Learning (UDL). Each teaching model and/or teaching resource provides teachers

with the flexibility to meet their students' literacy needs by allowing teachers to make use of the

best teaching models and resources for their students.

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how first grade teachers in

English Language Arts (ELA) and reading modified their literacy instruction to support all

students, including, but not limited to, students with a variety of different disabilities. I studied

five first teachers total from three separate first grade classrooms within the same school

(Oakwood Elementary). I interviewed and observed each teacher in order to understand the

reasoning behind each first grade teacher's literacy instructional modifications. All the teachers

in this study met frequently as a team to write the school's first grade ELA curriculum; therefore,

I was interested in how each first grade teacher chose to modify his or her literacy instruction in

his or her own classroom to meet the literacy needs of his or her specific students.

Participants

Participants in my study included five first grade teachers: three first grade general

education teachers, one first grade assistant teacher (also referred to as a co-teacher), and one

first grade arts integration teacher (see Figure 1). All of the first grade teachers taught at

Oakwood Elementary (pseudonym). There were three first grade classrooms total at Oakwood

Elementary and each first grade general education teacher was the primary teacher for one of the first grade classrooms. Each first grade classroom also had one assistant teacher and one primary general education teacher. I was an assistant teacher in one of the first grades (I excluded myself from this study). For clarity, I studied all three first grade general education teachers, one first grade assistant teacher, a drama arts integration teacher, and a dance arts integration teacher (see Figure 1).

Participant	Position	Time Teaching First Grade	Total Time Teaching
Ms. Smith (pseudonym)	First grade general education teacher	6 months	1 year and 6 months
Ms. Tanner (pseudonym)	First grade general education teacher	6 months	6 months
Ms. Wilde (pseudonym)	First grade general education teacher	1 year	3 years
Ms. May (pseudonym)	First grade assistant teacher/ co-teacher	6 months	6 months
Mr. Lloyd (pseudonym)	Drama arts integration teacher	3 years	3 years

Figure 1. Overview of participants. This figure shows each participant's teaching experience and current teaching position.

Setting

I conducted my research study at Oakwood Elementary (pseudonym). Oakwood Elementary is located in a suburban town called Hedgefield (pseudonym) in Western New York. The school is about twenty minutes away from the main city of Norvale (pseudonym) and ten minutes away from the local beach. The residents of Hedgefield are primarily middle class blue-collar workers who work at local jobs available at the Hedgefield Mall (pseudonym) and

surrounding local and chain retail centers. Many people who work in Hedgefield travel from neighboring cities and towns. Approximately 93% of the students attending Oakwood Elementary live in the nearby city of Norvale ("Academics/Staff," 2016). Overall, Oakwood Elementary is diverse and encourages students to see themselves as upstanding citizens.

Positionality as the Researcher

As an assistant teacher at Oakwood Elementary, I was accustomed to the school's daily operations. This study's origins began naturally because of my familiarity with the teachers and the school. All of the teachers in this research study already worked with me on a daily basis, so I believed this study would most likely not interfere with each teacher's daily instruction. None of the teachers were required to change his or her instruction for this study, and my role as an assistant teacher, in one of the first grade classrooms, remained the same. I live about twenty-five minutes away from Oakwood Elementary, so the demographics of my community are slightly different. I live in a town called Westgate (pseudonym) made of up 83.4% White, 5.2% Black or African American, 5.7% Asian, and 5.2% Hispanic or Latino (United States Census Bureau, 2010). My town is less diverse than the city of Norvale, where the majority of the students live. Although, my local town is similar in diversity to Hedgefield, which is the location of Oakwood Elementary.

I am an educated Caucasian female in my late twenties. I have worked as an assistant teacher at Oakwood Elementary for about three months; therefore, I am familiar with the school and many of the teachers. I am also familiar with the location and surrounding area of Oakwood Elementary because I grew up in Hedgefield; however, the majority of the students attending Oakwood Elementary are not familiar with Hedgefield because they live in the city of Norvale. During this research study, I worked directly with one of the first grade general education

teachers as an assistant teacher or co-teacher (e.g., teaching small groups, co-teaching whole

group, and one-to-one tutoring). As a result of my familiarity and closeness with my teaching

partner, I have a bias towards my own first grade classroom and my own first grade teaching

partner. Since I am familiar with my students and my own teaching partner, I actively attempted

to maintain a higher level of professionalism whenever I observed my classroom or interviewed

my teaching partner. Furthermore, I only wrote down the actions and words of each teacher in

the study; I made every attempt to ignore my existing background knowledge about the school,

curriculum, and/or teachers during each observation and interview. Even though I was an

assistant teacher (co-teacher) in my own classroom, my only focus for this research study was to

observe and record the language and actions of the other first grade teachers. I wanted to see how

each teacher modified his or her literacy instruction to meet the literacy needs of his or her

specific students.

Methods of Data Collection

I conducted a qualitative research case study on five first grade teachers at Oakwood

Elementary. The data I gathered included the following: 1) An initial semi-structured interview;

2) A final semi-structured interview; 3) Two weekly semi-structured interviews; 4)

Observational notes; and 5) Audio-recordings.

Initial semi-structured interview. In the beginning of the study, the initial semi-

structured interview (see Appendix A) was conducted to gather preliminary information about

each teacher's instructional practices and experiences. I interviewed each teacher on a one-to-one

basis for a maximum of thirty minutes. Each initial semi-structured interview was audio-

recorded, with approval, and transcribed verbatim. I erased each audio-recording as soon as they

were transcribed.

Final semi-structured interview. At the end of the study, a final semi-structured interview (see Appendix B) was conducted to show any thoughts or ideas that may have changed in each teacher's instructional practices during the study. I interviewed each teacher in the study on a one-to-one basis for a maximum of thirty minutes. Each final semi-structured interview was audio-recorded, with approval, and transcribed verbatim. I erased each audio-recording as soon as they were transcribed. The final semi-structured interview consisted of a series of questions related to my research questions and/or observations noted during the study. Please refer to question number six and seven in the final semi-structured interview form (see Appendix B) for clarity regarding questions related to observations noted during the study.

Weekly semi-structured interviews. I conducted a total of two weekly semi-structured interviews (see Appendix D) with each participant. Each weekly semi-structured interview was a minimum of five minutes and a maximum of fifteen minutes long. During these weekly semi-structured interviews, I used a weekly semi-structured interview form to record each teacher's views about his or her own literacy instruction over the duration of the research study. I obtained permission before audio-recording each weekly semi-structured interview in order to accurately capture each teacher's words. I erased each audio-recording as soon as they were transcribed. The weekly semi-structured interview worksheet (see Appendix D) had two columns: one side noted each teacher's responses and the other side included my thoughts and connections my research questions.

Observational notes. I wrote and/or typed observational notes for each teacher (using the observational notes form) as each teacher was instructing his or her students (see Appendix C). The purpose of these observations was to note the actions of the teachers, as well as highlight any connections I made to the research questions. I made an effort to observe each first grade

classroom on a daily basis; however, due to the busy nature of each classroom, daily

observations of each teacher in every classroom was not reasonable.

Procedures

My study began after I received verbal confirmation from each teacher. Since this study

was exempt, I was not required to collect signed consent forms. I recruited teachers through a

recruitment letter and Exempt Form A. The recruitment letter gave a brief introduction as to why

I was conducting this study, and Exempt Form A provided the teachers with an overview of the

study. After reading the recruitment letter and Exempt Form A, each teacher had the opportunity

to agree or decline to be in the study (through verbal confirmation). Once I obtained consent

from each teacher, I began collecting data over the course of six weeks.

