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## **An Examination of the Perceptions of Educational Leaders on the Ensuring Literacy For All Initiative's Impact on Student Reading Achievement in Louisiana**

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An Examination of the Perceptions of Educational Leaders on the Ensuring Literacy For All  
Initiative's Impact on Student Reading Achievement in Louisiana

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Educational Administration

By  
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December, 2013



## DEDICATION

To My Mom and Dad

whose grit and perseverance inspire me

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## Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of Louisiana's Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA) initiative from the perspective of educational administrators in order to identify: (a) the factors within ELFA that contributed to student reading performance; (b) the effects of the perceptions of ELFA administrators on student achievement; and (c) the components of effective leadership that attributed to the success of ELFA implementation. Bandura's (1993) socio-psychological theory of self efficacy was used to frame this study, which included six ELFA administrators from the state, district, and school level. The five findings of this study revealed the following: (1) high quality job-embedded professional development strengthened teachers' capacity to achieve a shared purpose; (2) efficacious ELFA leaders believed that they could alter their school culture and increase student achievement, despite having a low performing student population; (3) the gradual elimination of funds detrimentally impacted all levels of governance and created a snowball effect that ultimately decreased student achievement; (4) the urgency to help students read on grade level ignited a willingness for ELFA educators to trust each other; and (5) the standardization of practices resulted in a common language that ELFA leaders used to produce results, ensure compliance, and build teacher capacity. This study revealed that ELFA leaders believed that they could overcome challenges such as having a low performing student population and obstacles such as shortage of funding and low parental involvement. The ELFA leaders' self efficacy beliefs directly impacted their actions and behaviors as well as those under their supervision.

**KEYWORDS:** Efficacy, Reading, Education, Leadership, Phenomenology

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Literacy achievement is an ongoing concern that can rival national crises such as the high unemployment rate and rising health care costs. While students face more complicated texts and skills as they advance through school, it appears that reading, as a formal part of the curriculum, typically decreases as students move into higher elementary grades and beyond (Rapoport, 2012). The repercussion of minimizing formal reading instruction is reflected in national literacy statistics. According to the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results, our nation's only report card, 33% of fourth graders read at the Below Basic level, unchanged from the previous NAEP assessment in 2009, and 66% of grade 8 students scored below the proficient level in their ability to understand the meaning of text (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2011). Other data indicate that the average high school student is unprepared for the literacy demands of college and workplace (Stepenak, 2012). Moreover, one out of every three college freshmen is required to take a remedial reading course as a prerequisite to regular level courses (Stepenak, 2012).

These statistics are even more dismal in poverty-stricken areas where 83% of all low-income children read below grade level (Merrow, 2011). Poverty is the single best predictor of a child's failure to achieve in school, and about half of children from low-income communities begin first grade up to two years behind their peers (Reading Is Fundamental, 2011). At the end of 2011, the poverty levels in the United States hit a record high of 46 million (NCES, 2012). The latest report from the National Center on Education Statistics (2012) indicates that 23.9% of children ages 5-17 live in poverty in Louisiana, the highest in the country and almost 1.4 times the percentage of American children living in poverty (NCES, 2012). Poverty's negative effects on reading outcomes, the result primarily of disparate learning opportunities afforded to children

growing up in higher and lower income settings, place this population at significant risk of school failure (Jencks & Phillips, 2008). Faced with these pervasively low literacy performance rates and a test-based accountability system that scrutinizes student outcomes by demographic background, federal, state, and district level leaders are motivated to enact various literacy initiatives, which are discussed in the next section.

### The Current Condition of Literacy in Louisiana

In Louisiana, public education has fluctuated over the last decade. Since 1999, some schools and districts have shown incremental increases in academic achievement as reflected in School Performance Scores (SPS), District Performance Scores (DPS), and State Performance Scores (LDOE, n.d.). Each year, schools receive numerical scores known as School Performance Scores (SPS). School Performance Scores reflect two years of data and are calculated for K-6th grade schools using student test scores (90%) and attendance (10%) (LDOE, n.d.). Schools with a 7th and 8th grade configuration receive an SPS based on attendance (5%), dropouts (5%), and student test scores (90%) (LDOE, n.d.). High schools (grades 9-12) receive an SPS based on test scores (70%) and their Graduation Index (30%) (LDOE, n.d.). District Performance Scores and the State Performance Score are calculated using the same formula as School Performance Scores – but using only one year of data (LDOE, n.d.).

Louisiana's State Performance Score (SPS) has risen from 69.4 in 1999 to 94.8 in 2011 (LDOE, 2011), but a score of 94.8 translates to 230,000 – or nearly one out of every three – students still performing below grade level (LDOE, n.d.). School Performance Scores (SPS) also bring attention to Louisiana's urgent need to move forward. More than 350 schools in Louisiana remain with a School Performance Score below 80, which translates to approximately 40 percent of their students performing below grade level (LDOE, 2011). And, more than 850 of Louisiana

schools earned a score below 100 in 2010. Consequently, at least 25 percent of their students are not proficient for their grade level (LDOE, 2011).

Ninety percent of State, District, and School Performance Scores are derived from student performance on Louisiana's high stakes assessments, the Integrated Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (iLEAP) and the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP). Research (Spira, Bracken, & Fischel, 2005; Al Otaiba & Fuchs, 2006; Bishop & League, 2006; Coyne, Kame'enui, Simmons, & Harn, 2004; National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2009; Schatschneider, Wagner, & Crawford, 2008) has shown that a strong correlation exists between student performance on standardized assessments and their reading abilities. Spira, Bracken, and Fischel (2005) states that kindergarten end-of-year reading and behavioral outcome measures predict reading trajectories from first to fourth grade. Other studies suggest that even in the fall of the kindergarten year, students' prereading skills (e.g., letter naming fluency, phonological awareness, and oral vocabulary) and their behavior predict subsequent reading performance (Al Otaiba & Fuchs, 2006; Bishop & League, 2006; Coyne, Kame'enui, Simmons, & Harn, 2004; National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2008). Furthermore, in a large study of more than 23,000 first graders, end-of-first-grade scores on oral reading fluency uniquely predicted end-of-first-grade reading comprehension, beginning of second-grade oral reading fluency, and end-of-second-grade reading comprehension (Schatschneider, Wagner, & Crawford, 2008).

Two decades of converging scientific reading research now exists to indicate the critical skills children must acquire in order to read well by the end of third grade. In 2000, the National Reading Panel Report identified these skills as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency in reading text, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human

Development (NICHD), 2000). Students who lag behind in the development of these skills in early elementary school are in danger of not being able to read at grade level by third grade (Vincent, Tobin, & Hawken 2012).

Federal and state officials have attempted to address these research findings and implement best practices into reading classrooms by providing local education agencies with unprecedented amounts of funding in the past decade. In 2001, President George W. Bush passed an historical federal statute, aptly named Reading First of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Part B, Subpart 1, Section 101. By allocating twenty billion dollars into Reading First, the federal government strived to work with states and districts to ensure that all children can read at or above grade level by the end of third grade and enhance teacher quality through professional development (USDOE, 2001a). Reading First (RF) was predicated on scientifically-researched findings that high-quality reading instruction in the primary grades significantly reduces the number of students who experience reading difficulties in later years (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). According to the 2008 Reading First Implementation Evaluation Interim Report, children in Reading First schools received significantly more reading instruction, almost 100 minutes more per week on average, than those in non-Reading First Title I schools (USDOE, 2008). Moreover, 97% of participating school districts that reported increased student achievement credit Reading First as an important factor (USDOE, 2008).

Reading First also affected Louisiana's students. Gains were reported for Louisiana's Reading First program, which was allocated approximately 151 million dollars in Reading First funds between 2003 and 2008 (USDOE, 2008). According to the 2008 Annual Evaluation Report for Louisiana's Reading First program, some gains included:

1. four years of steady increases in the performance of third grade students in Reading First schools on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Assessment – from 34% to 51% on Benchmark, while students at risk decreased from 30% to 17%;
2. substantial decrease in the referral rate to special education for reading difficulties (53% to 19%); and
3. an increase in high-quality instructional practices.

With the removal of federal funding support for Reading First in 2008, leaders within the Louisiana Department of Education sustained the literacy model established by Reading First by allocating \$13,290,000 from the state general fund and \$5,000,000 from 8(g) state funds to create the Ensuring Literacy For All Initiative (ELFA). Approved by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) in 2008, the ELFA was a competitive grant intended to improve literacy achievement in grades prekindergarten through fourth grades. This study focused on ELFA and its three goals (LDOE, n.d), as pertained to literacy and leadership:

- Develop the reading foundation students need for future success.
- Provide technical assistance and professional development essential for PreK-4th grade teachers and administrators to address the diverse needs of all learners.
- Provide necessary support at the district level to have all students reading and writing at or above grade level by 3rd grade.

In 2011, after seven years of implementation, the ELFA Initiative, which began after Reading First ended in 2008, reported accelerated gains for students over non-ELFA schools (Asmus et al., 2011). First, participating schools sustainably increased the percentage of students scoring basic or above on the 3rd grade *i*LEAP ELA at a rate that was faster when compared to the



overall rate of state improvement (Asmus et al., 2011). Figure 1 displays the third grade iLEAP results for ELFA and non-ELFA schools over the last six years. The percentages represent students who scored Basic or above across Louisiana. For data reporting purposes, participating schools were categorized into four different cohorts, depending on their entrance year into the Reading First program. Cohorts 1, 2, 3, and 4 began in 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2009, respectively. Cohort 1 schools were selected under the Reading First requirements to support schools that had the greatest number of at risk students, in regards to their academic performance and socioeconomic status. Hurricanes Rita and Katrina greatly affected this cohort, shrinking the original 111 schools to 87 for 2005-2006 (Asmus et al., 2008).

Cohort 2 schools were added in the 2006-2007 school year and were home to even more highly at-risk students. The school district targeted in this research study contains six schools belonging to Cohort 2. Cohort 3 and 4 schools are demographically different. They entered ELFA through a competitive application process, but were chosen competitively without preferences for high poverty and historical low performance that were used in selecting Reading First schools. Thus, the population of Cohort 3 resembles Louisiana students in the general demographics. In its final year of implementation in 2010-2011, nearly 200,000 students in forty districts across the state benefited from Ensuring Literacy For All initiative. The first two cohorts of ELFA schools display a greater increase in the percentages of students who scored Basic or above. Cohort 2 has a gain that is twice the non-ELFA gain rate, while Cohort 4's gain nearly tripled the non-ELFA rate.

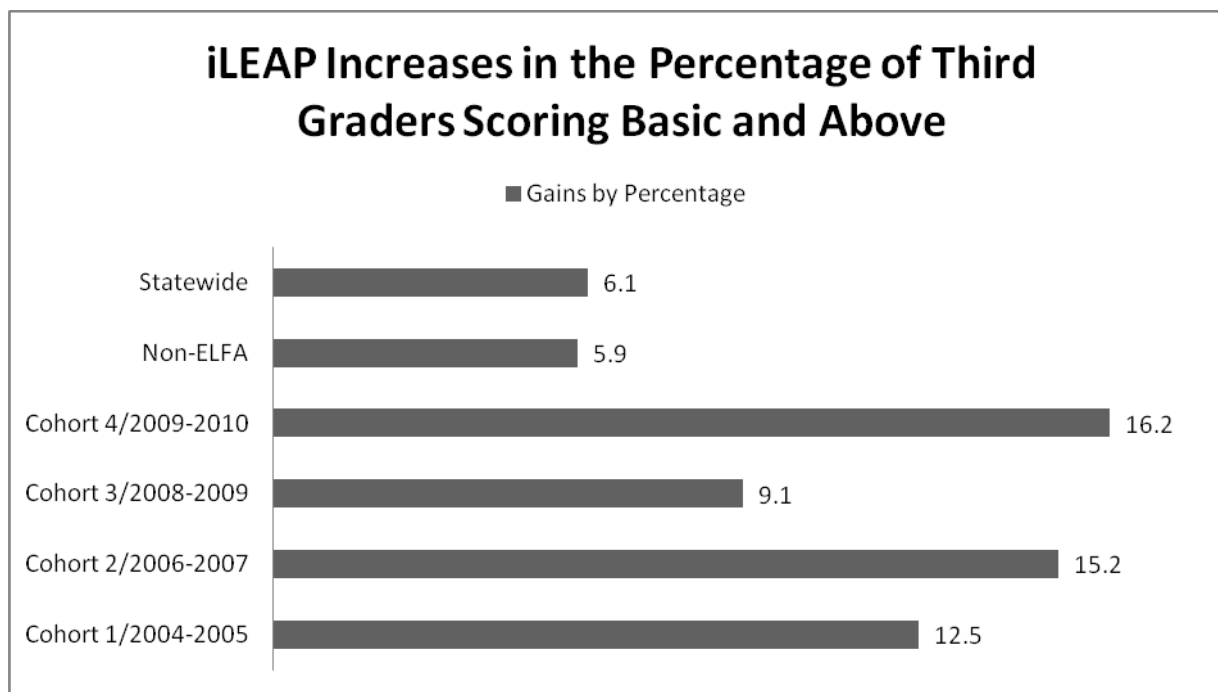


Figure 1. Increases in the Percentage of Third Grade Students Scoring Basic and Above on iLEAP English Language Arts by Cohort and Year Started

Source: Cecil J. Picard Center for Child Development, *Ensuring Literacy For All Evaluation 2010-2011*

Moreover, subgroups, including minority students, students of poverty, and special education students in ELFA schools show greater growth than their counterparts at non-ELFA schools (Asmus et al., 2011). Third, the special education referral rate steadily decreased, from approximately 50% of referrals being for reading difficulties in 2004 when Reading First was first implemented to 19% in 2006–2007 (USDOE, 2007).

Although gains were made, 31% of students still read below grade level at the end of third grade (Asmus et al., 2011). Asmus et al., (2011) concluded that external factors such as teacher mobility, funding limitations and school-level behaviors adversely affect student literacy learning opportunities (Asmus et al., 2011). Other factors that may have impacted ELFA's student achievement results include professional development and leadership (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom (2004). According to Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson

(2010), it is not enough to merely launch initiatives aimed at improving student achievement without investing in the professional development of school leaders by districts. Setting goals and emphasizing responsibility for achieving them is not likely to produce a payoff for students unless the initiative is accompanied by leadership development practices that the leaders perceive as helping them to improve their personal competencies. Principals who believe themselves to be working collaboratively toward clear, common goals with district personnel, other principals, and teachers are more confident in their leadership. Further discussion of the influence of leader perception and leader efficacy on student achievement will take place in later chapters within this study.

#### A Brief History of Reading Initiatives in Louisiana

During the 1995-1996 school year, the retention rate, defined as the percentage of students having to repeat the same grade (Jimerson, Woehr, & Kaufman, 2004), in Louisiana was 7.4%, compared to the estimated six percent for the United States for children in grades K-3 (Shepard, Smith, & Marion, 1998), and 41% of Louisiana's second and third grade students were reading below grade level (LDOE, n.d). Louisiana was ranked 38th in the nation in educational output, which includes demographics, student services, fiscal matters, and student achievement (Seiler, Landy, & Chilton, 1997) and had one of the highest rates of child poverty in the nation (Seiler, Landy, & Chilton, 1997).

This problem of educational underachievement for Louisiana students was finally addressed during the 1997 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature, when the Louisiana Department of Education was allocated \$30 million dollars to deliver measurable and palpable improvements in the performance of K-3 students in language, literacy, and math. Entitled the K-3 Reading and Math Initiative, legally known as House Bill 2233, this historic reform

package, proposed by Governor Mike Foster, focused on the prevention of reading difficulties through excellent instruction (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) and early intervention for students who were considered at risk. An additional \$40 million was allocated during the 1998 and 1999 Legislative Sessions, and a total of \$42.9 million was allocated during the 2000, 2001, and 2002 sessions. The 2003 Legislature made the final investment in this initiative with an allocation of \$12.8 million for 2003-2004 academic year (LDOE, 2001). Since the K-3 Initiative was first funded, state officials lauded the initiative as a success. In 2001, State Superintendent of Education Cecil J. Picard attributed the significant gains by fourth grade students on the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program for the 21st Century (LEAP 21) standardized assessment to their participation in the K-3 Reading and Math Initiative. "We thought that the K-3 program's influence would begin to show in 2001. And it did," Picard said (LDOE, 2001). Moreover, the average percentage of second and third graders reading on and above level on the Development Reading Assessment improved from 54.49% in the fall of 1998 to 75.46% in the Fall of 2002 (LDOE, n.d). Even with these gains, both educators and policymakers agreed that more progress was necessary. At that time, one of every five pupils still exited third grade reading below level; in high-poverty districts, the number rose to four or even five out of every ten (LDOE, 2001).

According to Dr. Reid Lyon (2008) of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), prevention and early intervention programs that combine instruction in phoneme awareness, phonics, fluency, and reading comprehension, provided by well-trained teachers, can increase the reading skills of 90% to 95% of poor readers to average reading levels. However, if schools delay intervention until nine years of age (the time that most children with

reading difficulties receive services), approximately 75% of those children will continue to have difficulties learning to read throughout high school (NICHD, 2008).

It was at this juncture that Reading First was introduced. Almost immediately after President George W. Bush took office, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (PL 107-110) established the Reading First Program (Title I, Part B, Subpart 1), a major federal initiative designed to help ensure that all children can read at or above grade level by the end of third grade. By channeling 20 billion dollars into Reading First, the federal government worked with all 50 states and districts to improve student achievement in reading, enhance teacher quality through professional development, and establish statewide accountability and leadership structures (USDOE, 2003).