In the beginning of the study, I interviewed each teacher using the initial semi-structured

interview form (see Appendix A). Each initial semi-structured interview was conducted on a

one-to-one basis in each teacher's own first grade classroom at Oakwood Elementary. Each

initial semi-structured interview was no more than thirty minutes long. All of the initial semi-

structured interviews took place in each first grade teacher's classroom before or after school.

Out of the five teachers in this study, three initial semi-structured interviews were audio-

recorded; one teacher declined to be audio-recorded and one teacher declined to be interviewed

(see Figure 2). Each audio-recording was deleted as soon as it was transcribed. The initial semi-

structured interview served as a starting point for my research.

I conducted a total of two weekly semi-structured interviews on a one-on-one basis with

three of the participants. Each weekly semi-structured interview was a minimum of five minutes

and a maximum of fifteen minutes long and took place in each teacher's own first grade

classroom at Oakwood Elementary. During these weekly semi-structured interviews, I asked each teacher the same questions (see Appendix D). I typed or handwrote notes during each weekly semi-structured interview with each teacher using the weekly semi-structured interview worksheet I created (see Appendix D). I audio-recorded three out of five teachers, and the audio-recordings were deleted as soon as they were transcribed (see Figure 2). Each of the teacher's responses were compared to my research study questions.

Over a six week time period, I observed each participant as he or she taught in his or her classroom at Oakwood Elementary. During each observation, I handwrote or typed the actions and words of each teacher using the observational notes form I created (see Appendix C) during lessons in English Language Arts (ELA) and reading. These daily observations were a minimum of five minutes and a maximum of fifty minutes. Sometimes I observed the same classroom and the same teacher multiple times during the same session or multiple times during the day. Many of my daily observations were interrupted, meaning, sometimes I observed for five minutes, stopped observing for a few minutes, and resumed my observations again. It was implausible for me to conduct uninterrupted observations for this study; therefore, I utilized this flexible note-taking method, which allowed me to pause and resume my observations as needed.

During each observation, I was interested in observing the instructional actions of each teacher in relation to my research questions. During ELA and/or reading time (in any of the first grade classrooms), I made every attempt to observe that particular teacher. For organizational purposes, I sat down with each teacher, before I observed, and I created an observational schedule. I attempted to follow this schedule daily, but sometimes unforeseen circumstances in my own classroom prevented me from observing each first grade teacher on a daily basis.

At the end of the study, I interviewed and audio-recorded three out of five teachers (see Figure 2) using the final semi-structured interview form (see Appendix B). Each final semi-structured interview was conducted on a one-to-one basis in each teacher's own first grade classroom at Oakwood Elementary. Each audio recording was deleted as soon as it was transcribed. The final semi-structured interview aided in culminating my research findings.

At the beginning of the study, I sought to observe each teacher a minimum of four times and interview each teacher four times (one initial semi-structured interview, two weekly semi-structured interviews, and one final semi-structured interview). However, due to unforeseen circumstances, I observed each teacher at least four times, interviewed three teachers in full, and interviewed one teacher once (see Figure 2).

Participant	Initial semi-structured interview	Two weekly semi-structured interviews	Final semi-structured interview	At least four observations
Ms. Smith	X	X	X	X
Ms. Tanner	X			X
Ms. Wilde	X	X	X	X
Ms. May	X	X	X	X
Mr. Lloyd				X

Figure 2. Data collected from each participant. This figure shows the data collected from each first grade teacher over the course of a six-week qualitative case study. I collected the least amount of data from Mr. Lloyd and Ms. Tanner.

Trustworthiness

I conducted a qualitative research case study on five teachers at my school. I obtained verbal consent from each teacher before beginning this study. None of the participants was required to change their instructional practices for this study. If any of the teachers felt that this study hindered his or her teaching at any point, he or she was no longer required to be in the

study. Before conducting any research, The Institutional Review Board at SUNY Brockport reviewed and approved this research study. I made every effort to conduct my research in the same room or rooms to help maintain consistency in my observations, but at times, this was not possible with all of the participants in my study. After I collected all the data from a variety of data sources (e.g., semi-structured interviews and classroom observations), I searched for themes across the data. Clark and Creswell (2015) emphasize the importance of using multiple data sources from each participant's perspectives in order ensure accurate themes develop in research findings.

Analysis

This qualitative case study explored first grade teachers' literacy instructional practices in English Language Arts (ELA) and reading. As an assistant teacher, I had the unique opportunity to divide my time between observing, teaching, and collaborating. My day-to-day assistant teacher duties did not change for this study, I simply decided to explore my fellow first grade teachers' instructional practices, as part of my master's thesis requirement. I focused only on each first grade teacher's instructional teaching methods in English Language Arts (ELA) and reading. After collecting data from all my teacher participants (e.g., semi-structured interviews and classroom observations), I transcribed each semi-structured interview verbatim. The use of verbatim transcripts allowed me to obtain the most accurate and complete data from my participants (Clark & Creswell, 2015).

Additionally, I used an "open coding" method to discover patterns in my data. Clark and Creswell (2015) say an open coding method allows a researcher to be "open to the ideas that occur in the data" (p. 356). As I combed through all the data, I coded for three patterns across semi-structured interviews with participants and patterns in instruction across participants: 1)

Literacy instruction; 2) Technology use; and 3) Arts integration. From these three codes, I searched for similarities and differences within the data and compared the data against my research questions. Throughout this coding process, I maintained an open mind and followed Shagoury and Power's (2012) advice to "explore the unexpected" in my data.

The following section outlines an example of my data coding process: I used the "literacy instruction" code during classrooms observations in ELA and reading instruction. I noted that all of the teachers used the same instructional teaching method called Whole Brain teaching. To determine the usefulness of this teaching method, I asked myself if Whole Brain teaching could be used to meet the literacy needs of all students. Finally, I compared the Whole Brain teaching model against the research questions; if not enough data supported this research finding, I dismissed it. I found that the Whole Brain teaching model answered my first research question, supported literacy learning for all students, and appeared in more than one data source; therefore, Whole Brain teaching became a relevant finding.

Finding One: Teachers Report Limited Time for Literacy Instruction

All of the teachers in this study reported a variety of difficulties in regards to meeting the literacy needs of their students. These instructional difficulties ranged from students' literacy abilities, teacher readiness, and/or home-school literacy connection. In particular, question nine on the initial semi-structured interview (see Appendix A) prompted a similar response from each first grade teacher. Three teachers indicated that many of their students' parents believed that literacy instruction was the sole responsibility of the school. Most of the teachers reported that literacy learning ended at school. Other teacher participants highlighted students' literacy abilities as a challenge to overcome. As a result, every teacher was overwhelmed with meeting their students' wide range of literacy needs.

Ms. May and literacy instruction. When asked about her greatest challenge for meeting the literacy needs of her students during the initial semi-structured interview, Ms. May (pseudonym), a first grade assistant teacher, was very honest with her response. She highlighted the challenges she faced when trying to meet the literacy needs of her students. She believed her students' literacy learning stopped as soon as school ended and her students engaged more with current TV shows than reading. She revealed that many of the parents viewed literacy learning as the teacher's responsibility. As Ms. May explained:

> "The fact that a lot of our kids are not exposed to books and reading and literature. It's almost as if I truly believe that, that, yeah teachers are supposed to teach concepts and we're supposed to teach the basic skills, but there are certain skills that should be happening at home so we can advance. And with our demographic and with our kids, um…we're just not getting that. We are playing mommy, daddy, and teacher. And, that's where you're seeing there's a lot. I know a lot of my kids are very in tune with TV and they could tell you what's on TV, but when it comes to recognizing a book, they're not, they're not able to do that, yet. They're not able to, you know, sit down and start beginning things and, you know, where they should be because they're not having that exposure at home. I think a lot of that problem is because from the perspective of the parent's now a days that we should be teaching it all. And that learning stops as 3:30. So that's the challenge that we're fighting."

Ms. May's response echoed each first grade teachers' struggles to meet their student's literacy needs. Furthermore, Ms. May felt pressured from her students' parents or guardians to "teach it all", which might make some teachers feel alone in engaging students in the learning

process. However, this does not mean parents are unengaged, I believe each parent at Oakwood Elementary wants their child to succeed in literacy.

Ms. Smith and literacy instruction. Ms. Smith (pseudonym) also emphasized the importance of literacy engagement at home. She noticed that many of her students required extra literacy support during the school day because her students were not exposed to literacy at home. She stated, "Many of our students are from poverty. And what is holding kids behind is the home and school connection. It [literacy learning] is cut off once they get home." Ms. Smith said she could relate to her students because she grew up in poverty herself, and she struggled with literacy as a young student. She indicated that many of her students' parents believe that, "it [literacy learning] is the school's responsibility." Ms. Smith admitted that she used to have the same mindset as many of her students' parents, but from her experience as a parent and as a teacher, she now sees the importance of literacy learning at home. As a young parent, she did not engage her own son in literacy learning outside of school, but now she reads at home with her son. Overall, was delighted with the reading progress her son made because she started reading at home. She states, "We do RtI [Response to Intervention] here. And that helps our students, but that can only go so far." Ms. Smith empathized with the parents struggles and also saw the importance of engaging students in literacy at school and at home. She realized that the teachers need the parents' support in order to help their children grow in literacy.

Ms. Tanner and literacy instruction. When asked about the greatest challenge for meeting the literacy needs of her students, during the initial semi-structured interview, Ms. Tanner (pseudonym), a first grade teacher, responded in two parts. First, she noted struggles her own personal struggles with adapting as a new classroom teacher and her concerns with teacher readiness along with her administrator's expectation for each teacher to learn and use research

based programs. Finally, she concluded that literacy is not valued at home for many of her

students. Ms. Tanner responded:

"[Answer one] Straight-up the greatest challenge I felt is learning specific research based

programs that are expected to be used for assessment and instruction and not necessarily

being given that training and kind of feeling a little lost the first few months because this

is my first year teaching…first year as a classroom teacher. That for me was very frustrating

because I felt that I had the knowledge base and the drive and stick with-it-ness, if that's a

thing…but I did feel that for a while I just didn't know the direction to go in. It was kind

of, I was doing a lot more planning and creating on my own for quite a while. But that, you

know, that is specific to this location I believe.

[Answer two] So I think if that weren't an issue and I could see past that, or even

take into consideration past experiences, one of my greatest (sigh), probably one of my

most heart breaking challenges with literacy is that it isn't seeming to be as pervasive in,

at home or outside of school. I was raised to believe and had experiences enough to connect

it and reinforce that belief that reading is something that should happen every day. And

that whether it's for joy, whether it's for information, reading conversation, taking

advantage of the library's resources…I find that, it feels at least, that we're seeing that it

[reading] doesn't seem to be as much value…and therefore, it effects a lot of other things.

I get this feeling that, again my first year, that a lot of what we are trying to teach at school

is being reflected as something that only happens at school. This is, my child is supposed

to learn these skills, you will be the one to teach them that, if they are struggling, you must

have a plan to deal with that. So I guess that's quite a challenge. And that might be more

personal than professional…In my undergraduate classes, we were told that sometimes you

have to leave some students behind (began crying). And that's so sad. We just have to

move on."

Ms. Tanner felt the pressure to "learn everything" in a limited amount of time, as well as

teach everything in a limited about of time; therefore, Ms. Tanner felt overwhelmed and

unprepared at times to teach specific research based literacy programs (e.g., Blast Foundations

and myLexia).

Ms. Wilde and literacy instruction. When asked about the greatest challenge for

meeting the literacy needs of her students, Ms. Wilde (pseudonym), another first grade teacher,

gave a different response from any of the other participants. Shagoury and Power (2015) note, as

researchers, we must welcomed the unexpected in data; therefore, I noted how Ms. Wilde's

response added to the data. Ms. Wilde, highlighted "memory issues" many of her students

experienced on a daily basis. As Ms. Wilde explained:

"That's a good one. I think my greatest challenge is that I have some students

who…struggle with memory, I don't want to say memory issues. But just having them

remember what they learned the previous day and being able to transfer it into a new

environment or a new situation. We might go over…some sight words during guided

reading and in reviewing those same sight words the following day, you know, I find that

some of my students won't remember it. You know…so that, that would be I think the

struggle. Because memorization…and sight words are not really words you can't

phonemically sound out, so those are words you just have to know. It's hard when they

can't phonemically sound out the word."

First grade teachers and their students' literacy needs. After I asked each teacher about their greatest challenge for meeting the literacy needs of their students, I noticed a similar response amongst all the teachers. I decided to include each teacher's exact words in order to reflect each teacher's true response. Clark and Creswell (2015) say verbatim transcripts allow researchers to maintain the most accurate data. Ms. Tanner's response, in particular, was interesting because her response showed her dual train of thought; this allowed me, as a teacher researcher, to notice her reflective nature as a teacher. She noted her struggles first, and then she noted her students' struggles. Ms. May seemed scattered in her train of thought. Through the transcript, I noticed how she pieced together her answer and gave a powerful response at the end: "And that learning stops at 3:30, so that's the challenge we're fighting." Ms. Smith was not audio-recorded; therefore, I wrote down a few exact quotes in order to capture her train of thought. Finally, Ms. Wilde's response was brief; however, she gave detailed examples to justify her response. Ms. Wilde focused primarily on specific student's literacy issues as a possible obstacle for literacy learning. Each teacher's response was similar; nevertheless, each participant noted their own unique literacy instructional challenges through their answers.

Finding Two: Teachers Use Technology to Enhance Students' Literacy Learning

All five teacher participants used technology in a variety of ways during instruction in ELA and/or reading; nevertheless, I only gathered enough data to analyze four teachers. Four teachers reported that technology enhanced students' learning by increasing literacy motivation and engagement. According to Boushey and Moser (2014), students using technology, such as e-books, increase their reading motivation, expression, fluency, and letter sound pronunciation. Teachers also stated that some forms of technology, such as myLexia, helped them easily track their students' overall literacy progress. During classroom observations, I observed each teacher

using one or more of the following technology during ELA and/or reading instruction: SMART

board, ELMO, iPads, and Chromebooks.

   Ms. May's instructional technology use. During phonics instruction, Ms. May used the

SMART board to project phonics videos on Go Noodle and phonics instruction using Blast

Foundations. Go Noodle is used by many teachers to promote movement and mindful moments

in the classroom ("Go Noodle"). Blast Foundations is a research based literacy program geared

toward students' phonemic abilities in Kindergarten through grade three ("Phonics suite," 2015).

I observed Ms. May using the SMART board during phonics instruction to project various

phonics related songs using Go Noodle before beginning Blast Foundations. On a few occasions,

she played the alphabet song featuring Usher singing with the Sesame street Muppets on the

SMART board. Ms. May danced along with the students as she played the Usher alphabet song.