The Reading First program's overarching goal was to improve the quality of reading instruction, and thereby improve the reading skills and achievement of children in the primary grades through several objectives (USDOE, 2003). First, it required that teachers in kindergarten through third grade use research based reading programs and materials. Second, it increased access to the quality of professional development for all K-3 teachers, including special education teachers, to ensure that they have the necessary skills to teach research based reading programs effectively. An important provision of the RF legislation is that professional development be made available to all schools, not only schools that received RF funding. A third objective was on using valid and reliable assessments, both to monitor progress and to identify students' reading problems. Reading First was intended to help prepare classroom teachers to screen, identify, and address barriers that inhibit students' ability to read at grade level by the end of third grade. More specifically, the programs and the professional development provided to school staff must use reading instructional methods and materials that incorporate the five

essential elements of effective primary-grade reading instruction, as specified in the legislation: 1) phonemic awareness; 2) decoding; 3) vocabulary development; 4) reading fluency, including oral reading skills; and 5) reading comprehension strategies (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Formally known as The Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) of 2001 and commonly referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), this federal statute stipulated that states must provide local education agencies (LEAs) with sufficient funding to make an impact on children's achievement. Louisiana received approximately 152 million dollars over seven years, with full implementation beginning in 2004 and ending in 2008 (Asmus et al., 2008). In Spring 2008, a group of 87 Louisiana schools completed their fourth full year in the Reading First program (an additional 25 schools completed their second year in RF. This group of 87 schools housed third grade students who have received all components of Reading First from kindergarten through third grade.

Longitudinal data between 2004 and 2008 revealed notable gains. First, an increasing number of third grade students in RF schools are reading on Benchmark (increasing from 34% to 51% in the spring of 2008) and fewer are considered at risk (decreasing from 30% to 17%) (Asmus et al., 2008). Second, the achievement gap narrowed for race, free and reduced price lunch program participation, and special education. Particularly in third grade, there is a strong closure to the point where there is essentially no difference in either performance or growth. Finally, results indicated a steady decrease in the special education referral rate over the course of the Reading First program - from approximately 50% of referrals being for reading difficulties when the grant was first implemented to 19% in 2006-2007 (Asmus et al., 2008).

After the completion of the Louisiana Reading First program, The Louisiana Department of Education continued its literacy focus with the K-12 Literacy Pilot Program and Ensuring

Literacy for All (ELFA) Initiative, adopted by the state in 2006. These were two separate literacy initiatives that shared similar program components but targeted different student populations (Table 1.1). Modeled after the Alabama Reading Initiative, the K-12 Literacy Pilot Program is designed to provide students with targeted interventions and continuous support by targeting elementary, middle and high schools that are linked by feeder patterns (LDOE, 2006). ELFA targeted K-4, connected with the No Child Left Behind Act, and aligned with the Reading First instructional model. Both plans sought to close the achievement gap between all student sub-groups by implementing key components well supported by national, scientifically-based research that have proven effective in improving outcomes for students. These components included:

1. frequent assessment of student performance and progress for early identification of struggling students;
2. intensive interventions to address individual and group weaknesses; and
3. extensive professional development and support for teachers.

In essence, ELFA continued the same goal as the previous two state initiatives of ensuring all students perform at grade level in reading by third grade. ELFA was implemented in schools across Louisiana with the highest population of at-risk students. With the experiences and knowledge from implementing two other reading initiatives, the LDOE implemented a more refined model, such as expanding its target audience to include pre-kindergarten and fourth grades. Table 1.2 depicts a timeline of implementation of both Reading First and Ensuring Literacy For All, as well as key events.

Table 1.

Timeline of Reading First (RF) and Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA) Implementation (Stokes et al., 2005; 2006; 2011; Asmus et al., 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010)

<i>Implementation School Year</i>	<i>Literacy Initiative</i>	<i>Notable Notes</i>
Dec 2003	Reading First	First five districts in Louisiana awarded RF funds
2003-2004 Pilot Year	Reading First	
2004-2005 Year 1	Reading First	First year of implementation for Cohort 1 schools
2005-2006 Year 2	Reading First	First year for iLEAP (Spr 2006)
2006-2007 Year 3	Reading First	First year of implementation for Cohort 2 schools
2007-2008 Year 4	Reading First	Final year of RF funding
2008-2009 Year 5	Ensuring Literacy For All	First year of ELFA funding; First year of implementation for Cohort 3 schools
2009-2010 Year 6	Ensuring Literacy For All	First year of implementation for Cohort 4 schools
2010-2011 Year 7	Ensuring Literacy For All	

Louisiana schools participating in the ELFA initiative have shown significant gains, according to an independent evaluation conducted by the Cecil J. Picard Center at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (Asmus et al., 2011). In a survey issued in 2010 on statewide literacy



initiatives, evaluators found that students are benefiting from LDOE's literacy initiative, demonstrating greater improvement than students not enrolled in participating schools. The statewide evaluation concluded that disadvantaged students, those who enter kindergarten with the lowest literacy skills, are showing the most improvement through the literacy initiative. Results of ELFA for the school district targeted in this study will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

In anticipation of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the U.S. Department of Education published the Blueprint for Reform (USDOE, 2010) in March 2010, calling for states to develop comprehensive, evidence-based literacy plans and to align federal, state and local funds to provide high quality literacy instruction (USDOE, 2010). Louisiana responded to this most recent federal call for educational reform and was awarded The Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy (SRCL, pronounced "circle") grant in November 2010. Aimed at improving the reading and writing skills of students from birth through twelfth grade, these federal dollars will be used to fund Louisiana's newest reading initiative, SRCL, which is modeled after the state's highly successful K-12 Literacy Pilot Program and includes all major components of ELFA.

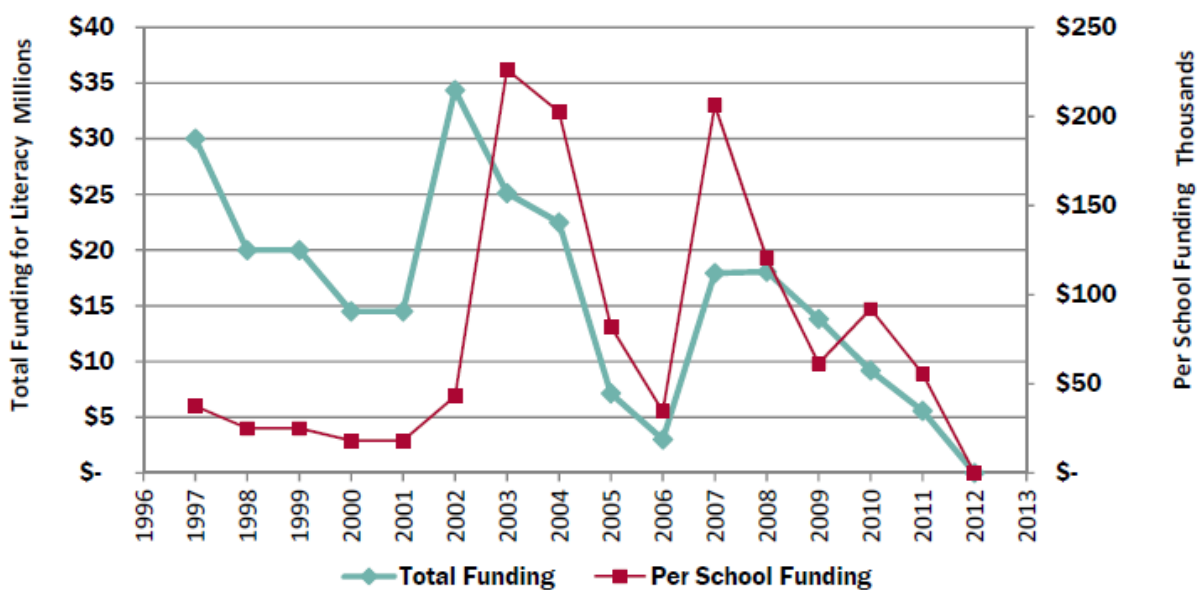
SRCL also funded the development of the Louisiana Comprehensive Literacy Plan (LACLiP). The Louisiana's Comprehensive Literacy Plan (LDOE, 2011) is Louisiana's most comprehensive and most recent plan to ensure Louisiana students meet the literacy expectations outlined in the state's critical goals and the Common Core State Standards (LDOE, 2010). To accomplish these goals, LACLiP accepts the basic premise that success in literacy is a combination of early care and experiences before school, followed by formal education in school settings.

LACLiP serves as a blueprint for all local educational agencies to follow, whereas SRCL provides funds for awarded districts to implement LACLiP. In April 2012, the Louisiana Department of Education announced the first cohort of 16 local school districts and one charter school that the agency recommended to receive sub-grants. A second round of grantees will be selected in 2013. The grant required districts to include members with expertise in literacy development and instruction at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, evaluation, Response-to-Intervention (RTI) model, assessments, validated interventions and instruction for struggling readers, English Language Learners, students with disabilities, professional development, and teacher preparation in literacy development. Table 2 summarizes the various literacy initiatives in Louisiana, and Figure 1.2 provides total funding amounts invested in literacy initiatives, beginning with the K-3 Reading and Math Initiative in 1997 and ending with ELFA in 2012.

Table 2.  
Louisiana's Literacy Initiatives, 1997-Present

<i>Louisiana Literacy Initiative</i>	<i>Implementation Period</i>	<i>Funding Source</i>	<i>Targeted Population</i>	<i>Number of Schools Served</i>
K-3 Reading and Math Initiative	1997-2004	State	K-3	All
Reading First	2004-2008	Federal	K-3	113
K-12 Literacy Pilot Program	2006-2011	State & Federal	K-12	217
Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA)	2008-2011	State	K-4	217
Striving Readers and Comprehensive Literacy	2011 - Present	Federal	0-12 (Birth to 12th Grade)	106

Figure 2. Total Funding For Literacy Initiatives in Louisiana  
Source: Cecil J. Picard Center for Child Development, Ensuring Literacy For All Evaluation 2012



## Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of educational leaders regarding the ELFA components that they believed contributed most to the success of third grade students in a Louisiana public school district. As previously discussed, annual external evaluations of the ELFA initiative existed from 2008 to 2011, but there were no documented studies concerning the perceptions of educational leaders, i.e., principals, district-level coaches, reading supervisors, and state coordinators regarding the most impactful ELFA components within this school district. Since millions of tax dollars have been invested to prepare all students to read by the end of third grade, beginning with the K-3 Reading and Math Initiative in 1997 to the present day, we must seek to understand the leadership practices that contributed to the performance of ELFA students, in hopes of replicating the same effective practices and avoiding problematic ones in other schools.

This study targeted the Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA) initiative for several reasons. First, ELFA was the most recent Louisiana reading initiative (2008-2011) that was fully implemented based on two decades of converging reading research. Timing was a relevant factor since ELFA was a refined product of Reading First and a foundation for the Louisiana Comprehensive Literacy Plan (LDOE, 2011). Further, investigating the perceptions of ELFA leaders required a phenomenon that occurred in recent memory, so that the participants' experiences are accurately shared. Finally, the mandate of iLEAP in the Spring of 2006 provided a consistent assessment measure to quantify the performances of third graders in this study's targeted school district for every year of ELFA implementation. Asmus et al., (2011) also completed a correlation analysis that compared ELFA implementation with performance on the iLEAP. The results provided evidence that the degree to which a district successfully

implemented ELFA components is positively and significantly correlated to its success on the iLEAP (Asmus et al., 2011).

Two different versions of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) were used during ELFA, DIBELS 6th Edition (Good & Kaminski, 2002) and DIBELS Next (Good & Kaminski, 2009) during the three years of ELFA, making analysis of student performance more complicated. Since this study concentrated on examining the perceptions of ELFA leaders, DIBELS was discussed but eliminated as a student performance indicator.

### Importance of This Study

Since 1997, Louisiana's reading initiatives have shown positive results, but the number of students reading on level by third grade has not increased (LDOE, n.d.). This study seeks to gain a better understanding of the implementation of components that led to the effectiveness of these reading initiatives through the eyes of educational leaders responsible for its implementation.

There exists a substantial base of literature regarding the overall statewide effectiveness of ELFA in the form of external evaluation reports (Asmus et al., 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011), but a paucity of research about the perceptions of the administrator and the effects of leadership on implementation of ELFA. Only one question on the ELFA Implementation Survey (Asmus et al., 2009) asked principals and coaches whether they perceived ELFA components to be effective. And, in ELFA's final year of implementation, 2010-2011, the Louisiana Department of Education provided a series of seminars to ELFA administrators that focused on leadership strategies, specific to literacy. Key leadership factors were addressed to support principals in becoming more effective at creating change and improving schools. Some participants expressed a sense of frustration due to a lack of available time. Many were

uncertain how much of the training they would be able to apply at their site. Still, others indicated successful transfer of the training would have required more job-embedded assistance than the seminars provided (Asmus et al., 2011). Considering the plethora of research on the influence of instructional leadership, particularly at the school level (Blase & Blase, 1999; Bogler, 2001; Checkley, 2000; Harcher & Hyle, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1996; Heck, 1999), the time and resources dedicated to developing leaders and examining the perceptions of ELFA administrators were sparse.

While assessment data were widely used to evaluate a program's effectiveness, they do not necessarily pinpoint the qualitative factors that contributed to student achievement. Behind each reading comprehension score for each student lies numerous variables that contributed to that score. These variables may include the instructional programs/materials, parental involvement, school environment, discipline policy, teacher quality, coaching, instructional strategies, school leadership, professional development, intervention time, etc. This study seeks to identify the components of ELFA that the administrators perceived to be most influential in the reading achievement of third graders in an effort to add to the existing literature and illuminate implementation practices in schools. While the administrators' perceptions are an indirect measure of implementation, their perceptions of implementation level should not be discounted.

### Theoretical Framework

This study assumes that high quality leadership at multiple levels of education – school, district, and state – and high quality reading instruction are linked, and together they impact students' learning. Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) found that policy decisions at the state level, district leaders' interactions with principals, and principal-teacher

relationships are all intertwined in a complex environment with one goal in mind – to impact student achievement. State educational agencies play an important role in interpreting policy and providing support and guidance to districts and schools (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Districts that help their principals feel more efficacious about their school improvement work have positive effects on school conditions and student learning (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010). In turn, principal efficacy provides a crucial link between district initiatives, school conditions, and student learning (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010).

To identify and examine multiple levels of leadership actions and factors influencing the Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA) implementation and student achievement, Bandura's socio-psychological theory of self efficacy (1993) is used to frame this study. Efficacy or self efficacy is a belief about one's own ability, or the ability of one's colleagues collectively (collective efficacy), to perform a task or achieve a goal (Bandura, 1997a). Efficacy beliefs, according to this theory, have direct effects on one's choice of activities and settings, and they can affect coping efforts once those activities begin (Bandura, 1997a). Such beliefs determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of failure or difficulty (Bandura, 1997a). People who persist at subjectively threatening activities, that are not actually threatening, gain corrective experiences that further enhance their sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1997a). Given appropriate skills and adequate incentive, efficacy expectations are a major determinant of people's choice of activities, how much effort they will expend and how long they will sustain effort in dealing with stressful situations (Bandura, 1997a).

Efficacy beliefs, according to Bandura (1993), develop in response to cognitive

and affective processes. Among the cognitive mechanisms, and relevant to this research, are perceptions about the level of controllability or alterability of one's working environment. These are perceptions about one's ability to influence, through effort and persistence, what goes on in the environment, as well as the malleability of the environment itself. Bandura (1993) reports evidence suggesting that those with low levels of belief in how controllable their environment is produce little change, even in highly malleable environments. Those with firm beliefs of this sort, through persistence and ingenuity, figure out ways of exercising some control, even in environments that pose challenges to change. This set of efficacy-influencing mechanisms may help to explain student reading achievement data and ELFA implementation results that foster leader efficacy.

### Research Questions

Based on a review of the literature and exploration of the impact of the ELFA initiative, the following research questions were developed to frame this study:

1. What are the perceptions of knowledgeable ELFA administrators regarding the contributing factors within the ELFA initiative toward student reading performance?
2. How did the ELFA administrators' perceptions impact student achievement?
3. What components of effective leadership do ELFA administrators attribute to the success of implementing ELFA?

### Definition of Terms

The trendy nature of educational initiatives, particularly in the area of literacy, calls for clarification of certain terminology. For this study, the term ELFA refers to Ensuring Literacy For All, a state-funded literacy initiative that began in 2008-2009<sup>1</sup> and sustained programmatic

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<sup>1</sup> The public school district in this study, Treeton School District, began as a Reading First district in 2006. Once RF funds ceased, ELFA funds sustained the Reading First program, beginning in the 2008-2009 school year.



components established by Reading First. In its final year, 2010-2011, ELFA impacted 19 districts and 43 schools deemed low-performing in literacy in Louisiana (Asmus et al., 2011).