Afterwards, she continued using the SMART board as she guided students through Blast

Foundations. Trios of letters (e.g., x z y, b x y, z b j) and/or trios of words (e.g., draw night am,

big pick pink) were projected on the SMART board. Ms. May said, "look, think, say," as she

introduced each letter or word by tapping on the SMART board. Each tap revealed the next letter

or word. The SMART board was the primary teaching tool as each letter or word was introduced.

   Through classroom observations of Ms. May, I noticed that she primarily used

technology as a literacy resource; however, this may not reflect her overall use of instructional

resources because I observed her teach only during phonics instruction. Over the course of four

observations, my data indicated discrepancies with Ms. May's instructional methods (e.g., the

use of technology) and her views towards technology integration in literacy. For instance, when

Ms. May was asked about how teachers should use technology for literacy instruction, during the

initial semi-structured interview, she responded, "Technology should be used as an enrichment

or extra help during extra time." Her response suggests that Ms. May might prefer using

technology as an additional instructional resource instead of a primary teaching tool.

Furthermore, when Ms. May was asked if technology helped all students with literacy

instruction, she said, "It depends on the concepts being taught. I think for students that have

disabilities in the area of literacy, one-on-one is the most affective." However, Giangreco (2010)

notes that one-to-one support, such as paraprofessionals, may not meet the needs of students with

disabilities because paraprofessionals have limited resources to fully support students with

disabilities. Ms. May's response suggests that technology use might be more beneficial for

students on an individual basis; technology resources, such as iPads, can offer individualized

literacy experiences for students, whereas whole group technology instruction may fail to reach

all learners.

       Ms. Wilde's instructional technology use. In another first grade classroom, Ms. Wilde

used the SMART board during shared reading. She read the text *Noise in the Night* on

ReadingA-Z.com. I observed Ms. Wilde as she projected the entire text, *Noise in the Night,* on

ReadingA-Z.com. As she read, she used the mouse cursor to guide her students word-by-word

through *Noise in the Night*. Ms. Wilde also called on a few students to read individual sentences

from the projected text. The pictures in the text were in full color and Ms. Wilde often referred to

these pictures to help aid students with predictions and word recognition. Midway through the

text, she instructed students to respond to the following writing prompt: What do you predict will

happen next in the story? As students were writing, Ms. Wilde highlighted a few key words from

the projected text using the highlighting feature on the SMART board (e.g., character's names

and vocabulary words). Furthermore, as students wrote their responses, Ms. Wilde quietly played

one song from Pandora on the SMART board. After the music began, she walked around from table to table and engaged her students in a brief dance break.

When Ms. Wilde was asked about how teachers should use technology for literacy instruction, during the initial semi-structured interview, she expressed that teachers should utilize a wide range of technology resources for their students. She felt as if technology use, such as iPad applications (e.g., myLexia), and resources, such as the SMART board, help engage students more with literacy learning. When asked about student engagement when listening to music during writing time, Ms. Wilde said, "They enjoy listening to music. It keeps them focused. I usually play smooth jazz. Sometimes I play kids pop. Which has more R&B/hip hop music." Ms. Wilde used technology (e.g., the SMART board and her laptop) to play the music; therefore, for Ms. Wilde, I viewed the use of music as a technology resource. Ms. Wilde's response to using music in the classroom suggested that she believed music was a key factor in promoting literacy instruction with her students. Ciampa (2014) says motivation is important to students' literacy learning; therefore, Ms. Wilde's emphasis on student motivation may help her students' literacy learning in the future.

Ms. Smith's instructional technology use. In yet another first grade classroom, I observed Ms. Smith use iPads as a literacy instructional tool during morning work. This was different from Ms. Wilde and Ms. May's instructional technology use because the iPads offered individualized literacy instruction, as opposed to whole group literacy instruction using literacy programs or lessons on the SMART board or ELMO. Each morning Ms. Smith chose small groups of seven students to learn literacy skills through a digital literacy tool on the classroom iPad called myLexia. myLexia is a computer-based literacy program that allows students to work independently at their own pace; this literacy program focuses on developing students'

foundational reading skills ("Lexia reading," 2011). Figure 3 shows a sample literacy lesson on
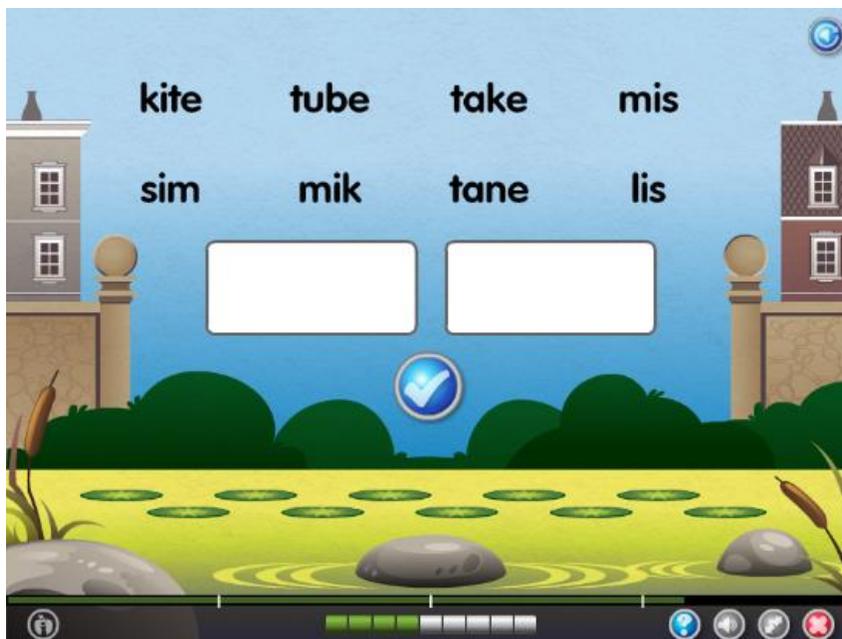
myLexia.

Figure 3. Sample literacy lesson on myLexia. This figure shows a sample literacy lesson that
students might encounter on the reading program myLexia.

When asked about her thoughts about technology integration in education during the

initial semi-structured interview, Ms. Smith acknowledged that iPad applications, such as

myLexia and myON, offered teachers literacy teaching suggestions and useful literacy resources;

however, she admitted that she rarely used this information as a teaching tool. According to

Hutchinson and Colwell (2012), teachers using aspects of technology resources is common

because many teachers are unaware of the extent in which technology should be used in their

classroom. Whenever Ms. Smith's students used the iPad or Chromebooks, she noticed a big

difference with student engagement. Ms. Smith said, "I notice a big difference between iPads

and books. Students seem more eager to learn on an iPad. They are more engaged. They also

love the Chromebooks." The use of technology in Ms. Smith's class served as a motivating

factor for all students' literacy learning. Ciampa (2014) says motivation plays a key role in students' learning; therefore, technology devices, such as iPads or Chromebooks, can play a crucial role in engaging students in literacy learning. Despite Ms. Smith's claims that technology increased her students' motivation in ELA and reading, Larson (2015) states that technology should never replace quality teacher instruction.

Ms. Tanner's instructional technology use. During a few classroom observations, I observed Ms. Tanner, who works in the same classroom as Ms. May, using the SMART board to introduce "the words of the week" (e.g., weekly vocabulary words). Over the course of a few observations, I observed Ms. Tanner project the words of the week on the SMART board. Figure 4 showed how Ms. Tanner used the SMART board as a resource to visually demonstrate the vocabulary word "echo". Visual representations of vocabulary words, such as figure 4, allowed students to engage with literacy in a variety of ways.

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework supports Ms. Tanner's use of technology, which states that teachers should use "multiple means of representation, expression and action, and engagement" (Ok et al., 2017, p. 116). During the initial semi-structured interview, Ms. Tanner noted that her students enjoyed spending time reviewing the words of the week. She speculated that their enjoyment with learning new vocabulary might be due to "how" she reviewed the words. During classroom observations, I noted that Ms. Tanner reviewed the words of the week the following ways: 1) She taught the American Sign Language representation for each word; 2) She visually represented each word through images or videos on the SMART board; 3) She displayed the definition of the words of the week on the whiteboard as a reference; 4) She gave students the opportunity to share their knowledge of the vocabulary words with the class; and 5) She drew attention to vocabulary words during shared reading. According to Stahl

and Kapinus (2001), teachers should provide students multiple opportunities to encounter

vocabulary words. Biemiller and Boote (2006), also say the constant exposure to vocabulary

words through repeated readings of texts help students master new vocabulary words.

Ms. Tanner's vocabulary instruction during ELA and reading time supported many

researchers' views towards successful literacy instruction (Biemiller & Boote, 2006).

Furthermore, Yoon (2013) suggests that technology use has the potential to help increase student

motivation in ELA. Ms. Tanner's way of instructing students emphasized student engagement

and motivation because her instruction allowed her students to participant in learning through

many avenues.

Echoes
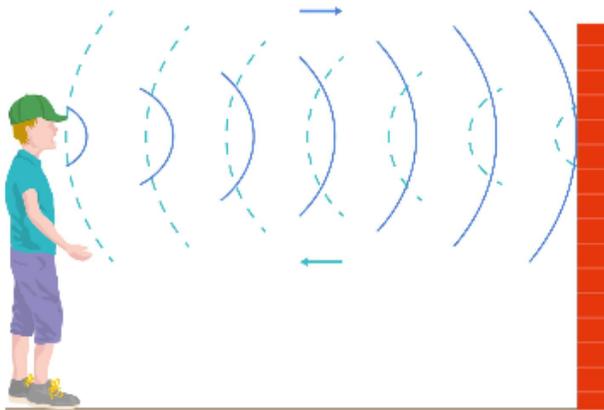https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXWcqriPvgk

Figure 4. Ms. Tanner's definition of echo. This figure shows an example picture Ms. Tanner
used to demonstrate the new vocabulary word echo to her students. Ms. Tanner also clicked on
the YouTube link to give her students an auditory representation of echo.

Finding Three: Some Teachers Have Opposing Views Regarding the School's Arts Integration as a Literacy Teaching Model

I obtained data regarding arts integration from four out of five first grade teachers through observations and/or semi-structured interviews (see Figure 2). Three teachers agreed with the arts integration teaching model, while one teacher expressed her reservations about using arts integration with her students. Oakwood Elementary uses arts integration as pivotal teaching model; therefore, I believe the staff as a whole should agree or, at very least, attempt to understand the value of the arts integration teaching model.

Ms. Smith's view on arts integration. When asked about her views on arts integration in literacy, during the initial semi-structured interview, Ms. Smith was honest about her views towards arts integration. She admitted, "Arts integration is a great idea, but here…it is not flowing the way we expected. We are not using the co-teaching model. If we could roll it out the right way, it would be a good idea overall." When asked another question about how arts integration has helped her students, Ms. Smith responded, "Behaviors is a problem. We are not able to get into arts integration as much as possible because students are taking the arts for granted." I asked Ms. Smith if she could think of a way to solve this problem. She responded, "Behaviors definitely hold students back…the arts could be fun and engaging, but behavior is interfering, which makes it more difficult to teach. Maybe if students had more practice and more experience with arts integration, we will find improvements." Ms. Smith recognized the beneficial role arts integration-teaching model could play; however, she struggled to see this model successfully implemented. Ms. Smith's experiences with classroom behaviors inferring with the arts mirrors Bradshaw's (2016) initial research on arts integration. Bradshaw (2016) notes that classroom behaviors often interfered with the students' ability to fully engage in arts

integration; however, instead of focusing on students' behaviors, Bradshaw (2016) reworked her arts integration approach and aligned her instruction with students' interests. As a result, her students demonstrated a new appreciation for arts integration, which caused her students to engage in an inquiry based learning environment (Bradshaw, 2016). Maybe with a new perspective, such as Bradshaw's (2016), Ms. Smith could see arts integration successfully implemented with her students.

Ms. Wilde's view on arts integration. When asked about her views on arts integration in literacy, during the initial semi-structured interview, Ms. Wilde noted the positive role of the arts integration-teaching model. She noted the importance and value of arts integration in literacy. As Ms. Wilde explained, "Arts integration enhances the literacy instruction." When asked about how teachers should integrate the arts into their literacy instructional practices, Ms. Wilde said, "Teachers should know the difference between arts integration and arts enhancement. Arts integration uses the arts standard and the content standard and instructs students using both. Arts enhancement might be students reading a book about birds flying down south and drawing or coloring a picture that goes with the book." Ms. Wilde's understanding of the difference between arts integration and arts enhancement and the use of both the content standard and the arts standard in arts integration instruction, demonstrates her strong understanding of the meaning of arts integration. Ms. Wilde's views match Silverstein and Layne's (2010) definition of arts integration, which says, "…Students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject area and meets evolving objectives in both" (p. 1). Ms. Wilde's understanding of arts integration has the potential to help the school's arts integration teaching model grow because other teachers could learn from Ms. Wilde's awareness of arts integration.

Ms. May's view on arts integration. When asked about her views on arts integration in literacy during the initial semi-structured interview, Ms. May responded, "Arts integration in literacy is brilliant! Especially when done correctly. It can reach students in a different way (non-traditional) than what we are used to. It's really student lead and has the perfect gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student." From her response, it is clear that Ms. May had a positive attitude towards arts integration, and her response showed a strong appreciation for the arts in literacy. Despite this positive outlook, Ms. May believed the arts integration teaching model was more useful in some literacy contexts. During the initial semi-structured interview, I asked Ms. May how she feels teachers should integrate the arts into literacy instruction. Ms. May answered, "Arts integration should be used for specific units." Her response demonstrated her overall understanding of arts integration because she talked about her past experiences with arts integration and saw the impact arts integration had on specific literacy units.

Ms. May's understanding of arts integration and positive views towards art integration could stem from her arts rich educational background. When Ms. May was asked why she became a teacher, during the semi-structured interview, she stated that she attended a performing arts high school, a music school, and majored in arts integration in college. As a result, Ms. May had a comprehensive understanding of the arts in education because she lived and breathed the arts and/or arts integration for over ten years. Since Oakwood Elementary believes in using art integration as a literacy teaching model, Ms. May's unique background may help other teachers, such as Ms. Smith, understand the value of the arts and arts integration in literacy.

Mr. Lloyd's view on arts integration. During four classroom observations, I noted that Mr. Lloyd, the drama arts integration teacher, primarily used the arts to enhance students' literacy learning in ELA and reading. For instance, Mr. Lloyd read a story aloud about a prince

rescuing a princess from a fire-breathing dragon, and he modeled how to use instruments to highlight individual characters' personalities or events in the text. As he read, he used various instruments to signify characters or events, such as using the bell to demonstrate the princess and the drums to demonstrate the dragon destroying the town. Afterwards, Mr. Lloyd allowed his students to practice integrating sound/music with their own read aloud text in small groups of four or five.