Other terms used in this study include the following:

1. ELFA administrator – educational leaders, current and former, at the state and district level who oversaw the implementation of ELFA; includes principals, school-based reading coaches, district-level instructional strategists, state reading coordinators, and district reading director.
2. SBRR – scientifically-based reading research; all core and intervention programs have to meet this criteria in order to purchase reading programs with ELFA funds.
3. historically underperforming – According to NCLB (ESEA), students who failed to reach a given states' definition of "proficient" on that states' exam for a period of two years would be considered "historically underperforming" (USDOE, 2001b).
4. disadvantaged population – student population whose educational readiness or educational achievement is below average for their age group and/or grade level.
5. three tier model – a prevention model designed to meet the instructional needs of all young readers. The model has three levels or tiers of instruction: Tier I: Core Instruction; Tier II: Supplemental Instruction; Tier III: Intensive Intervention.
6. reading coach –hired to provide professional development and to assist classroom teachers in delivering reading instruction through modeling, coaching, and conferencing.
7. iLEAP - Integrated Louisiana Educational Assessment Program; state-mandated assessment for third grade students since 2006.
8. DIBELS – Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills; standardized assessment for grades K-4; mandated by the LDOE in all ELFA schools.

9. DIBELS Next – the current version of DIBELS, replacing the previous version, DIBELS 6th Edition
10. Intervention - Reading intervention is a program, supplementary to an existing literacy curriculum, that is provided to students for the primary purpose of increasing reading levels; can be administered both in and out of the traditional classroom environment.
11. Reading block – a 90 minute block of instructional time dedicated to reading and writing.
12. Uninterrupted – no announcements, field trips, or any type of activity that interrupts learning and teaching during the reading block.
13. SPS – School Performance Score

### Organization of This Study

Chapter 1 provided the statement and history of Louisiana's reading initiatives in this study, listing the research questions and terms associated with the initiatives. Chapter 2 discusses federal and state reading reform efforts as well as a comprehensive description of the Ensuring Success For All initiative, including the history and program components. Chapter 3 provides a review of the literature relative to the current study. Chapter 4 describes the research design along with the rationale for the selection of the particular design. Procedures used to accomplish the research are also stated in Chapter 4. The findings of the research are presented in Chapter 5. Finally, Chapter 6 contains a summary of the entire study, conclusions drawn from the research, and implications and recommendations for future studies.

## CHAPTER 2. THE HISTORY OF ELFA

This study focuses on the administrators' perception of Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA) components and their relation to student achievement. This chapter is devoted to a history of Louisiana's Ensuring Literacy For All Initiative, beginning with a trace of federal education governance as it influenced local educational policies in reading instruction and reading leadership. A comprehensive discussion of the history of ELFA, including descriptions of program goals, objectives, and components is included. Program evaluations and policy implications of ELFA, from its origin as Reading First to its current existence within the Louisiana Comprehensive Literacy Plan (LDOE, 2011), will also be discussed.

### The Federal Government and Educational Reform

To set the stage and provide a context for the upcoming discussion of ELFA's origins, Table 3 provides a brief summary of the expanding role of the federal government in educational reform. For most of the United States' history, the federal role in education has been small. States primarily possessed the legal authority to govern education and teachers made instructional decisions independent of much government oversight when they close the classroom door (Superfine, 2011). In the second half of the twentieth century, this governance structure began to change significantly.

Table 3.

The Growth of the Federal Role in Education (Superfine, 2011)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Federal Decision/Law</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
1954	Brown v. Board of Education	Segregation in public schools is unconstitutional; civil rights issues
1958	National Defense Education Act	Innovation in education promoted in response to Sputnik's launch
1965	Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)	Compensatory education for economically disadvantaged children, also known as Title I
1975	Education for All Handicapped Children	Policies to assure children with disabilities a free and appropriate public education
1994	Goals 2000	Development of state standards and assessment systems
1994	Improving America's Schools Act (IASA)	Development of state standards, assessment, and accountability with Title I funds
2002	No Child Left Behind	Reauthorization of the ESEA of 1965; imposed sanctions if states don't meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and other key provisions; includes recommendations by National Reading Panel (NRP) and Reading First
2009	American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)	National economy stimulated during recession; districts and states competed for Race to the Top funds
2011	Guidelines approved to grant waivers to states who are out of compliance with NCLB	All students required to be proficient in reading and math by 2014

### The National Reading Panel

The publication of the National Reading Panel (NRP) report in 2000 forever changed the landscape of reading instruction and teaching practices in the United States, particularly within Reading First districts and subsequently, in Louisiana's Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA) schools. For the first time in history, the federal government, under President Bill Clinton and Congress, asked the director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the Secretary of Education to convene a national panel of experts to produce a report that evaluated actual reading research findings, specifically the efficacy of various approaches to teaching children to read (NICHD, 2000). As a result, the National Reading Panel

(NRP) was formed in 1997. During a two year span, the NRP examined and synthesized over 100,000 studies on effective elementary reading instruction, including the National Research Council Committee's publication, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). This report provided an excellent starting point for the NRP, as it included valuable insights into how the scholarly community viewed effective reading instruction (Shanahan, 2006).

In 2000, the federally-funded National Reading Panel released their findings to include five basic building blocks or pillars, upon which all reading instruction would be based: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (NICHD, 2000). Explicit teaching of these five elements of reading conferred a learning advantage to children, especially those in kindergarten through third grade (Shanahan, 2006). Completed under the presidency of Bill Clinton, findings from the NRP became the basis of educational law under President George W. Bush. Reading First and non-Reading First districts were encouraged to upgrade their reading programs to reflect the NRP findings (Shanahan, 2006). Likewise, many textbook publishers altered or created books and materials to ensure that they address the five components of reading (Shanahan, 2006). The endorsement of commercial reading programs by some government officials would later ensue wide-spread controversy over the intentions of Reading First.

#### Reading First at the Federal Level

Shortly after President George W. Bush took office, he signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 on January 8, 2002 (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). No Child Left Behind, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) under President Lyndon B. Johnson, moved through Congress in 2001 with surprising bipartisan

support (Glazer, 2011). Considered the most sweeping education reform since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, it implemented at the federal level a call for "accountability" in education, based on four basic premises: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on proven, research based teaching methods (Killingsworth, 2010).

NCLB is a major expansion of federal authority over state and local educational policy (Glazer, 2011). Some argued that NCLB of 2001 was perhaps the greatest impact on reading reform in recent years (Dean et al., 2012). According to NCLB every student will achieve 100% proficiency in reading and mathematics by the end of 2013-2014 school year (USDOE, 2001b). However the definition of proficient is unclear, since the federal law gave states the power to define proficiency (Hoff, 2007). This resulted in fifty different definitions of the term and debate over the rigor of each state's standards (Hoff, 2007).

To help states achieve 100% proficiency, the United States Department of Education along with the National Reading Panel established the United States Reading First Initiative. Legally known as Title I, Part B, Subpart 1, Section 1201 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Reading First was established to fund implementation of the National Reading Panel (NRP) recommendations in *Preventing Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Two main recommendations were: 1. specific instruction in the major parts of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) was the best approach to teaching most children to read and; 2. instruction should be systematic (well planned and consistent) and explicit (NICHD, 2000).

To receive Reading First federal funds, schools and districts were required to establish high quality comprehensive scientifically based research (SBR) (USDOE, 2003) reading

instruction for children in grades K-3 that included the five reading components recommended by the NRP: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. By focusing on K-3, the critical years for reading development, Reading First was designed to close the achievement gaps between subgroups of students and eliminate the reading deficit through these five objectives (USDOE, 2001a):

1. Establish reading programs for students in grades K-3 that are founded in scientifically-based reading research, thereby ensuring that every student can read at or above level by grade 4;
2. Offer professional development and other support so that teachers have the knowledge and tools they need to identify and overcome their students' specific reading barriers;
3. Select and administer screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based instructional reading assessments;
4. Select or develop effective instructional materials to assist teachers in implementing the essential components of reading instruction; and
5. Strengthen coordination among schools, early literacy programs, and family literacy programs to improve reading achievement for all children (USDOE, 2001b).

### Scientifically Based Research

Scientifically based research is the required standard in professional development and the foundation of academic instruction under NCLB (USDOE, 2003). The popularization of the term and the use of SBR as the foundation for many education programs and classroom instruction caused a great deal of controversy, particularly in relation to Reading First. Although the term scientifically based research appeared more than 100 times in NCLB, it was the least

publicized goal of NCLB, but the most vital (Grunwald, 2006). Publishers promoted programs based on SBR, whether it did or did not meet the SBR criteria, and instructional practices not based on SBR were condemned.

Controversy and the lack of consensus about what it actually means for something to be based on scientific research in education led Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education Susan Neuman to host a seminar where leading experts in the fields of education and science discussed the meaning of scientifically based research and its status across various disciplines (USDOE, 2002). A synthesis of information from the seminar and other published papers on SBR revealed that scientific research is the only defensible foundation for educational practice (Reyna, 2002; Feuer & Towne, 2002). The alternative, explained Neuman (2006), is to base reading practices on tradition, superstition, or anecdote, all poorly supported claims. The emphasis on scientifically based research supports the consistent use of instructional methods that have been proven effective. To meet the NCLB definition of scientifically based, research must (Stanovich & Stanovich, 2005):

- employ systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;
- involve rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions;
- rely on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers, and across multiple measurements and observations; and
- be accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparatively rigorous, objective, and scientific review.



## The Reading First Controversy

Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings called it the most effective and successful reading initiative in the nation's history (Barbash, 2008). Alabama Superintendent of Education Joseph Morton sent a report to his congressional delegation touting Reading First as the most effective federal program in history (Barbash, 2008). And, the White House Office of Management and Budget, rated Reading First "effective," the only component of NCLB to receive this rating. These are documented testimonies of Reading First's effectiveness, and yet a string of controversies plagued Reading First.

Performance-wise, children in Reading First did not fare better than children in comparison groups; it actually showed that Reading First was less effective than the comparison groups, although RF students had an additional ten minutes of instruction each day on the five component of reading, recommended by the National Reading Panel. This equates to an extra six weeks of reading instruction every year. Moreover, American fourth graders did not improve between 2001 and 2006 on the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) reading test (Krashen, 2008).

Textbook-wise, controversies arose with the allegations of conflicts of interest between several key Reading First leaders and commercial reading and assessment publishers. Grunwald (2006) stated that United States Department of Education officials and several influential reading consultants coerced states and local districts into adopting a small group of unproven textbooks and reading programs with almost no peer-reviewed research behind them. These include basal programs published by Scott Foresman, McGraw-Hill, Houghton Mifflin, and Voyager. Former Secretary of Education Rod Paige and Reid Lyon, a member of the National Reading Panel (NRP) and a consultant to states seeking Reading First grants, reportedly forced New York City

to adopt Voyager or risk losing its Reading First funding (Barbash, 2008). Both men later left government to work for Voyager (Grunwald, 2006). The publisher of Voyager, estimated to be worth \$5 million before Reading First, was sold thereafter for \$380 million (Barbash, 2008).

Three publishing groups representing different reading programs (i.e., Success For All, Dr. Cupp Readers, and Reading Recovery) filed separate complaints with the Office of Inspector General (OIG), requesting an investigation (Barbash, 2008). In September 2006, the OIG issued a report exposing some of Reading First's favoritism and mismanagement (Grunwald, 2006). The OIG reports were highly critical of implementation of the Reading First program, and essentially validated many of the concerns that had been raised in complaints filed with the OIG. Highlights of the OIG reports included internal emails from the Reading First program director, Chris Doherty, who vowed in his emails to deny funding to states who included whole language programs, such as Rigby, in their applications (Barbash, 2008; Grunwald, 2006). Doherty, a proponent of skills-based and phonics-based programs, was also accused of "stacking" the National Reading Panel with mainly skills-based reading experts (Pearson, 2004; Barbash, 2008). As a result, Doherty was forced to resign and his Assistant Director, Sandi Jacobs, reassigned (Barbash, 2008).

Research-wise, controversies have also arisen regarding the application of scientifically based research requirements in NCLB to the Reading First program. The issues involve difficulties of applying existing research to concrete educational interventions. Some observers noted that there are many areas of education research with few, if any, studies based on randomized control trials, viewed by many as the standard of scientifically based research. Some critics of Reading First also argued that the government has unduly narrowed the scientifically based reading research, causing states to be unnecessarily limited in their choices of reading

programs, assessments, and professional development packages. The NRP report, on which the Reading First legislation is based, has also been criticized for ignoring research on other instructional methods and excluding qualitative studies from its research base (Pressley, 2000; Coles, 2002).

Assessment-wise, the effectiveness and popularity of the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) was debated in congressional hearing (Pearson, 2004; Barbash, 2008). Investigators looked into ties between DIBELS and three former members of a committee established by the U.S. Department of Education to review assessment products (Pearson, 2004; Barbash, 2008). Edward J. Kame'enui, a co-creator of DIBELS and a faculty member at the University of Oregon, was named the first commissioner for special education research in the Department of Education in 2005 but resigned that job in June (Pearson, 2004; Barbash, 2008). According to the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Education and Labor, Kame'enui and the other former committee members, Deborah Simmons and Roland H. Good III, also co-authors of DIBELS, were accused of financially benefitting from the sale of DIBELS (Pearson, 2004; Barbash, 2008). John P. Higgins Jr., inspector general of the Department of Education, stated that his office found instances where Education Department officials intervened and worked to influence states to select DIBELS (Pearson, 2004; Barbash, 2008).

### Ensuring Literacy For All

The end of Reading First federal funds in 2008 also signaled the beginning of Louisiana's Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA) Initiative. Data from four years of Reading First, 2005-2008, in Louisiana showed year-to-year growth in several areas, legislators and Louisiana Department of Education leaders developed sustainability plans in order to maintain current trends in reading

growth and performance (Asmus et al.,2008). This plan became known as Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA). They hoped to build upon the following successful results from Reading First (Asmus et al., 2008):

1. Four years of steady increases in the performance of third grade students in Reading First (RF) schools – from 34% to 51% on benchmark or grade level, while students at risk decreased from 30% to 17%.
2. Students attending RF schools display growth rates that are significantly higher than students attending non-RF schools.
3. Substantial decrease in the referral rate to special education for reading difficulties (53% to 19%).
4. Increase in high-quality instructional practices, partly attributed to intensive Reading First professional development.
5. Students who participated in both Reading First and LA 4 perform at higher levels than students who participated in only one of the programs or neither.

Although Louisiana reported successful gains with its Reading First program, legislators and Louisiana Department of Education leaders realized that many children still could not read on grade level by the end of third grade (Asmus et al., 2008). In 2008, a total of 18.3 million was appropriated to sustain the goals of Reading First.

### Goals and Objectives

The main goals of ELFA were 1. to increase academic performance of all students attending ELFA schools, and 2. to modify and improve instruction for public school students in prekindergarten through fourth grade (Asmus et al., 2009). The objectives to meet these goals included the following (Asmus et al., 2008):

- Develop the reading foundation students need for future success.
- Provide the technical assistance and professional development essential for PreK-4th grade teachers and administrators to address the diverse needs of all learners.
- Provide the supports necessary at the district level to have all students reading and writing at or above grade level by 3rd grade.

### Eligibility and Selection

In the 2008-2009 school year, ELFA began with volunteer participation selected through an application process. Preference was given to existing Reading First Schools and the Literacy Pilot Schools who had already proven to be pioneers in increasing student achievement in reading. These schools were also those with the highest population of at-risk students. Local educational agencies (LEAs) who applied were organized into cohorts of schools, according to their initial funding source and the year they joined (Table 4).

Table 4.  
Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA) Cohorts

<i>Cohort</i>	<i>Implementation Year</i>	<i>Eligibility Criteria</i>	<i>Number of Students Served</i>
Cohort 1	2004-2005	Joined 1 <sup>st</sup> year of Reading First; contained greatest number of at risk students, in regards to academic performance and socioeconomic status; affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, shrunk from 111 schools to 87.	Approximately 8500
Cohort 2	2006-2007	Joined 2 <sup>nd</sup> year of Reading First; contained greatest number of at risk students, in regards to academic performance and socioeconomic status.	8174
Cohort 3	2008-2009	Joined 1 <sup>st</sup> year of ELFA; entered ELFA through a voluntary, competitive application process; did not have to meet the same criteria as Cohorts 1 and 2 regarding poverty and poor performance.	5112
Cohort 4	2009-2010	Joined 2 <sup>nd</sup> year of ELFA; entered ELFA through a voluntary, competitive application process; did not have to meet the same criteria as Cohorts 1 and 2 regarding poverty and poor performance.	7930

In its final year of implementation in 2010-2011, nearly 200,000 students in forty districts across the state benefited from Ensuring Literacy For All initiative.

#### Basis for Allocations

District allocations were calculated on the basis of a \$130,000 foundation per school, supplemented by a per pupil allocation of \$210 for every K-3 student, and a 3.5% district administration allowance. Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools with more than 300 K-3 students received an additional \$90,000 to cover the expense of a second Reading Coach.