Through Mr. Lloyd's classroom observations, I noticed that he used arts integration to enhance instruction by instructing students to learn "with" the arts. Goldberg (2012) says educators can teach a concept (such as literacy) using one of two key aspects of arts integration: learning "through" the arts or learning "with" the arts. Learning with the arts is described by Doyle et al. (2014) "as a complementary method of teaching…used as one type of curriculum resource to teach broader concepts" (p. 3). In Mr. Lloyd's case, he focused on the fluent reading of text and used the art form of music to enhance students' overall reading of the text; therefore, Mr. Lloyd taught this arts integration unit with the arts instead of through the arts. Mr. Lloyd collaborated with all of the first grade teachers before this unit in order to decide "how" to best teach the ELA standards and arts standards using the arts integration teaching model. Oakwood Elementary allows teachers to choose the best type of arts integration instruction to meet the literacy needs of their students, while sticking with the definition of arts integration.

Finding Four: Teachers Utilize the Whole Brain Teaching Model to Promote all Students' Literacy Learning

All five teachers in this study used Whole Brain teaching every day; however, I only gathered enough data on Whole Brain teaching with two out of five first grade teachers. Whole Brain teaching was a teaching tool used schoolwide; therefore, every teacher utilized this

teaching method throughout the day. According to Battle (2010), Whole Brain teaching focuses

on student engagement, classroom management, and impactful teaching techniques through "The

Big Seven" (e.g., seven aspects of Whole Brain teaching). In the context of this study, I focused

on only two aspects of Whole Brain teaching (e.g., mirror words and teach okay). I was

interested in how these two aspects of Whole Brain teaching, mirror words (e.g., call and

response) and teach okay (e.g., turn and talk), influenced students' literacy learning in ELA and

reading. Through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, I found that Whole

Brain teaching did the following: reinforced old literacy concepts, introduced new literacy

concepts, reengaged students with a literacy lesson, rewarded students' ideas about literacy, and

allowed students to discuss literacy concepts through whole group and small group discussions.

For instance, Ms. Tanner used mirror words to review vocabulary words or introduce new

vocabulary words. Additionally, Ms. Smith used teach okay to allow students to discuss the main

idea in a text, make predictions, or make connections (e.g., text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-

world) (Draper, 2010). Ms. Tanner and Ms. Smith serve as two quick examples of Whole Brain

teaching, the following will outline Whole Brain teaching in more detail.

 Mirror words: Call and response. Mirror words was a teaching tool that utilized a call

and response teaching method. Each teacher in this study used mirror words; nevertheless, I

gathered enough data on mirror words for two teachers in this study. Ms. Tanner and Ms. Smith

used mirror words multiple times throughout their ELA or reading lessons. Often, mirror words

was used to introduce new vocabulary words, introduce new literacy concepts, or to reinforce old

literacy concepts. The idea of mirror words was the same for each teacher. The teacher would

say, "mirror words," and students repeated, "mirror words." Then the teacher said short phrases

while using hand gestures, and students repeated these short phrases and hand gestures.

Ms. Tanner, in particular, used mirror words multiple times throughout a read aloud lesson or as she was reviewing the "words of the week" (e.g., vocabulary words). I observed Ms. Tanner say the following to introduce the word echo to her students, "Mirror words…echo…is a repeating sound…a sound that repeats…when sound waves…reflect and bounce back…mirrors away." On another occasion, I observed Ms. Tanner review echo again, "Mirror words…an echo…is a repeating sound…a sound that happens…over and over…sound waves (repeated four times)…travel and bounce off…mirrors away" Afterwards, she asked her students, "Why did I say sound waves over and over?" Ms. Tanner used mirror words to emphasize an important concept in their read aloud book, *Bats in the Band*. She wanted the students to recognize both the importance of echo and the importance of sound waves.

During another observation, Ms. Tanner introduced the concept of main idea through mirror words. She said, "Mirror words…every story…has a main idea…the reason the story is written…these are the details…all of these details…connected to the main idea…these details support the main idea…they're not random…they make sense…mirrors away." Ms. Tanner gave a quick overview of main idea before diving into the bulk of the read aloud.

Ms. Smith also used mirror words during shared reading. As she read a text called *Moonbear.* In order to introduce the concept of a shadow, Ms. Smith said, "Mirror words…a shadow…follows you around…blocking the sun….showing a dark spot on the ground…mirrors away." Through mirror words, Ms. Smith quickly introduced the vocabulary word shadow to her students. Ms. Smith typically used mirror words once every lesson, while Ms. Tanner used mirror words frequently throughout a lesson.

Ms. Tanner used mirror words more than other first grade teacher in this study. I noticed that Ms. Tanner often paused instruction to quickly engage students again with the use of mirror

words, while Ms. Smith used another Whole Brain teaching method called "class yes", which

reminded students to stop talking and look at the teacher. Ms. Tanner's excessive use of mirror

words may suggest that she preferred to continue engaging students with instruction instead of

simply getting her students' attention through "class yes".

Teach okay: Turn and talk. Teach okay was another teaching tool used by each teacher

that allowed students to discuss literacy topics in pairs or small groups; however, I only observed

one teacher, Ms. Smith, who used teach okay.

Ms. Smith used teach okay during shared reading to allow her students to discuss

predictions or ideas with each other and use accountable talk (e.g., "I agree because" or "I

disagree because"). During one shared reading lesson, she asked her students to discuss the

following, "Tell your partner some of your predictions." Students discussed their predictions

with their partner. Afterwards, Ms. Smith allowed individual students to share their ideas.

Furthermore, during a shared reading of the text *Moonbear*, Ms. Smith said, "What would you

tell Moonbear if you were him? Jellies tell your partner about it. (clap, clap) teach." Students

discussed their thoughts with their partners as Ms. Smith listened in on students' conversations.

Discussions such as these allowed students to make and refine their ideas about a particular

literacy concept or discussion. As noted previously, after each "teach okay" discussion Ms.

Smith allowed multiple students to share their ideas with the whole class. This allowed students

to hear and share multiple perspectives with other students.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how five first grade teachers in English

Language Arts (ELA) and reading modified their literacy instruction to support all students,

including students with a variety of different disabilities. This study focused on the following research questions:

1. What do first grade teachers report as the literacy instructional practices that most influence and promote literacy learning in their classrooms?

2. In what ways do teachers report that technology and/or the arts influence the literacy learning environment in English Language Arts (ELA) and reading?

Over the course of six weeks, I found the five first grade teachers included in the study at Oakwood Elementary felt their literacy instruction in English Language Arts (ELA) and reading was limited due to the time constraints of the school day. Through data analysis, I found that many of the teachers utilized as many literacy instructional tools and instructional supports as possible to meet the literacy needs of all their students, not just students with a variety of different disabilities, since the majority of their students received general education supports. All five teachers used a variety of literacy supports: 1) Technology integration in literacy (e.g., iPad, SMART board, and Chromebooks); 2) The Whole Brain teaching model (e.g., mirror words and teach okay); and 3) The arts integration teaching model. Although many teachers agreed with technology use and the Whole Brain teaching model, I discovered that some of the teachers disagreed with the school's core foundational arts integration teaching model. I wondered if time constraints and a plethora of required literacy teaching programs (e.g., myLexia and Blast Foundations) caused some teachers in this study to value some teaching methods over others.

Conclusions and Implications

Conclusion one: Teachers feel pressured to meet the literacy needs of all their students. As noted in my findings, some first grade teachers felt the pressure of "teaching it all",

meaning, teachers had outside pressures and demands (e.g., parents, administration, programming, and time), which might impact each teacher's ability to meet the literacy needs of all their students in the areas of ELA and reading. Four out of five teachers in this study felt overwhelmed with the limited amount of instructional time dedicated to meet the literacy needs of their students, and one teacher disagreed with the arts integration teaching model. Due to these pressures and demands and limited amount of time to teach, I can assume that some teachers may focus solely on core instruction, such as reading, writing, and phonics, and disregard other instruction, such as arts integration.

However, research has shown the positive impact that arts integration has on students' literacy development ("The benefits," 2013). Anderson (2012) states that drama education can influence students' written language development: "Significant increases in students' written language productivity and specificity were observed in contextualized dramatic arts activities, as compared to decontextualized language arts activities" (p. 959). Lackey and Huxhold (2016) also note the link between constant exposure to arts infused lessons and higher tests scores on non-art related tests. Furthermore, Coleman (2011) emphasizes the importance of an arts based curriculum in helping students practice "sustained inquiry" (p. 1), which is an important skill for students to master in both the arts and reading. An arts rich curriculum and/or arts integrated curriculum allows students to learn and engage with school in a unique way; therefore, I believe if more teachers at Oakwood Elementary fully understood the important role of arts integration in the classroom, they might reconsider their initial hesitations about arts integration. The teachers at Oakwood Elementary care about their students' learning; thus, with time, experience, and determination, the arts integration teaching model at Oakwood Elementary will continue to grow. The first grade teachers in this study were experiencing similar struggles in meeting the

literacy needs of their students; therefore, if each teacher fully embraced the arts integration teaching model, they might see growth in other non-arts areas, such as ELA and reading.

Implication one: If some teachers disagree with instructional practices, this could negatively impact students' literacy learning. When the first grade teachers disagreed with literacy instruction, such as the school's arts integration teaching model, students were directly impacted. As noted in my findings, Ms. Smith expressed her apprehensions towards arts integration because of her own students' behaviors. Despite her hesitations, she believed an arts integration teaching model could positively impact her students; however, she was discouraged with her current experiences with the arts integration teaching model. Research has shown that classroom behaviors directly influence students' ability to fully engage and learn from an arts integration teaching model (Bradshaw, 2016); therefore, Ms. Smith is not alone with her struggles in utilizing the arts integration teaching model.

At Oakwood Elementary, arts integration was co-taught; meaning, the first grade elementary teacher focused on teaching the content standards (e.g., ELA), and the first grade arts integration teacher focused on teaching the arts standards (e.g., drama, dance, music, or visual arts). With this co-taught model in mind, the elementary teacher and the arts integration teacher relied on each other to deliver an arts integrated lesson smoothly. Unfortunately, if the elementary teacher and the arts integration teacher disagreed on "how" to teach, their arts integration instruction could become disjointed. I can speculate that students might sense when instruction is disjointed, which may inadvertently impact students' engagement with the content (e.g., ELA and the arts).

Some teachers at Oakwood Elementary, particularly classroom teachers, may not fully understand or believe in the arts integration teaching model. I wondered why some first grade

teachers disagreed with arts integration, even though arts integration was interwoven into the school's curriculum. Nobori (2012) states that teachers need high quality professional development in arts integration in order to fully understand the value of arts integration. According to Markus (2012), students benefit directly from arts integration the following ways: 1) Students engage in risk taking; 2) Students are provided appropriate differentiation; and 3) Teacher-student collaboration is encouraged. As noted previously, research has shown the positive impact of the arts and arts integration in schools (Anderson, 2012; Bradshaw, 2016; Coleman, 2011; Lackey & Huxhold, 2016; "The benefits," 2013). Therefore, if classroom teachers welcomed the arts integration teaching model and fully engaged with the arts integration teacher in the collaborative teaching process, students might experience the direct benefits of an arts integration teaching model.

Furthermore, if classroom teachers felt wary about the arts integration teaching model, students may not experience the full benefits of an arts integration teaching model. A true arts integration teaching model relies on the cooperation of both the classroom teacher and the arts integration teacher; without successful teacher collaboration and cooperation, the arts integration teaching model fails and students' learning are directly impacted. Nonetheless, I believe the first grade teachers at Oakwood Elementary were striving to meet the literacy needs of all their students; therefore, Oakwood Elementary could assist their teachers by providing explicit trainings on the impact of arts integration teaching model on student learning. The arts integration teaching model is both unique and difficult to understand at the same time; therefore, constant exposure and practice with arts integration will allow each first grade teacher to experience the full impact of arts integration in education.

Conclusion two: Teachers can use many means of learning to engage their students in literacy learning. According to my findings, first grade teachers at Oakwood Elementary had access to a variety of resources to engage their students in multiple means of literacy learning (e.g., videos, text-to-speech, digital interactive literacy games/applications, music, iPads, Chromebooks, SMART board, ect.). The teachers at Oakwood Elementary already used elements of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is a framework for teaching and improving students' learning through an understanding of how the brain processes learning (e.g., engagement, representation, and action/expression) ("About universal," 2017). Technology, in particular, is an important part of UDL because "technology…can help provide multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement options, and thus plays an important role in UDL" ("Universal design," 2010, p. 1). UDL allows teachers to meet the individual needs of all students through curriculum materials, instruction, and activities (Smith Canter et al., 2017). The first grade teachers at Oakwood Elementary used elements of UDL through differentiated instruction, strategic grouping, and one-to-one instruction (e.g., literacy centers, guided reading, myLexia). Students at Oakwood Elementary engaged with literacy learning in many ways; therefore, I can assume that students in this study have the potential to benefit from the plethora of teaching resources and tools. If one teaching tool or resource fails, teachers could ideally access another teaching tool or resource.

Implication two: Literacy instruction must be purposeful and meaningful for all students. Even though multiple literacy resources exist, I believe the first grade teachers at Oakwood Elementary should have an integral understanding of research based teaching practices and research based teaching models for literacy. Teachers in this study were required by their school's administration to use the following: 1) Literacy research based technology programs,

such as myLexia and Blast Foundations and 2) The arts integration teaching model.

Consequently, some teachers may have a limited understanding of the importance or significance

of research based technology programs or researched based teaching models. Regardless of

whether or not the teachers in this study understood the importance of research based technology

programs (e.g., myLexia or Blast Foundations) or the arts integration teaching model, research

has shown that technology integration supports "four key components of learning: active

engagement, participation in groups, frequent interaction and feedback, and connection to real-

world experts" ("Why integrate technology," 2008, p.1). Furthermore, the arts integration

teaching model allows students to develop the reading skills of "sustained inquiry" (Coleman,

2011, p. 1). I believe each first grade teacher at Oakwood Elementary strived to engage all their

students in literacy learning; nonetheless, research based technology programs (e.g., myLexia

and Blast Foundations) and research based teaching models (e.g., arts integration) were a

requirement at Oakwood Elementary; thus, teachers might struggle to grasp the significance of

these teaching programs and teaching models. Consequently, each teacher must adapt their

instruction and set aside time to purposefully plan instruction. However, planning time was

limited for each teacher at Oakwood Elementary due to frequent group first grade curriculum

planning meetings.