## Ensuring Literacy For All Model

Using Reading First as a foundation, Louisiana's ELFA Model was a comprehensive, school reform initiative that included the following key components (LDOE, 2003; LDOE, 2011):

1. A three tier instructional model
2. Scientifically based research programs and strategies
3. Extended time for reading and literacy instruction based on grade level
4. Ongoing formative and summative assessments
5. Professional development

### The Three Tier Instructional Model

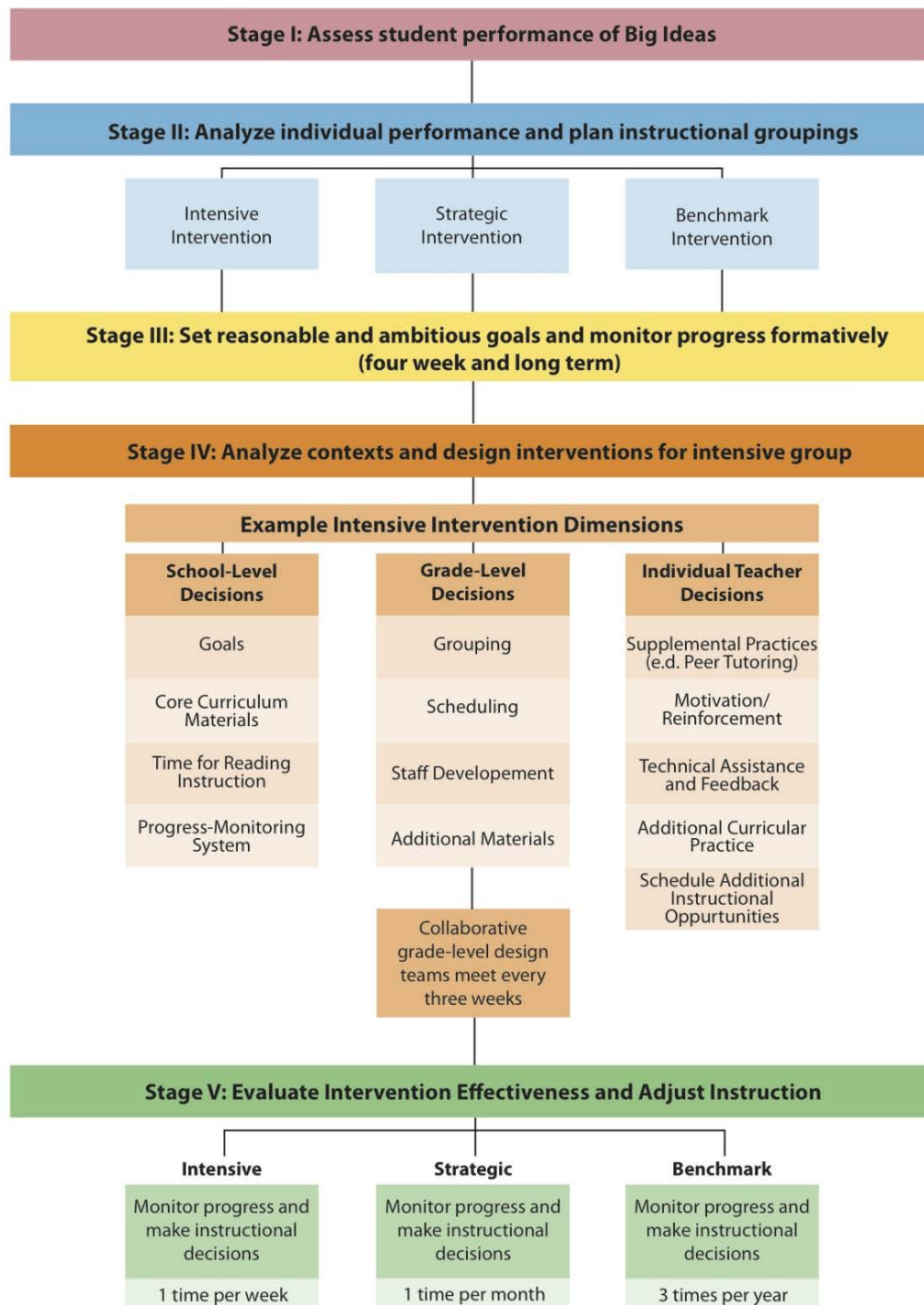
The same three tier model (Adelman & Taylor, 2005; Sugai, Horner, & Gresham, 2002; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003; Walker et al., 1996) that was recommended and used nationally during Reading First was continued in ELFA in order to reach all learners and to give additional accelerated instruction to struggling readers. Modeled after prevention models in the health field, the three tier model is a framework for educators to use in preventing reading difficulties in their students (Vaughn, 2008). In Tier 1, all students received daily focused instruction on grade level reading/language arts curriculum. Teachers in all disciplines were required to teach reading skills within the context of core academic subjects. Student progress was monitored using DIBELS every two weeks and lessons were adjusted based on data. Tier 2 intervention is strategic and targets deficit skill areas through explicit, systematic instruction. Tier 2 students receive strategic instruction for 30 minutes during each session, in addition Tier 1 instruction. In Tier 3, severely struggling students received additional intensive instruction (30-60 minutes per day) by an interventionist, a specialized reading professional, although many

schools lacked qualified personnel (Asmus et al., 2011). Figure 3 provides a roadmap of Louisiana's school-wide three tier model. It starts with student assessment, outlines the intervention process, and evaluates the effectiveness of the intervention and adjusts instruction (Adelman & Taylor, 1998; Sugai, Horner, & Gresham, 2002; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003; Walker et al., 1996).



Figure 3. Three tier model.

Source: Adelman & Taylor, 1998; Sugai, Horner, & Gresham, 2002; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003; Walker et al., 1996



## Scientifically Based Research Programs and Strategies

Research has shown that the inclusion of certain elements and strategies in instructional materials increase their impact on student outcomes (Torgesen, 2007). Literacy leaders responsible for selecting commercially published programs for their core, supplemental, or intervention should examine them for three main components: 1. Instructional Content; 2. Instructional Design; 3. Empirical Evidence (Torgesen, 2007). The characteristics of each of these components are listed in Table 5. Instruction that is guided by a systematic and explicit curriculum is more effective, particularly with at-risk learners, than instruction that does not have these features (Torgesen, 2007).

Table 5.  
Characteristics of Scientifically Based Reading Programs (Torgeson, 2007)

### Scientifically Based Reading Programs

<i>Instructional Content</i>	<i>Instructional Design</i>	<i>Empirical Evidence</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• phonemic awareness</li> <li>• phonics</li> <li>• fluency</li> <li>• vocabulary</li> <li>• comprehension strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• explicit and systematic instructional strategies</li> <li>• coordinated instructional sequences</li> <li>• ample practice opportunities</li> <li>• aligned student materials</li> </ul>	<p><i>Reporting of Results:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer-reviewed journals</li> <li>• Reviews, empirical, special issues</li> <li>• Not all journals created equal</li> <li>• Third Party Investigator</li> <li>• Publisher Materials</li> </ul> <p><i>Experimental Design</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Random Assignment</li> <li>• Control Group</li> <li>• Quasi-Experimental Design</li> <li>• Control Group (participants not randomly assigned)</li> <li>• Participants should be matched on variables such as SES.</li> <li>• Pre-Post, Single Group Design</li> </ul>

## Core Reading Programs

In keeping with those federal and state guidelines, Louisiana's ELFA Program required districts to adopt and implement a comprehensive core reading program (also known as a basal reading program). A core reading program has been defined as the primary instructional tool that teachers use to teach children to learn to read and to ensure they reach reading levels that meet or exceed grade-level standards (USDOE, 2001a). Core programs should help guide both initial and differentiated instruction in the regular classroom. Core programs support instruction in the broad range of reading skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension) required to become a skilled reader and contains teacher's manuals with explicit lesson plans, and provides reading and practice materials for students (Torgeson, 2007).

Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (2012) stated that schools should have classrooms that show the elements of a good core reading program for beginning readers:

- Assessment of students' reading ability (both fluency and word recognition) and strategies to help struggling readers catch up;
- Both direct instruction in sound-symbol relationships and exposure to motivating, interesting reading materials;
- A focus on the relationships between letters and sounds and the process of obtaining meaning from print;
- High-quality instructional materials, including materials that students can read to themselves easily, and more difficult texts that a child can learn to read with the teacher;
- Frequent and sustained opportunities for students to read aloud;
- Practice emphasizing the sound structure of words; and

- Additional instruction through supplementary reading programs for students who fall behind expected levels.

### Supplemental Reading Materials

Core reading programs create a foundation for reading instruction and serve the needs of most students, most of the time (Stewart, 2004). For reading instruction to be effective, however, teachers must supplement the core program with targeted interventions tailored to the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. To ensure that teachers have access to high quality materials for targeted student interventions, RF districts were required to purchase supplemental reading materials from a BESE-approved lists.

### Intervention Programs

Intervention is provided only to students who perform below grade level, as determined by their DIBELS data, in the development of critical reading skills. This instruction will usually be guided by a specific intervention program that focuses on one or more of the key areas of reading development. This type of instruction is needed by only a relatively small minority of students in a class (Stewart, 2004).

In some cases, students may need to receive instruction guided by a comprehensive intervention program that addresses all five areas of reading and is specifically designed to meet their specific needs, while at the same time accelerating their growth toward grade level reading ability. In effective intervention programs, students receive individualized or small-group instruction, opportunities for repeated reading of passages, and are taught reading strategies to help them decipher text (Torgesen, 2001). Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (2012) called for teachers to observe and interact with students as they read authentic texts for genuine purposes,

and then keep anecdotal records of students' developing skills, problems, changes, and goals in reading.

### Extended Time for Reading and Literacy Instruction

The goal of Ensuring Literacy For All is to elevate those students already performing at grade level and bring those students who are performing below grade level up to grade level within one to two years (Dufour, et al., 2004). To achieve this goal, the daily reading block is protected, and additional instruction is carefully differentiated and targeted according to students' specific needs (LDOE, 2003). The primary variable for accelerating students' progress in reading is added instructional time (Dufour et al., 2004; Fielding, Kerr, & Rosier, 2007). Such additional time should include explicit targeted instruction based on data and further assessed for mastery (Dufour et al., 2004; Fielding, Kerr, & Rosier, 2007).

From kindergarten through third grade, there are on average only 720 school days to use in teaching students to read (Fielding, Kerr, & Rosier, 2007). ELFA schools are required to dedicate 90-120 minutes of protected instructional time to K-3 reading instruction, and approximately two to four hours per day of literacy instruction and practice within language arts and content area classes (LDOE, 2006). Students who are reading below grade level receive added instruction beyond the reading block in order to catch up to their peers who are performing at grade level (Dufour et al., 2004; Fielding, Kerr, & Rosier, 2007). These students require additional instructional time that is intentional and explicit (Dufour, et al., 2004; Fielding, Kerr, & Rosier, 2007).

### Ongoing Formative and Summative Assessments

Assessment is the cornerstone of effective teaching practice, and effective reading instruction starts with comprehensive assessment (Lesaux & Marietta, 2012). The degree to

which teachers can support struggling readers varies according to how comprehensive and timely they are in assessing reading competencies (Lesaux & Marietta, 2012). For early readers, comprehensive screening is essential. Research shows that it is possible to predict which young students will have reading difficulties later in life (NICHD, 2000). For example, a child's ability to hear and work with the sounds of spoken language, called phonological awareness, at ages four and five is strongly related to his reading skills in the primary grades (Lipka & Siegel, 2007; NICHD, 2000; Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006; Strickland & Shanahan, 2004); a child's vocabulary at age four is predictive of his third grade reading comprehension skills (NICHD, 2000; Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006; Strickland & Shanahan, 2004).

The legislation of Reading First in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 popularized a skills-based assessment known as the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). Reading First required states to identify and use valid and reliable measures to screen, progress monitor, and diagnose (USDOE, 2001a). Louisiana was one of forty-three states to adopt during its Reading First years and continued in the first two years of ELFA. In 2010, DIBELS NEXT (Good & Kaminski, 2009), a more updated version, was published and replaced DIBELS 6<sup>th</sup> in many schools. Asmus et al., (2011) stated that program evaluation of ELFA in the 2010–11 school year was more complicated than past years because of the transition from DIBELS 6<sup>th</sup> to DIBELS Next.

Researchers have disagreed on the dependence of DIBELS to assess all components of reading. Like Lesaux and Marietta (2012), Pearson (2004) asserted that DIBELS dug too deeply into the infrastructure of reading skill and process and provided many bits and pieces but not the orchestrated whole of reading as a skilled human process. He also stated that DIBELS students

are held accountable to the indicators and required teachers to teach and judge students based on criteria that are not consistent with our best knowledge about reading development.

In an interview with Ruth Kaminski, co-author of DIBELS Next, Dessoiff (2007) quoted Kaminski as saying, "It was never intended to be the be-all and end-all of reading assessment but to work pretty darned well as an indicator of a core skill. Table 6 shows results from a survey of ELFA stakeholders. Overall, the perceived accuracy of DIBELS was high with between 78 and 97 percent of the respondents agreeing that DIBELS was mostly accurate or completely accurate. The group with the smallest amount of support for DIBELS was teachers.

Table 6.  
Accuracy of DIBELS (Asmus et al., 2011).

	<i>Principals</i>	<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Coaches</i>	<i>Coach/Interventionist</i>	<i>Interventionist</i>
<b>Complete accuracy</b>	16.4%	18.3%	25.6%	21.2%	27.0%
<b>Mostly accurate</b>	75.9%	59.2%	69.2%	75.8%	62.7%
<b>Sum of above</b>	92.3%	77.5%	94.8%	97.0%	89.7%
<b>Often inaccurate</b>	1.7%	10.9%	0.9%	0.0%	4.9%
<b>Unreliable</b>	0.0%	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%
<b>Number</b>	109	1156	112	32	197

### Professional Development

Among its many purposes, ELFA was enacted to help state and local educational agencies prepare teachers through ongoing, high quality professional development. The curriculum, environment, programs, and assessments are important elements of quality, but it is the teacher's and literacy leader's ability to implement the curriculum and to use effective

practices that result in long-term gains for children (LDOE, 2011). Professional development for teachers is a key mechanism for improving classroom instruction and student achievement (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Cohen & Hill, 2000; Corcoran, Shields, & Zucker, 1998; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Elmore, 1997; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). Intensive, on-going professional development that includes job-embedded strategies such as coaching and mentoring can provide educators the skills they need to help prepare students for success (Yoon et al., 2007). By contrast, traditional models of professional development such as brief, one-session workshops, training, and single conference sessions appear to have little impact on teacher behavior (Yoon et al., 2007). Therefore, professional development beyond quick, one-time presentations should be planned and implemented.

Professional development is best conducted with groups of teachers from the same school, grade, or department rather than by drawing together individuals from different schools (Yoon et al., 2007). Involvement in the planning and design of professional development by stakeholders increases the level of buy-in and commitment to the plan. Among the benefits for teachers working collaboratively are increased opportunities to talk over learned knowledge, concepts and skills, as well as collaboratively confronting problems that arise during implementation within their unique context (Yoon et al., 2007). When teachers and literacy leaders collaborate to determine needs, decide on a course of action, and implement and support a plan that leads to improved teaching and learning, students win (Huberman & Guskey, 1995).

Yoon et al. (2007) states that professional development should be seen as an extension of a district's or school's overall school improvement plan. Professional development appears to be most successful when it focuses on specific rather than generic or all-purpose content. Research also points to the benefit of using professional development activities that incorporate active



learning, including such activities as discussion about content, hands-on practice opportunities, and discussion of possible implementation issues (Yoon et al., 2007). Activities should be assessment-driven and clearly linked to student learning targets rather than chosen at random. According to Guidance for the Reading First Program (USDOE, 2002b), professional development activities were high quality if they:

1. addressed all five essential reading components;
2. aligned clearly with instructional programs (i.e., core reading programs) as well as state academic and performance standards;
3. included adequate time and opportunities for teachers to learn new concepts and practice what they have learned; and
4. included opportunities for collaboration and feedback from coaches, mentors, peers, and outside experts (USDOE, 2003).

Strong, engaged, and supportive leadership personnel play an instrumental role in building a professional development program that embeds the characteristics of evidence-based, professional development practices (Yoon et al., 2007). It is through this type of professional learning that teacher effectiveness will increase and improved outcomes for all students will be achieved (Yoon et al., 2007). ELFA's plan included professional development strategies that guided teachers and transformed literacy leaders. These strategies included reading/literacy coaches, faculty study groups, annual teacher literacy institutes, and quarterly leadership academies.

## Reading Coaches

In recent years, the literacy coach has become an integral part of a school's literacy team as more educational settings recognize the need for on-site professional development (Dean et al., 2012). In response to No Child Left Behind, schools have looked for on-site development that includes specialists who provide support for classroom teachers (Lynch & Ferguson, 2010). These specialists, often referred to as literacy coaches, help teachers build on their strengths to improve their teaching practice and increase their professional knowledge (Toll, C. A., 2006). The term literacy coach, however, has changed over the years, and the expectations of the role differ among professionals who provide and receive services (Bean, 2004; Bean, Swan, & Knaub, 2003; Dole, 2004; Mraz, Algozzine, & Watson, 2008; Shaw, Smith, Chesler, & Romeo, 2005).

The International Reading Association (IRA, 2006) stated that literacy coaches should primarily work directly with classroom teachers to improve instructional practices. Some literacy coaches focus specifically on supporting classroom teachers in their daily implementation of the school's literacy program (IRA, 2006). Others support teachers by working across subject areas. Most literacy coaches also provide general and specific professional development (Dole, 2004).

According to Shanklin (2007), literacy coaches should be non-evaluative; that is, they should support teachers as they reflect, analyze assessment data, and improve instructional practices. Because of this non-evaluative paradigm, it is essential for literacy coaches to position themselves in a way that teachers view them as supportive, rather than authoritative. Most researchers agree that literacy coaches should be collaborative presences who work with teachers to develop literacy skills alongside their teachers (Burkins, 2007). Therefore, building relationships and establishing trust by maintaining confidentiality and communicating effectively

is the foundation of the literacy coach's work with teachers (L'Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010).

ELFA districts hired and supported literacy coaches for each of their schools (LDOE, 2003). Their roles and responsibilities included professional development to classroom teachers through in-class assistance, including model lessons, assistance in lesson planning, and observing as a colleague who provides nonevaluative feedback (LDOE, 2006). To ensure that reading coaches have the knowledge and skills they need to support instructional change, the LDE recommends that districts appoint experienced elementary teachers with advanced degrees and academic backgrounds in reading to these positions (LDOE, 2003). The coaches are coached by their regional reading coordinators and receive other ongoing training and technical assistance through the Louisiana Department of Education.

### CHAPTER 3. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

This chapter includes a review of relevant literature on literacy leadership, specifically where the efficacy of instructional leaders at the state, district, and school level impacts program implementation and reading achievement. Literature regarding the link between educational leaders such as principals and district administrators and student achievement will also be discussed. Finally, I explore pertinent literature on the influence of educational leaders' perceptions on instructional pedagogy and student performance.

#### Components of Effective Leadership Within Literacy Programs

Scholars believed that the decline in the quality of public school in terms of student achievement is attributed to a lack of quality administrators (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Pitner, 1988; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Gregorian, 2001). On the other hand, several studies point to the necessity of effective literacy programs. Booth and Roswell (2002) stated that schools with successful literacy programs have strong principal leadership with focused attention on setting literacy agenda, supporting teachers, accessing resources, and building a capacity for further growth. According to Century and Levy (2002), leadership and a strong literacy culture, out of all the elements of a successful literacy model, have the greatest potential for sustaining the model over time. Another study by Steckel (2009) concurred that instructional leadership is perhaps the single most important role for elementary principals and other leaders, such as literacy coaches and instructional specialists. These studies point to fact that quality administrators provide effective leadership for quality instruction (Okpala, Hopson & Chapman, 2011). Because quality school and district administrators are paramount in improving student achievement, it is crucial for administrators to be skilled in instructional leadership, assessment strategies, and fiscal management (Okpala, Hopson & Chapman, 2011).

In order to understand the characteristics of effective school leadership, though, it is essential to examine components that foster the development of leadership expertise. According to the Louisiana Comprehensive Literacy Plan (LDOE, 2011), which embodies components of the Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA) initiative, the principal needs an interest in and even a passion for literacy, along with a strong knowledge base about literacy and language development. Other components that contribute to the development of literacy leaders include (LDOE, 2011):

- Creating a shared literacy vision for the school and community
- Organizing a literacy leadership team
- Analyzing multiple forms of student, school, and teacher data
- Engaging in professional development
- Studying evidence-based instructional practices in reading, spelling, and writing
- Identifying and prioritizing a list of targeted students for intervention or support

However, real sustainability of literacy instructional improvements requires leaders and all staff members to maintain core beliefs and values, i.e., literacy culture, for their program (LDOE, 2011). Although the principal is key to helping the literacy culture survive and thrive, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE, 2011) recommends that the principal involves other educators and community members in leadership position through shared leadership (Lambert, 2003).

The term shared leadership is closely linked to the concept of professional learning communities in educational literature (Lambert, 2003). The key notion is that leadership is about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively (Lambert, 2003). Shared leadership builds an environment that supports common planning time

and collaboration to improve instructional and infrastructural changes such as extended time for literacy and increased family involvement (LDOE, 2011). When principals and teachers share leadership, teachers' working relationships with one another are stronger and student achievement is higher (Louis et al., 2010). Togneri and Anderson (2003) assert that principals who share leadership responsibilities with others will be less subject to burnout than principals who attempt the challenges and complexities of leadership alone. Further, principal leadership that elicits high levels of commitment and professionalism from teachers, and works interactively with the school staff to share instructional leadership capacity, is associated with school organizations that learn and perform at high levels (Marks & Printy, 2003).

According to Lambert (2003), shared leadership is based on the following assumptions:

- Everyone has the right, responsibility, and ability to be a leader.
- People's participation depends on how leadership is defined.
- Educators yearn to be more fully who they are - purposeful, professional human beings.
- Leadership is an essential aspect of an educator's professional life.

Being responsible for the learning of colleagues is at the center of shared leadership (Lambert, 2003). Experiencing informal influence and feedback through professional discussions encourages a focus on shared practices and goals (Crispeels, Castillo, & Brown, 2000; Marks & Printy, 2003) and it may foster organizational innovation (Harris, 2009). By understanding that learning and leading are firmly linked within the school community, principals can take the first step in building shared instructional leadership capacity within their organizations (Lambert, 2003).

However, quantitative studies linking shared leadership to student learning are virtually nonexistent (Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). A search through the peer-reviewed, scholarly

journals and the ERIC database reveals only a handful of articles that list shared leadership in their title or descriptors. Those that do are very much what Smylie would term “mostly descriptive, lacking strong conceptual definitions and overreliance on perceptual data” (Smylie, 1997, p. 574). As such, the quantitatively verifiable merits of shared leadership remain to be seen.

On the other hand, Marks and Printy (2003) emphasized the benefits of shared leadership in eliciting the instructional leadership of teachers for improving student performance. This shared leadership approach may help galvanize a school around ambitious academic goals and establish conditions that support teachers and facilitate student success (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). For more than three decades, reform proposals have recommended the inclusion of teachers in shared leadership roles. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, efforts to promote school-based management often included formal representation of teachers in decision making, although many investigations of these efforts report weak implementation (Anderson, 1998; Malen, 1994). The Education Commission of the States, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and teacher professional associations advocated teachers’ participation in leadership and decision-making task (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

These supporters of shared leadership are compatible with findings from some research which suggested that increasing teacher influence may improve schools significantly (Louis et al., 2010; Louis et al., 2008; Mayrowetz & Smylie, 2004; Spillane, Halvorson, & Diamond, 2004). Other research, however, suggested that teacher involvement in formal decision-making or leadership roles have limited impact on student achievement (Marks & Louis, 1997; Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002). Still, what constitutes and promotes the distribution or sharing of leadership in a school is somewhat unclear. Sharing leadership may have its greatest impact by reducing teacher isolation and increasing commitment to the common good (Pounder, 1999).

## Perceptions of Educational Leaders

The research base that informs how educational leaders in administrative positions (i.e., principals, literacy coaches, reading supervisors, curriculum coordinators) perceive reading reform initiatives and/or instructional practices, in general, is scarce. Richardson (1994) emphasized that school administrators' beliefs drive instructional pedagogy, and Hart (2002) concluded that administrator's perceptions should be taken into consideration in an effort to change practices. However, a few studies on the principals' perceptions of reading coaches exist, spawned mainly by the proliferation of reading coaches as part of the No Child Left Behind Act, P.L. 107-110. Cramer (2007) examined the perceptions of the effects of the relationship between six principals and six reading coaches. The results indicated the following:

1. reading coach's relationship with the principal played an essential role in the coaches' perceptions of success;
2. The relationship with the principal is necessary no matter how much training the coach receives;
3. Principals must support the coaches by positioning them in the building as leaders who provide a valuable service;
4. Principals must understand the role of the coach in order to develop a close relationship.

Mraz, Algozzine, and Watson (2009) found that the perceptions of school level administrators are important because they play a pivotal role in actualizing the role of the reading coach in ways that will support the advancement of teachers and, in turn, the quality of instruction offered to students. Principals viewed reading coaches as being effective at carrying out their daily responsibilities and as necessary members of the school's faculty (Dean, 2010).



More recently, Dean and Dyal (2012) found that the reading coach's role is misunderstood by principals because there remains little consistency in the training, backgrounds, and skills required for such positions.

Regarding perceptions of policy hierarchy, which is inherent in initiatives funded and originated by state educational agencies, Louis et al. (2010) discovered that perceptions can influence program implementation. In one study, administrators clearly accepted the state's role in setting curriculum standards and accountability (Louis et al., 2010). At the same time, the state is perceived as an adversary regarding policy and change (Louis et al., 2010). Leadership at the state level entails dealing with policies and practices that may seem far removed from people whose interest in schools is more immediate and concrete, such as students and parents (Louis et al., 2010). State-level leaders are charged with formulating policies that will frame practice in districts and schools more broadly, according to the public interest, and to provide incentives and sanctions for local implementation of those policies (Louis et al., 2010). Louis et al. stated that "tensions have been inevitable in these efforts, which have left no state untouched" (p. 218). Educators who are affected by proposed changes often see new policies and regulations as distractions from or add-ons to their real work, and therefore interpret those policies to fit their needs (Weatherly & Lipsky, 1977). Rather than being passive recipients of policy, they are actors in the process of making policy. Professionals in schools, for example, have opportunities to pick and choose among the inducements and constraints that are offered by policies to further their own interests (Honig & Hatch, 2004) as they orchestrate the local policy process (Wallace, 2003). Each of these perspectives has validity in that it describes and explains certain aspects of policy work. In sum, districts and schools generally view states as partners with limited vision

and even fewer resources (Louis et al., 2010). They move forward in the spirit of complying with state agendas and take account of the meaning behind the prescribed state plans.

In another study, results show that student achievement is higher where teachers perceive greater involvement by parents, and where teachers indicate that they practice shared leadership (Louis et al., 2010). Direct, active involvement by parents, as perceived by teachers, can have an impact on student learning. Although Feuerstein's (2000) research indicates that schools have less influence over subtle forms of parent involvement, Louis et al. (2010) found that teachers and principals have more influence on parental and community involvement, and its link to student learning than others have thought. Because parental involvement is linked to student achievement by correlation, teachers and principals can play a role in increasing student learning by creating a culture of shared leadership and responsibility among school staff members and within the wider community. In sum, examining leader perceptions of shared leadership may help us understand organizational trends and capacity for leadership within literacy initiatives such as Ensuring Literacy For All.

#### Leader Efficacy

One of the most powerful ways in which districts influence teaching and learning is through the contribution they make to feelings of professional efficacy on the part of school principals. In addition to defining the meaning of self efficacy and its several dimensions, this section identifies the effects of self efficacy feelings on a leader's behavior and the consequences of that behavior for others. Through quantitative and qualitative studies, Louis et al. (2010) found that principal efficacy provides a crucial link between district initiatives, school conditions, and student learning. Principals who believe they are working collaboratively toward clear and common goals with district personnel, other principals, and teachers in their schools are

more confident leaders (Louis et al., 2010). Pointing to the similarity of efficacy and self-confidence, McCormick (2001) claims that leadership self efficacy or confidence is likely the key cognitive variable regulating leader functioning in a dynamic environment.

Most leader efficacy studies have been influenced by Bandura's socio-psychological theory of self efficacy (e.g., 1982, 1986, 1993, 1997a, 1997b). Efficacy beliefs, according to this theory, have directive effects on one's choice of activities and settings, and they can affect coping efforts once those activities begin (Bandura, 1993). Such beliefs determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of failure or difficulty (Bandura, 1993). People who persist at subjectively threatening activities that are not actually threatening gain corrective experiences that further enhance their sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1997a). Given appropriate skills and adequate incentives, efficacy expectations are a major determinant of people's choice of activities, how much effort they will expend and how long they will sustain effort in dealing with stressful situations (Bandura, 1997a). For example, districts that help their principals feel more efficacious about their school improvement work have positive effects on school conditions and student learning (Louis et al., 2010). Districts should require the development of improvement plans in all schools, with improvement goals expected to be clear and aligned with state and district standards, but with considerable discretion left to the school to determine the paths to goal achievement (Louis et al., 2010).

According to Bandura (1993), efficacy beliefs develop in response to cognitive and affective processes. Among the cognitive mechanisms, and potentially relevant to this research study, are perceptions about the level of controllable or alterable of one's working environment. These are perceptions about one's ability to influence, through effort and persistence, what goes on in the environment, as well as the malleability of the environment

itself (Bandura, 1993). Those with low levels of belief in how controllable their environment is produce little change, even in highly malleable environments (Bandura, 1993). Those with firm beliefs, through persistence and ingenuity, figure out ways of exercising some control, even in environments that pose challenges to change (Bandura, 1993). This set of efficacy-influencing mechanisms may help to explain ELFA program components that foster leader efficacy.

Self efficacy beliefs also evolve in response to motivational and affective processes. These beliefs influence motivation by determining the goals that people set for themselves (Locke & Latham, 1984), how much effort they expend, how long they persevere in the face of obstacles, and their resilience in the face of failure. People are motivated to reduce the gap between perceived and desired performance and to set themselves challenging goals which they then work hard to accomplish (Bandura, 1993). They mobilize their skills and effort to accomplish what they seek (Bandura, 1993). Such beliefs may be influenced by some of the conditions that principals experience in their districts.

Literature on the influence of demographic variables on leader efficacy seems to be weak or non-existent (Gareis & Tschannen-Moran, 2005). For example, virtually no evidence exists to suggest that school level or size (DeMoulin, 1992), teacher's age or total years of experience in education, student socio-economic status (SES) or student ethnicity, influence leader efficacy (Gareis & Tschannen-Moran, 2005; Lucas, 2003; and Roberts, 1997). Likewise, personal characteristics (i.e., leader's gender, experience, race, and ethnicity) have no impact on leader efficacy (Louis et al. 2010).

On the other hand, organizational characteristics such as district size and school level are significant moderators of district effects on school-leader efficacy (Louis et al., 2010). The larger the district, the less the influence (Louis et al., 2010). Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and

Anderson (2010) also found that districts have larger effects on elementary than secondary school leaders. Elementary schools are typically more sensitive than secondary schools to leadership influence, although most other leader-efficacy research reported mostly non-significant effects (DeMoulin, 1992; Dimmonck & Hattie, 1996).

Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) suggested that investment in the professional development of school leaders will have limited effects on efficacy and student achievement unless districts also develop clear goals for improvement. On the other hand, setting targets and emphasizing responsibility for achieving them is not likely to produce a payoff for students, unless those initiatives are accompanied by leadership development practices that principals perceive as helping them to improve their personal competencies (Louis et al., 2010). This study aims to identify these leadership practices that contributed to student achievement in successful ELFA schools.

## CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a detailed description of the research methodology that was utilized in this study. The chapter is organized into several sections to provide a framework within which to describe the research plan. Needing a suitable explorative research design that would prevent or restrict my own biases, I chose to conduct a qualitative phenomenology study.

### Rationale for Qualitative Research

Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (p. 204). Given that the purpose of this study is to understand educational leaders’ perceptions and lived experiences as related to the implementation and effectiveness of the Ensuring Literacy For All initiative, an interpretive and naturalistic approach, in which data are collected through interviews, seems most appropriate.

While quantitative research reveals statistics and offers the bird’s eye view, it fails to furnish a worm’s eye view as to how leaders describe their experiences. Hakim (2000) asserts that “the worm can only investigate things up close and does not necessarily know much about the wider world” (p. 36). Furthermore, Silverman (2001) advises that there are areas of social reality that statistics cannot measure and that qualitative methods “can provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data” (p. 32). This is clearly illustrated in each published ELFA Annual Evaluation Report (Asmus et al.), from 2008 to 2011. Program effectiveness relied heavily on assessment data and data derived from surveys. Although qualitative data in the forms of focus groups, observations, and surveys were analyzed and contributed to the evaluation, the enormity of both initiatives

prevented the external evaluators from obtaining the critical worm's eye view (Hakim, 2000) that could possibly illuminate a more holistic view of the participants' experiences.

### Rationale for Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of experience and the ways in which things present themselves in and through experience. The German philosopher and founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), "sought to develop a new philosophical method which would lend absolute certainty to a disintegrating civilization" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 54).

The aim of phenomenology is the return to the concrete, captured by the slogan "Back to the things themselves!" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 56; Kruger, 1988, p. 28; Moustakas, 1994, p. 26), whereas the aim of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts (Giorgi, 1985). According to Welman and Kruger (1999, p. 189), "the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved." A researcher applying phenomenology is concerned with the lived experiences of the people (Greene, 1997, Holloway, 1997; Kruger, 1988; Kvale, 1996; Maypole & Davies, 2001) involved, or who were involved, with the issue being researched.

Phenomenologists, in contrast to positivists, believe that the researcher cannot be detached from her own presuppositions and the researcher should not pretend otherwise (Hammersley, 2000). In this regard, Mouton and Marais (1990, p. 12) state that individual researchers "hold explicit beliefs." The intention of this study, at the outset, is to gather data regarding the perspectives of research participants about the phenomenon of the contribution of elements within the Ensuring Literacy For All initiative towards students' reading performance.

In order to uncover the social and psychological phenomena of ELFA leaders, I utilized Moustakas' (1994, p. 105) methods of preparing phenomenological research:

1. Formulating the question
2. Conducting a comprehensive review of professional and research literature
3. Constructing criteria to locate appropriate participants
4. Providing participants with instructions on the nature of the research and obtaining informed consent
5. Developing a set of questions to guide the interview process
6. Conducting and recording interviews
7. Organizing and analyzing data to facilitate development of individual textual and structural descriptions, including composite descriptions.

This systematic process of phenomenology aligns with qualitative research methods promoted by Patton (1990), Marshall and Rossman (1995), and Glesne and Peshkin (1992). Following these steps grants the researcher substance to guide the study and complete data analysis.

#### Role of the Researcher

As a phenomenological researcher, I must examine and set aside my beliefs and prejudgments concerning the phenomenon being studied. Husserl refers to this “freedom from suppositions the *epoche*, a Greek word meaning to stay away from or abstain” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). This is critical in order for the researcher to be receptive and open to the descriptions and meanings of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The following are my personal and professional experiences that have influenced me. I offer this information to alert the reader to any biases that I may have.



I am a first generation Vietnamese-American, uprooted from my native Vietnam on April 30, 1975, the final day of the Vietnam War when the Communist regime conquered South Vietnam. Leaving Vietnam was non-negotiable, since my father served as a weapons officer for the non-Communist South Vietnam, and being captured meant death or lifetime imprisonment. I was only two years old and a heavy burden to my parents and siblings during our escape to freedom. By the grace of God, we made it to the United States and settled in Algiers, Louisiana with no money, no knowledge of English, and no knowledge of our new world. Thankfully, the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New Orleans helped with housing and our American sponsors with basic necessities such as food and clothing.