Each teacher at Oakwood Elementary planned and wrote their school's curriculum each

week; meaning, each first grade teacher worked together to write the following weeks curriculum

during the current week (e.g., ELA curriculum for next week must be written this week). For

example, each first grade teacher met on Mondays for ELA curriculum and arts integration

curriculum, Wednesdays for arts integration curriculum again, and Thursdays for math

curriculum. During curriculum meetings, each first grade teacher planned instruction ("what" to

teach) instead gathering materials and preparing ("how" to teach). Each first grade teacher

typically planned and/or prepped their own instruction on Tuesdays and Fridays; however,

sometimes administrators at Oakwood Elementary scheduled meetings during their Tuesday and

Friday planning time. Since each teacher had a limited amount of individual planning time, this

impacted each teacher's abilities to purposefully plan instruction and learn more about required

programs and/or required teaching models. How could the first grade teachers learn more about

their school's research based teaching models (e.g., arts integration) and research based teaching

programs (e.g., myLexia and Blast Foundations) when they were given a limited amount of

personal planning time?

Limitations

The limitations of this study include: 1) The number of participants; 2) The length of the

study; and 3) My position at the research site. This research focused solely on five first grade

teachers' literacy instructional practices in ELA and reading. More participants, including other

teachers, students, and administrators, would have allowed for richer data analysis. This study

was comprised of new teachers; therefore, my findings excluded experienced teachers, students'

opinions regarding teaching models (e.g., arts integration), and administrators' input about

teaching models and/or research based teaching programs. The length of the study also hindered

my ability to gather data and limited my research findings. As a six week long study, I found the

data collection process extremely difficult, resulting in a disproportionally large number of

observations for two teachers and a low number of observations for the other three teachers.

Furthermore, many teachers expressed difficulty in setting aside time for interviews, resulting

one teacher completing only the initial semi-structured interview (see Appendix A and see

Figure 2) and another teacher declining all semi-structured interviews (see Figure 2). Finally, my

position, as a teacher assistant, at the research site impacted my ability to gather data because I had a responsibility to continue performing my job.

Suggestions for Future Research

Based on my current research, I believe there is a gap in the area of arts integration as a teaching model, technology in the classroom, and the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a proven teaching model. I encountered research about specific art forms (e.g., visual arts, music, dance, and drama). I also came across superficial resources about the arts as an additional instructional tool (e.g., drawing a picture to emphasize a writing piece). Other research focused on promoting or advocating arts integration in schools and keeping the arts (e.g., music, drama, dance, and visual arts) in schools; however I saw a gap in "how" the arts impact students' learning. How can educators measure the impact of the arts on literacy learning? Although there are benefits to learning an art form and using the arts as an extra teaching tool, research about arts integration can be confusing because some researchers define arts integration in differently. Nevertheless, further research on true arts integration in the classroom setting is essential. I believe in order for students to truly learn through arts integration, the following must take place: 1) Students must learn the content form "through" the arts and 2) Teachers must use the arts standard and the content standard to promote learning. Therefore, additional research on the impact of arts integration on literacy learning is needed.

I found plenty of research on technology use in the classroom, but the research base is limited. Meaning, I found plenty of research about iPads and e-books; however, teachers need more research on Chromebooks or SMART boards, since many classrooms are expanding their use of technology in the classroom. Further studies regarding technology use in the classroom

will only benefit future teachers and students and possibly change how educators think of literacy instruction.

Currently, many researchers advocate for the use of UDL in classrooms; however, researchers failed to prove "how" UDL impacts students' learning. Research on UDL outlines why UDL is important; nonetheless, in order for teachers to fully embrace UDL as an educational framework, researchers need to study the specific impact of UDL on students' learning in all subject areas (e.g., mathematics, ELA, social studies, science, ect.).

Overall Significance

This study is relevant to many classrooms today because teachers are already modifying their instruction and utilizing various teaching tools and resources to meet the literacy needs of all their students. As a teacher at Oakwood Elementary, a school that emphasizes the use of non-traditional instructional resources and teaching models (e.g., arts integration teaching model and research based teaching programs), I strive to be a lifelong learner. As a teacher, my learning never ends; therefore, I must constantly adapt and learn new ways of teaching.

The results of this study will potentially help other elementary school educators, utilizing the an arts integration teaching model and/or technology integration, understand the need for meaningful literacy instruction for all students. Despite current research on arts integration, UDL, and technology, teachers must decide which instructional tools and resources work best for their students. Arts integration sounds great on the surface; nevertheless, experiencing "how" to teach arts integration for the first time is intimidating. Despite my educational experience in arts integration, I struggled (just as the teachers in this study struggled) to successfully co-teach arts integration. Furthermore, technology in the classroom and the UDL framework is helpful for

many teachers; nonetheless, these literacy instructional tools and teaching models are pointless,

unless teachers meaningfully integrate instructional tools and teaching models for all their

students.

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Appendix A

Initial Semi-Structured Interview

DATE: _____
PSEUDONYM: _____

1. Please tell me about how you became a teacher and why you started teaching.
2. How long have you been teaching?
3. What experience do you have in modifying your literacy instructional practices when working with students with diverse needs and/or students with disabilities?
4. Please tell me about the specific instructional tools and modifications you use to meet the literacy needs of your students. What are some of the common literacy instructional modifications that you use with your students? Explain how you would modify your instruction to meet the literacy needs of each student.
5. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (Literacy, n.d.) defines literacy as "the ability to read and write" or "knowledge that relates to a specific subject". How do you define literacy?
6. How do you generally support literacy for students with disabilities?
7. Do you find certain literacy instructional modifications more useful than others?
8. How do you change your literacy modifications across the subject areas?
9. What do you find to be the greatest challenge for meeting the literacy needs of your students?
10. What do you recommend as literacy instructional modifications for other teachers (e.g., new teachers and experienced teachers)?
11. How do you determine if one literacy modification is more useful than another?
12. What do you do when you find a specific literacy modification is failing to meet the needs of your students?
13. What are your thoughts about technology integration in literacy?
14. What are your thoughts about arts integration in literacy?
15. Do you find technology and/or the arts in the classroom has helped students with diverse needs and students with disabilities in the area of literacy?
16. How do you feel about using pencil and paper teaching versus paperless teaching?
17. How should teachers integrate technology and/or the arts into their literacy instructional practices?
18. What technology skills and/or arts skills do you feel teachers need in the classroom today?
19. What do you see as the greatest challenge in meeting your students' literacy needs?

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Appendix B

Final Semi-Structured Interview

DATE: _____
PSEUDONYM: _____

I am going to ask you about modifications you make when you teach. When I am discussing modification, I am referring to the literacy modification you make in your instruction to best meet the needs of students with diverse needs and students with disabilities.

1. What are your thoughts about your literacy instruction at the end of this study? Has your thinking changed?
2. Do you feel that some literacy modifications are more beneficial to students with disabilities than other modifications?
3. What sort of professional development and/or training do you think has most helped you as in your literacy instructional practices?
4. How do you feel about being able to meet the literacy needs of your students? Is there anything you found challenging?
5. Have you seen an improvement in your students' literacy skills over time?
6. I noticed that you do _____with your students. Could you tell me more about that?
7. When you do _____, I noticed your students did _____. Could you tell me more about that?
8. In what ways do you collaborate with teachers about literacy instructional practices?

Appendix C

Observational Notes Form

DATE: _____

PSEUDONYM: _____

My Observations (What are the teachers doing?)	My Thoughts (How does this relate to my research?)

Appendix D

Weekly Semi-Structured Interview

DATE: _____

PSEUDONYM: _____

How do you feel your literacy instruction went this week? What went well? What would you have done differently?

Teachers' Thoughts	My Thoughts (How does this relate to my research?)