At the onset, my parents knew that our ticket to success lay in securing a good, solid education. Though I was a mediocre student, I discovered early on that endurance and diligence would save me and my family. Enduring the taunts and bullying by my American classmates, minding my teachers, and diligently attempting my classwork eventually empowered me to finally learn to read and write fluently towards the end of fourth grade. Difficult is an understatement to describe my journey, but the alternative to literacy was unacceptable. The process of learning to read and reading to learn was a hardship exacerbated for an English language learner. I am indebted to Dick and Jane and their predictable, decodable stories.

I have reflected on my elementary school years many times over the course of my career as an educator, and understand first-hand the many obstacles that students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds must overcome. My first job after graduating from Loyola University of New Orleans in 1996 was the position of a sixth grade English teacher in the Jefferson Parish Public School System. My classroom years were pivotal in my

professional career as they ignited my passion for curriculum and instruction, leadership, and reading.

After three and a half years of teaching reading and writing to middle school students, I was tapped to become a district-level literacy coach. Two years later, I was asked to take the position of English Language Arts (ELA) Consultant, a humble title equivalent to supervisor of elementary ELA instruction over 53 elementary schools in Jefferson. This job also came with two other major responsibilities: compliance officer of The Louisiana Law for Dyslexia and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. At 27 years of age, I held the record in Jefferson Parish as the youngest to occupy the position and the first Vietnamese-American to do so.

In 2002, when President George W. Bush approved Reading First, I was responsible for securing the competitive grant for Jefferson Parish. We were one of the first five districts to receive the award in December 2003. At that point, I was too attached to Reading First and excited about all of its intentions. As a result, I applied for the position of Reading First Administrator. I was granted the job and delved deeper than ever into the world of reading research, best practices, assessments, professional development, and leadership. These factors were all part of my former job as the district's supervisor of ELA, but significantly enhanced, due mainly to the mandates of Reading First. Throughout my various positions in Jefferson, I also earned two Master's degrees from the University of New Orleans, a Master of Education in Special Education, Gifted/Talented and a Master of Education in Leadership and Supervision.

When Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, I evacuated to Baton Rouge and eventually married my husband who resided there. After a year of frustrated commuting from Baton Rouge to New Orleans, I resigned as Reading First Administrator and began a new career in the publishing industry as the South Louisiana Sales Representative for McGraw-Hill Education. In this

capacity, I remained close to curriculum issues, particularly in the area of reading, and acted more as a resource to the districts I serviced rather than a sales person. I also established contacts with district literacy leaders, some of whom have helped me secure my list of research participants. My various positions as a reading educator, publishing representative, and active member of the Louisiana Reading Association significantly developed my knowledge of teaching children to read. I recognize that the participants in my study will express a variety of beliefs and views related to working with Ensuring Literacy For All schools. I will respect and value their experiences and honor their perspectives.

#### Research Site

Treeton School District was selected for this study for a number of reasons. Housing over 10,000 students, Treeton provides a diverse number of schools, based on their student population, socioeconomic climate, classroom environment, and varied leadership styles, from the district level to the school level. Over 50% of Treeton's student population are minorities and receive free and reduced price lunch. Most importantly, Treeton houses ELFA schools that began implementation during the 2006-2007 school year and ended in 2010-2011. This timeframe allowed me to use iLEAP data, which was mandated by the Louisiana Department of Education for all public school third graders beginning in Spring 2006. The use of iLEAP data, the only consistent assessment measurement tool used during the duration of ELFA allowed the study's participants to fully evaluate the program's effectiveness since third grade students have received ELFA instruction for four complete school years, kindergarten through third grade.

Figure 4 and Figure 5 illustrate iLEAP English Language Arts data for the two ELFA schools in Treeton School District during the entire duration of ELFA implementation. Each figure graphs iLEAP scores from pre- ELFA (Spring 2006), during ELFA (Spring 2010), and

post-ELFA (Spring 2012). This depiction shows the positive influence of ELFA in terms of student achievement, as measured by iLEAP.

Figure 4. Grade 3 iLEAP English Language Arts for Sycamore Elementary.

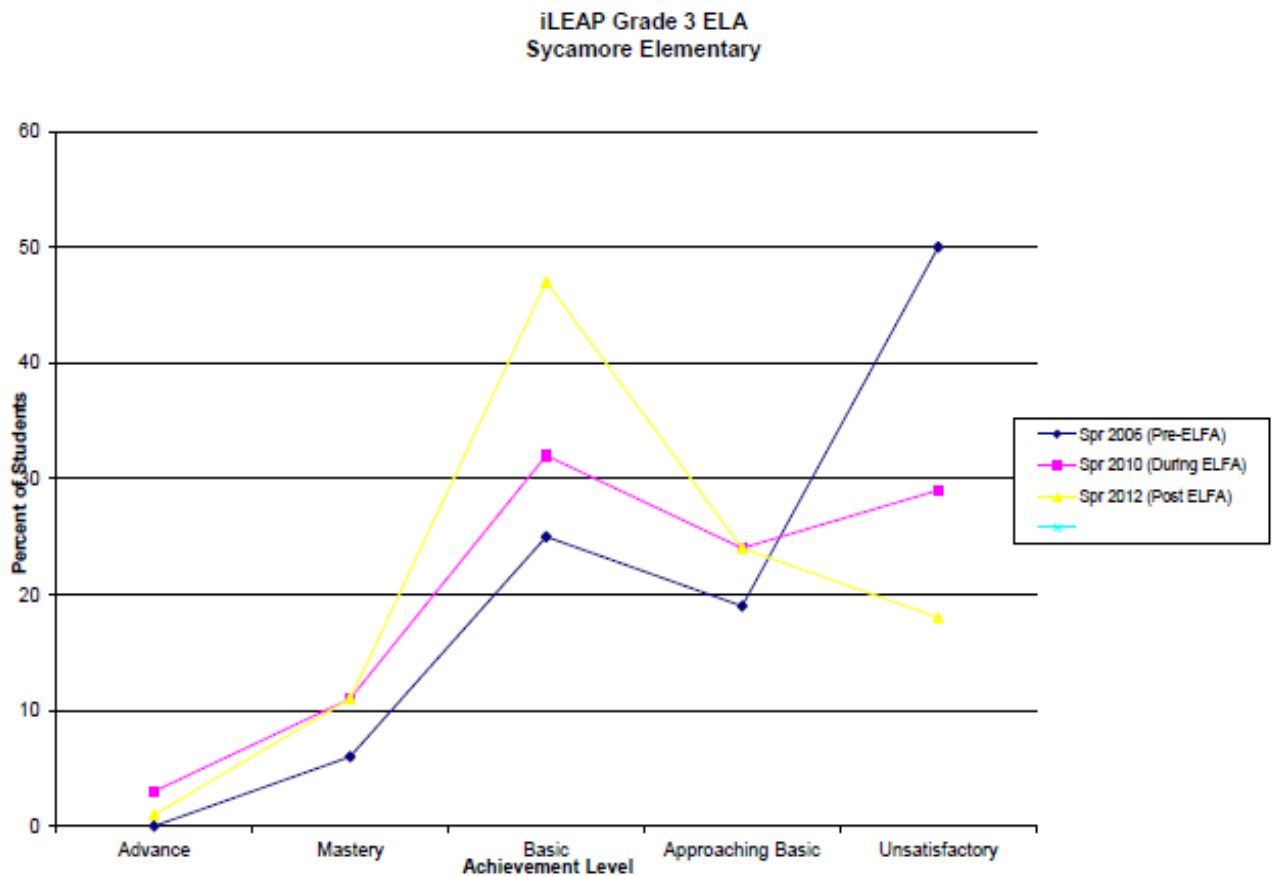
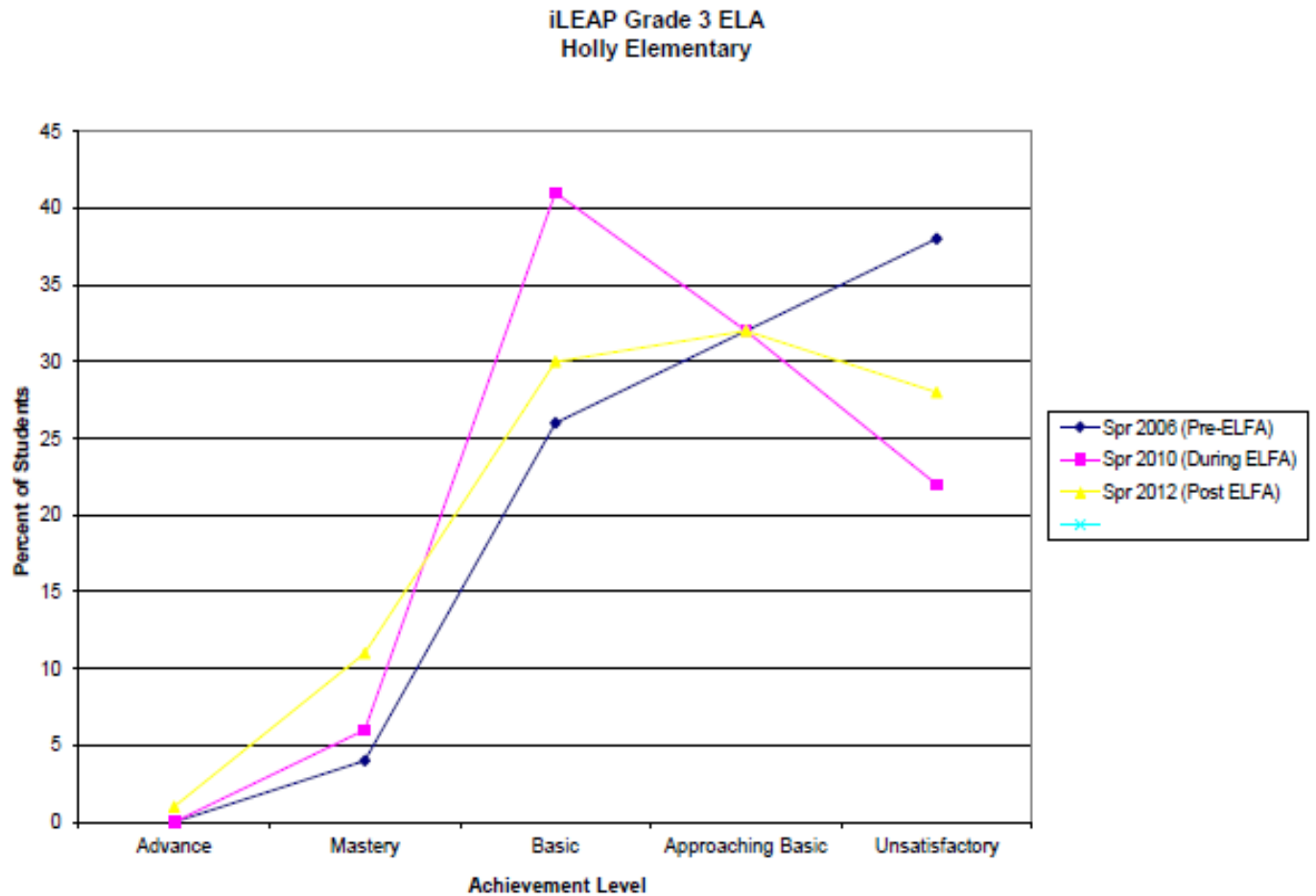


Figure 5. Grade 3 iLEAP English Language Arts for Holly Elementary.



#### Participant Selection

This study included a purposive sample (Patton, 1990) of two Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA) public schools located in Louisiana and six participants who worked directly with the implementation of ELFA in those schools. The schools were specifically selected based on several criteria. First, both schools significantly increased their iLEAP English Language Arts scores from Spring 2006 before ELFA was implemented to Spring 2012 when ELFA ended. Since this study seeks to examine the influence of leader perceptions on student achievement and components of effective leadership, only successful ELFA schools showing evidence of student

achievement were sampled. Second, these schools share a history of receiving both Reading First and ELFA funds, collectively from 2007 to 2011. The latter criteria places them in Cohort 2 of the ELFA population, meaning that both schools began implementation in the 2006-2007 school year.

According to Hycner (1999, p. 156), “the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice versa) including even the type of participants” in a research study. I chose criterion sampling, considered by Welman and Kruger (1999) as the most valid kind of non-probability sampling, to identify the participants. I selected the sample based on my judgment and the purpose of the research (Babbie, 1995; Greig & Taylor, 1999; Schwandt, 1997), selecting those who “have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched” (Kruger, 1988, p. 150). According to van Manen (1990), “the purpose of an indepth interview study is to understand the experiences of those who are interviewed, not to predict or to control that experience” (p. 22). Participants selected for this study, then, had to provide enough experiential “detail and in sufficient depth that those who read the study can connect to that experience, learn how it is constituted, and deepen their understanding of the issues it reflects” (Seidman, 2006, p.51). Accordingly, participants were selected based on the appropriateness and richness of their characteristics and experiences relevant to this study. Participants were initially identified by Treeton central office administrators who defined them as “the best” and who met the following three criteria:

- An educator with knowledge of ELFA implementation plans
- A stakeholder in the implementation of ELFA, from 2006-2007 through 2010-2011
- A reading educator with administrative and leadership responsibilities at the state, district or school level, e.g., reading coordinator in the State Literacy Department; school-based reading coach; principal; district-level literacy coach; district director.

In an effort to utilize maximum variation sampling (Maykut & Morehouse, 2000), a purposefully selected sample of persons or settings that represent a wide range of experience related to the phenomenon of interest, I requested recommendations of participants representing the state, district, and school level. With a maximum variation sample, the goal was not to build a random and generalizable sample, but rather to try to represent a range of experiences related to the study (Seidman, 1998).

### Sufficiency and Saturation

Seidman (2006) identified two criteria for determining the number of participants: sufficiency and saturation of information. Sufficiency refers to the number and range of participants required to reflect those in the population, while saturation of information refers to the point where the researcher no longer learns anything new from the data collection (Seidman, 2006). Boyd (2001) regards two to ten participants as sufficient to reach saturation and Creswell (1998) recommends “long interviews with up to ten people” (p. 65) for a phenomenological study. Finally, Creswell (2003) noted, that “the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants that will help the researcher to understand the research question” (p. 185).

In order to describe the phenomenon as accurately as possible and utilize maximum variation sampling, I aimed for a minimum of six research participants, but remained open to interviewing more ELFA leaders until the purpose of the study was exhausted or saturated, that is when interviewees introduced no new perspectives on the topic.

To widen the participant pool, I used snowball sampling (Coleman, 1958; Spreen, 1992). Snowballing is a method of expanding the sample by asking one informant or participant to recommend others for interviewing (Babbie, 1995; Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Bailey (1996),

Holloway (1997), and Greig and Taylor (1999) called those through whom entry is gained gatekeepers and those who volunteer assistance key actors or key insiders. Neuman (2000) qualifies a gatekeeper as “someone with the formal or informal authority to control access to a site” (p. 352), a person from whom permission is required. Jade, my gatekeeper and a district level literacy coach, provided a list of three potential research participants, in addition to herself, at the state, district, and school levels who were instrumental with the successful implementation of ELFA. Jade’s recommendations included literacy leaders that I also knew, some personally and some professionally.

Maintaining fidelity to snowball and purposive sampling, I requested recommendations from my first interviewee, Shannon, for names of other ELFA administrators to interview, at her discretion. Shannon was able to name three other administrators that met the participant criteria. It was somewhat difficult for some to allocate time for the interview, due to issues associated with their tremendous job responsibilities, but also because of the district’s vague and lack of guidance with the implementation of the Common Core for State Standards. Eventually, I was still able to complete all interviews between August 2013 and September 2013.

In order to ensure ethical research, I used the University of New Orleans Institutional Review Board’s (IRB) consent form, which also contains Bailey’s (1996) recommended items:

- The subject’s acknowledgement of participating in research
- The purpose of the research (without stating the central research question)
- The procedures of the research
- The risk and benefits of the research
- The voluntary nature of research participation
- The subject’s (informant’s) right to stop the research at any time



- The procedures used to protect confidentiality (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000; Kvale, 1996, Street, 1998).

The consent form (Appendix A) was provided to each participant in my introductory email and explained to them at the beginning of each interview. Participants were informed about the guarantee of confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used in place of the participant, district, and school names. Every participant interviewed signed the consent form, indicating their consent and understanding of the research project. These forms were collected prior to leaving each interview site.

#### Data Collection Procedures

Typically, the phenomenological interview constitutes an unstructured, in-depth process, using open-ended comments and questions to allow the data to emerge (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). “Doing phenomenology” means capturing “rich descriptions of phenomena and their settings” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 104). Kvale (1996, p.1) remarks with regard to data capturing during the qualitative interview that it “is literally an interview, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest,” where the researcher attempts to “understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold meaning of people’s experiences.” Seidman (1998) states that the purpose of interviewing is not to get answers to questions, not to test hypotheses, and not to evaluate as the term is used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 1998). For this reason, the interview protocol was “directed to the participant’s experiences, feelings, beliefs, and convictions” (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 196) about the phenomena.

After the University of New Orleans Internal Review Board approved the study's protocol (Appendix C), I made contact with potential participants, explained the study, and secured their informed consent. All potential participants completed a short survey via email to ascertain the number of years they have taught, current job positions, job title during ELFA, the grade level and content areas they have taught, their education and work experience (Table 7). I then conducted an in-depth interview with each of the administrators who met the criteria and were available.

Specific questions structured each interview, “a conscious attempt by the researcher to find out more information about the setting of the person” (Bailey, 1996, p. 72). Yet, the interviews were not so structured as to restrict what Glesne and Peshkin (1992) refer to as “unexpected leads that arise in the course of your interviewing” (p. 92). The alignment of research and interview questions in Table 7 were developed with the original research intent: to examine the perceptions of Ensuring Literacy For All leaders as they relate to student achievement. In developing the interview questions, I considered how they have the potential to address the research questions.

Table 7. Alignment of Interview and Research Questions

<i>Research Question</i>	<i>Interview Questions Aligned to Research Question</i>
<p>1. What are the perceptions of knowledgeable ELFA administrators regarding the contributing factors within the ELFA initiative toward student reading performance?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me about your experiences with the ELFA initiative.</li> <li>• Which of these instructional factors contributed most to student achievement?</li> <li>• Which of these implementation factors contributed most to student achievement?</li> <li>• What did professional development look like?</li> <li>• How was professional development supported?</li> <li>• In your opinion, how were teaching practices improved because of professional development?</li> <li>• How did ELFA compare to other state reading reform efforts you have been involved with in the past.</li> <li>• How has reading instruction [at your school] [in your district] [across the state] changed since the implementation of ELFA?</li> <li>• What factors/conditions do you attribute these changes?</li> <li>• What are the impacts ELFA has had on students in your charge? Teachers?</li> <li>• Were there any challenges or obstacles to ELFA implementation? What were they?</li> <li>• How did you overcome the challenges or obstacles?</li> </ul>
<p>2. How did the ELFA administrators' perceptions impact student achievement?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe the academic needs of the student population served by ELFA?</li> <li>• How did this student population's grades and assessment scores change as a result of ELFA?</li> <li>• How did you feel about implementing ELFA when you first learned about it? What about [your colleagues] [teachers at your school]?</li> <li>• How did you feel about implementing <u>during</u> the implementation of ELFA?</li> <li>• Are there components of ELFA that still exist [in your classrooms] [school] [district literacy plan] [state policy] today?</li> <li>• What are the impacts ELFA has had on you as an educational leader?</li> <li>• For STATE research participants: How did you provide support and guidance to districts and schools?</li> <li>• For DISTRICT research participants: How did you help principals and teachers implement ELFA?</li> <li>• For SCHOOL research participants: How did ELFA affect your school environment, i.e., literacy culture, reading block? How did ELFA affect student learning? How did ELFA affect teacher quality?</li> </ul>

Table 7 (Cont'). Alignment of Interview and Research Questions

<p>3. <i>What components of effective leadership do ELFA administrators attribute to the success of implementing ELFA?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the implementation of ELFA contribute to your development/growth as an educational leader? In what ways?</li> <li>• How would you describe your leadership style?</li> <li>• Who influenced your leadership style?</li> <li>• What do you think is your most outstanding contribution to ELFA implementation? Was there anything that you would change?</li> <li>• How was information from state to district to school level communicated? How did this affect day-to-day operations?</li> <li>• How would you describe your interaction with other ELFA administrators, i.e., principals, district supervisor, instructional specialists, state personnel regarding professional development, communication, etc?</li> <li>• How did you ensure that all stakeholders, i.e., teachers, parents, etc. were involved in the effort to improve literacy achievement?</li> <li>• What components do you credit for the success of ELFA?</li> <li>• Is there anything else that you want to add?</li> </ul>
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I audio-recorded all interviews, with the permission of interviewees (Arkley & Knight, 1999; Bailey, 1996). Each interviewee was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. The indepth, yet semi-structured nature of the interview naturally allowed the researcher and participant to engage in a fluid dialogue, without the boundaries of a rigid, ordered path. Therefore, the duration of the interviews and the number of questions varied from one participant to the other. I focused on “what goes on within” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 96) the participants and probed whenever necessary to get the participants to “describe the lived experience in a language as free from the constructs of the intellect and society as possible.” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 96). This is one form of bracketing. A second form of bracketing is discussed later as part of Hycner’s (1999) five-step explication process.

In-depth interview techniques (Seidman, 1998), adapted from Seidman’s approach, were employed to gather data. Seidman’s (1998) protocol requires conducting a series of three separate interviews with each participant. The first interview should be a focused career history,

where participants were asked to reconstruct their career experiences. The purpose of the second interview is to concentrate on the participant's past experiences, with emphasis on the details of the actual experiences rather than the participant's opinions about those experiences. In the third interview participants are asked to reflect on the meaning of their experiences.

While the protocol used for this study varied from Seidman's (1998) approach in the number of interviews conducted, the protocol is similar in that the interview addressed each of the focus areas he identified. Although Seidman (1998) prefers that researchers adhere to the structure he developed, he recognizes that researchers will have reasons for modifying the model. Seidman (1998) states, "As long as a structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and reflect upon their experience in the context of their lives, alterations to the three-interview structure and the duration and spacing of interviews can certainly be explored" (p. 21-22). Deviation from Seidman's approach to conduct three separate interviews was deemed necessary, based on previous conversations with Treeton school district's curriculum personnel. They suggested one face-to-face interview per participant due mainly to time constraints caused by new district policies, accountability measures, and matters associated with the beginning of a new school year.

"Memoing" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 69) is another important data source in qualitative research that was used in this study. Memoing refers to the researcher's field notes recording what the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the process. As immediately as possible after each interview, I listened to the recording and made notes. I transcribed verbatim words, phrases and statements in order to allow the voices of research participants to speak. Due to time constraints, I personally transcribed

three interviews and hired a transcriptionist to complete three. This did not interfere with any parts of the data analysis process.

Field notes are a secondary data storage method in qualitative research. Because the human mind tends to forget quickly, field notes by the researcher are crucial in qualitative research to retain data gathered (Lofland & Lofland, 1999). The writing of field notes during the research process compels the researcher to further clarify each interview setting (Caelli, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This means that the researcher must be disciplined to record, subsequent to each interview, as comprehensively as possible, but without judgmental evaluation. For example: “What happened and what was involved? Who was involved? Where did the activities occur? Why did an incident take place and how did it actually happen?” Furthermore, Lofland and Lofland (1999) emphasized that field notes should be written no later than the morning after.

Four types of field notes (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973; Burgess, 1982) were made:

- Observational notes (ON) — 'what happened notes' deemed important enough to the researcher to make.
- Theoretical notes (TN) — 'attempts to derive meaning' as the researcher thinks or reflects on experiences.
- Methodological notes (MN) — 'reminders, instructions or critique' to oneself on the process.
- Analytical memos (AM) — end-of-a-field-day summary or progress reviews.

Researchers are easily absorbed in the data-collection process and may fail to reflect on what is happening. However, it is important that the researcher maintain a balance between descriptive notes and reflective notes, such as hunches, impressions, feelings, and so on. Miles

and Huberman (1994) emphasize that memos (or field notes) must be dated so that the researcher can later correlate them with the data.

### Pilot Interview

As recommended by Seidman (2006), I conducted a pilot interview with a retired Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA) administrator from a non-participating Louisiana public school district. The purpose of the pilot interview was to reflect upon the practical elements of the interview and to try out the interviewing design to determine such attributes as (a) the average duration of each interview, (b) the general clarity of the interview questions from a participant's perspective, (c) the general ability of the participants to provide relevant responses (d) the general flow between questions, and (e) the connection between each interview tier. This process provided me with information to refine the interview protocol and inform research participants of the approximate duration of each interview.

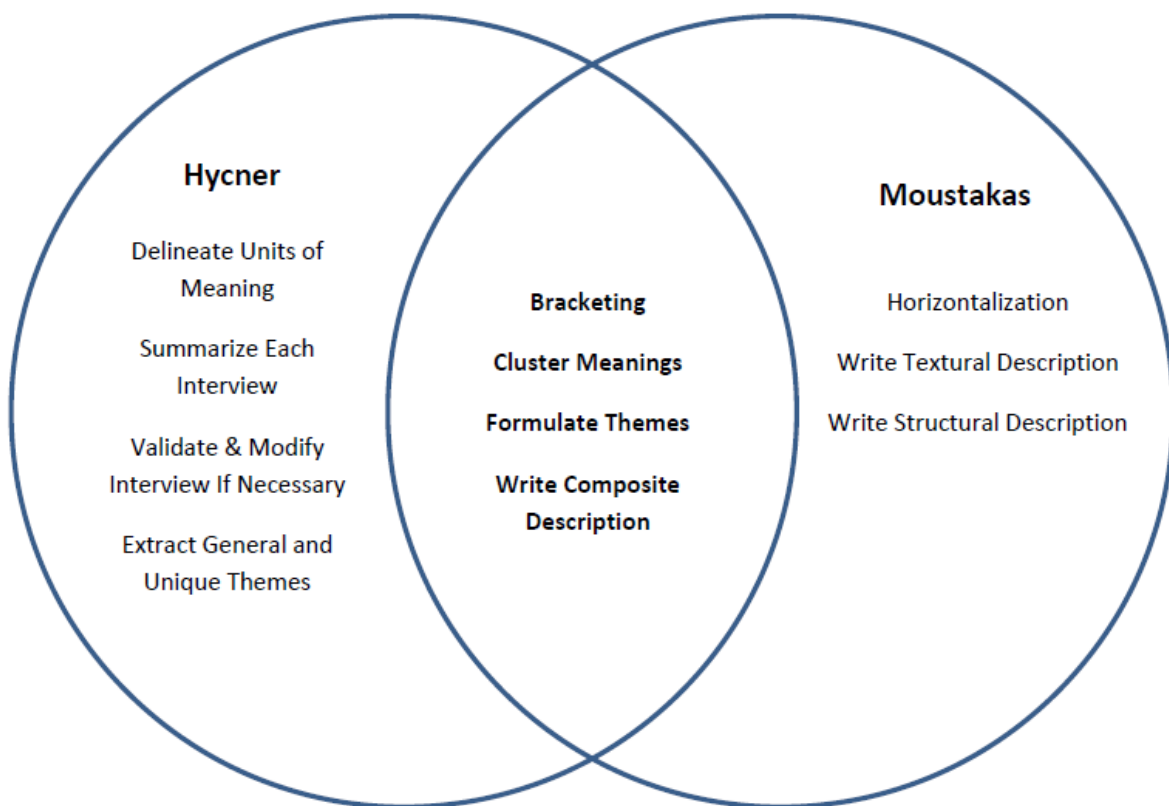
### Data Analysis

“...unlike other methodologies, phenomenology cannot be reduced to a ‘cookbook’ set of instructions. It is more an approach, an attitude, and investigative posture with a certain set of goals” (Keen, 1975, p. 41).

In the literature on phenomenology, there exist a number of approaches (Colazzi, 1978; Moustakas, 1994; Hycner, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994; etc.) to analyzing data, but there is no agreement on a single right approach. To sensitize the researcher to a number of issues that affect the analysis of interview data, a research method must be responsive to the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1970). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) regard analysis as the “systematic procedures to identify essential features and relationships” (p.9). My attempt to be true to the phenomenon of interview data is reflective in the use of a combination of two phenomenological data analysis

processes: a simplified version of Hycner's (1999) explication process and Moustakas' (1994) procedural steps. My decision to combine Hycner's and Moustakas' processes was made after I found that the explicit use of Hycner's steps did not sufficiently provide the guidance and trustworthiness required in analyzing data. Hycner's process needed the horizontalization process described by Moustakas. Figure 6 below illustrates how combining the processes of Hycner and Moustakas allowed me to reduce large volumes of interview data and guided me to construct meaning by identifying emerging themes.

Figure 6. Hycner's (1999) Explication Process and Moustakas' (1994) Data Analysis Procedure



The hourglass diagram in Figure 7 illustrates the general process of data reduction and meaning construction in phenomenology, using Hycner's (1999) explication process and Moustakas' procedure within an hourglass graphic, borrowed from Farizo (2004). As depicted by the hourglass, qualitative data analysis begins with a reduction of data from pages of verbatim

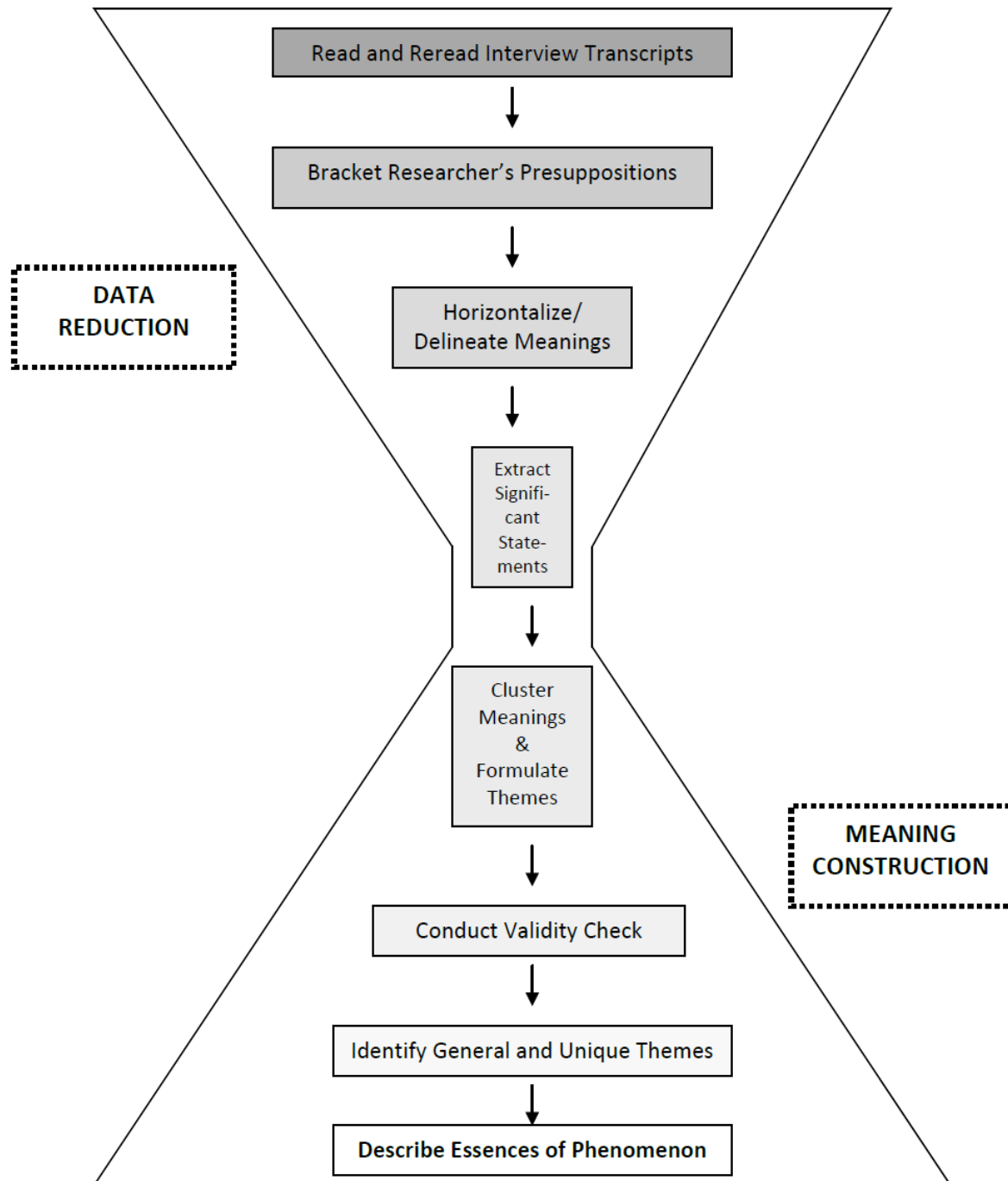


transcripts into units of general meaning, crystallizing (Hycner, 1999) and condensing (Hycner, 1999) what the participants said. Significant statements are then extracted, further reducing the data into the next major phase, constructing meaning. The researcher begins constructing meaning by identifying themes and clustering data around those themes. The themes gradually reveal the essential features of the experiences. Finally, the researcher develops descriptions to identify the essence or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006; van Manen, 1996; Yin, 2003).

I also followed Reimen's example (1986) and organized each step into table or figure formats. Hopefully this representation and organization of data will help the reader navigate through the multifaceted process of phenomenological data reduction and meaning construction. Finally, I put closure on each step of the process with a brief reflection of the ongoing data analysis.

Figure 7. Reduction of Data and Construction of Meaning.

Adapted from Hycner's (1985) Guidelines for Phenomenological Analysis, Moustakas' (1994) Data Analysis Method, and Farizo's (2004) Reduction of Data and Construction of Meaning Graphic



## Bracketing and Phenomenological Reduction

Phenomenological reduction “to pure subjectivity” (Lauer, 1958, p. 50) is a deliberate and purposeful opening by the researcher to the phenomenon “in its own right with its own meaning” (Fouche, 1993; Hycner, 1999). It further points to a suspension or ‘bracketing out’ (or *epoche*) “in a sense that in its regard no position is taken either for or against” (Lauer, 1958, p. 49) the researcher’s own presuppositions and not allowing the researcher’s meanings and interpretations or theoretical concepts to enter the unique world of the informant/participant (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Sadala & Adorno, 2001). This is a different conception of the term bracketing used when interviewing to bracket the phenomenon researched for the interviewee. Here it refers to the bracketing of the researcher’s personal views or preconceptions (Miller & Crabtree, 1992). It means suspending (bracketing) as much as possible the researcher’s meanings and interpretations and entering the interviewee’s world in order to understand the meaning of what that person is saying, rather than what the researcher expects her to say.

In the next section, I have engaged in bracketing my own presuppositions regarding leadership under the Ensuring Literacy For All initiative. I hope this process of radical reflection (Hycner, 1999) will serve to limit the influence of researcher subjectivity and increase the reader’s confidence in my capacity to stay true to the participant’s experiences as much as possible.

### Discussion of Subjectivity and Bracketing of Researcher’s Presuppositions

In a phenomenological analysis, the process aims to examine the lived experience from the ones who had the experience rather than imposition of other people’s interpretations. There should be two perspectives of phenomenological analysis of the perception of lived experience:

from the people who are living through the phenomenon, and from the researcher, whose has great interest in the phenomenon. In order to “return to the things themselves” (Husserl, 1970), the researcher has to be aware of her own experience being infused into both her engagement in the interviews and the analysis of data. For phenomenological researchers, it seems to be impossible to detach personal interpretations from the things that are personally interesting. Thus, the researcher has to be aware of her own experience being infused into both her engagement in the interviews and the analysis of data.

In the process of bracketing the experience, I must acknowledge and declare my subjectivities, as they operated during the entire research process. Peshkin (1988) audited his own subjectivities that were revealed while conducting a particular study and identified six types: the Ethnic-Maintenance I; the Community-Maintenance I; the E Pluribus-Unum I; the Justice-Seeking I; the Pedagogical-Meliorist I; and the Nonresearch Human I. By conducting my subjectivity audit, I discovered that I also have a Community-Maintenance I, a sense of community unique to a group of people with a shared history. Given that I was a former Reading First Administrator and Treton’s School District’s McGraw-Hill sales representative, it was no surprise to encounter the Community-Maintenance I (Peshkin, 1988). Of my six interviews, four were with people that I had interacted with in one capacity or another within the last thirteen years. These included district and state level literacy administrators who implemented Reading First and subsequently ELFA since 2003, when Louisiana was awarded Reading First funds. The community in this sense was not a familiar place of gathering for us; rather, it was a community of familiar faces – friends and acquaintances – who shared a similar professional background. Because I oversaw an effective implementation of Reading First and because I have since taken a considerable number of graduate classes on supervision and

leadership, I presumed that my research participants, who worked with successful ELFA schools, embodied similar experiences and leadership philosophies. At times during the interview, some members of this community verbalized “you know” frequently, because they knew that I was able to identify with them. As a phenomenological researcher, I recognize that I must enter the participants’ world and allow whatever meanings to emerge, by consciously monitoring my body language and verbal cues in an effort to manage my subjectivity.

### Delineating Units of Meaning

This is a critical phase of explicating the data, in that those statements that are seen to illuminate the researched phenomenon are extracted or “isolated” (Creswell, 1998; Holloway, 1997; Hycner, 1999). The researcher is required to make a substantial number of judgment calls while consciously bracketing her/his own presuppositions in order to avoid inappropriate subjective judgments (Moustakas, 1994). As recommended by Holloway (1997) and Hycner (1999), I immersed myself through reading and reflecting on the verbatim transcripts until an overall understanding was achieved and a holistic sense developed. Then I carefully scrutinized the transcription for chunks of relevant meaning and eliminated overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions (Moustakas, 1994). This rigorous process entails going over every word, phrase, sentence, paragraph and noted significant non-verbal communication in the transcript with as much openness as possible. I was better able to acknowledge my own preconceptions and stay attentive to the participants’ attitudes and perceptions. I considered the literal content, the number (the significance) of times a meaning was mentioned and also how (non-verbal or para-linguistic cues) it was stated. The actual meaning of two seemingly similar units of meaning might be different in terms of weight or chronology of events (Hycner, 1999).

Delineating units of meaning at this point does not yet address the research questions; rather, it helps the researcher secure unique and coherent meanings by staying close to the literal data. If there was ambiguity or uncertainty as to whether a statement constitutes a discrete unit of general meaning, I included it. At this stage, all general meanings are included, even redundant ones. I followed Lincoln and Guba (1985), who write that a unit must meet two criteria. First, it must reveal information that is relative to the study and stimulate the researcher to think beyond the particular bit of information. Second, the unit should be the "smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself- that is it must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out" (p. 345).

Reading all six transcripts in one sitting gave me a genuine sense of each individual's voice as well as a collective group voice of their experience with ELFA. Although I was asking them to walk down memory lane and recall an experience that took place two years ago, the participants came across as excited, candid, and intelligent. Each person spoke with authority about her experiences, while remaining humble about her accomplishments.

#### Horizontalization

After these first readings of the entire volume of transcripts and delineation of units of general meaning, I conducted a horizontal analysis across all participants in order to identify the emergent topics and subcategories to better understand the context and complexities of the phenomenon. Hycner (1999) refers to this step as delineating units of meaning relevant to the research questions, while Moustakas (1994) simply refers to it as horizontalization. Both entailed the extraction of significant statements from transcribed interviews. I define a significant statement as any statement that addressed one of the research questions.

Statements that were clearly irrelevant to the phenomenon were not recorded. However, if there were ambiguity or uncertainty at this time, I erred on the safe side and included such statements. A brief example of these two beginning steps of data reduction follows (Table 8). The research question addressed was: What are the perceptions of knowledgeable ELFA administrators regarding the contributing factors within the ELFA initiative toward student reading performance?

Table 8. Units of General Meaning and Units of Relevant Meaning.

<i>Transcription</i>	<i>Units of General Meaning</i>	<i>Horizontalization</i>
Once we put in a program and <sup>1</sup> we had you know explicit teaching models, <sup>2</sup> all of the PD, <sup>3</sup> we really looked at data and <sup>4</sup> intervention were really in place. I think that <sup>5</sup> all of those things helped us because <sup>6</sup> prior to that, teachers were allowed to do whatever they wanted to do, <sup>7</sup> teach it in the matter that they desired to teach it and <sup>8</sup> it didn't matter the outcomes. <sup>9</sup> It was basically the process and <sup>10</sup> outcomes was kind of left out of the picture. <sup>11</sup> We started to get the fourth grade teams on to look at the outcomes and not just what they're doing on standardized tests but also with the formatives.	<sup>1</sup> We had explicit teaching models <sup>2</sup> all of the PD <sup>3</sup> We really looked at data <sup>4</sup> Interventions were in place <sup>5</sup> All those things helped us <sup>6</sup> Prior to that, teachers were allowed to do whatever they wanted <sup>7</sup> Teach it in the matter that they desired <sup>8</sup> It didn't matter – the outcomes <sup>9</sup> It was basically the process <sup>10</sup> Outcomes was left out of the picture <sup>11</sup> Fourth grade teams looked at outcomes on standardized tests and formatives	<sup>1</sup> We had explicit teaching models <sup>2</sup> all of the PD <sup>3</sup> We really looked at data <sup>4</sup> Interventions were in place <sup>5</sup> All those things helped us <sup>6</sup> Prior to that, teachers were allowed to do whatever they wanted <sup>7</sup> Teach it in the matter that they desired <sup>10</sup> Outcomes was left out of the picture

Once horizontalization was completed for each interview, I employed Miles and Huberman's (1994) inductive coding technique to reduce data from the transcripts to the significant statements. They recommended the use of descriptive codes (first level, low-inferencing coding) and inferential codes (pattern, higher order concept coding). I coded the



first set of significant statements with no prespecified codes, allowing the data to suggest initial codes. Since I had read and reread the transcripts, bracketed my presuppositions, and horizontalized each transcript, much of the coding process was done with ease. I used labels I devised for quick reference (e.g., GRO for growth; LEAD for leadership; CAP for capacity; STR for structure, etc.). The codes varied for each interview, however, some codes were similar throughout all six. Some of these codes were descriptive, requiring little or no inference beyond the piece of data itself. Usually, these were derived from words and phrases repeated by the participants. For example, descriptive coding was used in the following excerpt from Shannon's interview, with JE for Job-Embedded and COL for collaborate.

I think the national conferences gave us some initial information to go back and apply it to our state and local districts, but we also have to provide **job-embedded** opportunities by having regional coaches and allowing districts to have school coaches. That's why I said **job-embedded** is the key factor and **collaboration**. With the use of data walls, you can see students progressing or regressing and the coaches will meet with teachers on grade level to talk about the skills and talk about how does this skill look inside the classroom with core program connecting it. That's where the true learning comes into place and that's where you get the **job-embedded** professional development.

Inferential or pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) is more interpretative. This second level coding tends to focus on pattern codes that require the researcher to pull together material into smaller and more meaningful units. Many of these inferential codes were generated either through relevant literature or my experience with Reading First and ELFA. The following is an example of inferential coding from Paula's interview, where funding (code: FUND) was an issue:

ELFA came after Reading First. We were less restrictive. They were allowed more choices and we allowed some high income districts to apply. In some ways, Ensuring Literacy For All was a little better because all the people involved wanted it. In Reading First, they applied by district and they picked the neediest schools and sometimes those schools weren't 100% on board.

During the coding process, I also simultaneously engaged in memoing (Miles & Huberman, 1994), "the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding...it exhausts the analyst's momentary ideation based on data with perhaps a little conceptual elaboration" (Glaser, 1978, p. 83-83). My memoing consisted of recording ideas that surfaced during the coding process. A few memos described the data, but most have conceptual content and were more substantive and theoretical in nature. These codes and memos assisted me in the next steps, the formulation of meanings and clustering of themes. Table 9 below provides an excerpt of horizontalization and coding from Jade's interview. Jade's full horizontalization is included in Appendix E as a representative of all horizontalized transcripts.

Table 9. Horizontalization of Jade's Experience

*Horizontalization of Jade's Experience*

<b>Codes:</b>			
<b>COL</b>	<b>Collaboration</b>	<b>CAP</b>	<b>Capacity</b>
<b>GRO</b>	<b>Growth</b>	<b>FUND</b>	<b>Funding</b>
<b>LEAD</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>STR</b>	<b>Structure</b>
<b>PD</b>	<b>Professional Development</b>	<b>TRUST</b>	<b>Trust</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We supported coaches, mimicked the Reading First model, did all the professional development. Actually did in-school modeling, tracking of data. LEAD PD</li> <li>2. It was a good experience. LEAD</li> <li>3. The support that we initially received with Reading First was scaled down tremendously. But with ELFA, they gave us little support but not much. FUND</li> <li>4. But I still think that we were able to bring on a lot of good things, a lot of the training that we got through Reading First, we carried over. GRO</li> <li>5. We had explicit teaching models, all of the PD. We really looked at data and interventions were really in place. I think all of those things helped us. PD STR</li> <li>6. Prior to that teachers were allowed to do whatever they wanted to do, teach it in the manner that they desired , and it didn't matter – the outcomes. CAP STR</li> <li>7. I think the program, tier three, and assessments contributed on the same level because they all sprung from instruction. STR</li> <li>8. We used the basal as the main curriculum, the driving force, taught teachers how to add engagement, then we used assessment to determine the next level of instruction as well as intervention to really scale down and look at student needs. STR</li> <li>9. I think all of the assessments contributed most to student achievement. DIBELS and then LEAP. We always looked at data. We tried to find correlation between those outcomes and what students were actually doing. GRO</li> <li>10. The implementation factor that contributed the most, what I believe, is the professional development. PD</li> <li>11. We were able to monitor and pretty much stay on top of what was actually happening and the different dynamics that were tooted there. LEAD STR</li> <li>12. We did a lot of whole faculty study groups. PD</li> <li>13. But we also did more collaborative planning within the grade levels that were extremely structured. COL PD</li> <li>14. We had protocols. STR</li> <li>15. In some cases, some schools adopted the TAP model. CAP</li> <li>16. It wasn't just moving students forward, but it was also moving teachers forward, developing their competencies. CAP</li> <li>17. I think it was shared leadership because we all had a responsibility to make sure that the mission and goals of the ELFA grant was carried out, even though at the top we had a director of reading. LEAD</li> </ol>			

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Table 9 (cont'). Horizontalization of Jade's Experience.

18. That role in our district changed often throughout the course of Reading First and ELFA. LEAD
19. They first got all their information from the state; we came together as a team and determined how professional development would look , what type of support we would offer. COL
20. We got all the principals together and all the schools that were involved. COL
21. We tried to tailor it and customize it to individual schools, so we had a skeleton framework, so to speak. We didn't start filling in and plugging in until we started looking at each individual school. COL
22. They kind of shared in some of the decision-making. Would they do grade levels? Would they do whole faculty? Would they do individual one on one PD, modeling? Some schools were better than others. COL CAP
23. At schools where you didn't have great buy in, a lot of it stemmed from the principal, because they probably believed that it didn't work. LEAD
24. They felt like they were handed over certain things that they had to do that they were mandated to do and of course, in my opinion, it spilled over to what the teachers would do. LEAD
25. Those principals who were highly successful, we saw good results. LEAD
26. Those schools had principals who were in the forefront of collaborative planning. LEAD COL
27. They always kept in touch with what we asked them to do. LEAD COL
28. In my opinion, even if they didn't believe wholeheartedly with everything we did, they went ahead and did it because they saw the results. LEAD TRUST
29. Nothing was perfect, but some of the principals said it was better than doing nothing at all. LEAD COL

### Formulate Meanings

This two-step process in data analysis required the clustering and labeling of units of relevant meaning to form a common theme or essence. First, I returned to the original transcripts, my lists of units of relevant meanings related to the research questions, the significant statements from the horizontalization process, and my memos to cluster relevant meanings. In this constant process of going back and forth from one data set to another, I had some difficulty deciding whether a certain unit clustered under one category or another. In these cases, I would err on the cautious side and categorize it under both clusters.

Second, the aggregate of formulated meanings was organized into clusters of themes (Hycner, 1999). Care is taken not to cluster common themes if significant differences exist.

These clusters were referred to the original description in order to validate them. Each description was examined to see if there was anything original that was not accounted for in the cluster of themes and whether the cluster proposed something that was not original.

This process entailed more artistic judgment here than in previous steps. Colaizzi (1978) states, “Particularly in this step is the phenomenological researcher engaged in something which cannot be precisely delineated, for here he is involved in that ineffable thing known as creative insight” (p. 59). Table 10 lists clusters of formulated meanings and the themes that emerged from and are common to all six participants' descriptions. These themes will serve as an outline for the final stage of data analysis, which is description or transformation (Colaizzi, 1978). The following chapter will describe the results of the study through a descriptive narration of these themes within the context of the participants' words. Both the textural description (*what* was experienced) and the structural description (*how* it was experienced) will be presented. I will also incorporate my personal meaning of the experience in Chapter 5.

Table 10. Formulated Meanings and Themes

<p><b>COLLABORATION</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ELFA forced an unprecedented level of collaboration among state, district, and school administrators and among school faculties, as part of its goal to implement all components with fidelity. COL</li> <li>2. Clear, effective means of communication of information from state to district to schools quickened the implementation process. COLLABORATION</li> <li>3. Every ELFA administrator interviewed practiced shared leadership. COL LEAD</li> </ol>
<p><b>GROWTH</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Progress took place in terms of student achievement, gap closure between Caucasian and African-American students, and significant reduction in the number of special education referrals. GRO</li> </ol>
<p><b>LEADERSHIP</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Every ELFA administrator interviewed practiced shared leadership. LEAD COL</li> <li>2. ELFA administrators believed that shared leadership galvanized ELFA educators into calculated actions. LEAD</li> <li>3. Efficacious ELFA administrators believed that they could alter their school culture and impact student achievement, despite housing low income, low performing students. LEAD</li> <li>4. State leaders effectively shielded negative press about national Reading First implementation, concentrating only on elements within their control and a positive, we-can-do-this attitude. LEADERSHIP</li> <li>5. Active and consistent guidance and support from ELFA administrators at the state, district, and school levels coupled with a no-nonsense, urgent approach resulted in serious implementation of ELFA. LEADERSHIP</li> <li>6. Confusion reigned as principals are advised to cast aside explicit and systematic reading instruction, an enforced ELFA component and research based practices in order to institute Common Core State Standards. LEADERSHIP</li> </ol>
<p><b>TRUST</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ELFA encouraged change in teacher practices in a supportive climate. TRUST</li> <li>2. Self efficacy and collective efficacy played major roles in the successful implementation of ELFA. TRUST</li> <li>3. Self efficacy from district level ELFA administrators transferred to principals who transferred it to their faculty, resulting in collective efficacy. TRUST CAPACITY</li> <li>4. The urgency to help students to read on grade level ignited a willingness for school level administrators to place trust in state and district leaders. TRUST</li> </ol>

Table 10 (cont'). Formulated Meanings and Themes

<p><b>JOB EMBEDDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Job-embedded professional development was essential in developing teacher and administrator capacity. JEPD</li> <li>2. Consistent monitoring of ELFA implementation and support provided to teachers via professional development enabled change and growth in student achievement as well as teacher quality. PD LEAD</li> <li>3. The coaching model provided job-embedded professional development and teacher support, eliminating many obstacles to increasing student reading performances. JEPD</li> <li>4. The coaching model, classroom walk throughs, and constant visits altered feelings of isolation associated with teachers in a classroom context. JEPD</li> <li>5. Better working environments and student populations in non-ELFA schools caused an increase in ELFA teacher attrition. Teacher turnover in ELFA schools are blamed for preventing more students from progressing in reading and language arts. CAP PD</li> <li>6. ELFA teachers received more professional development than non-ELFA teachers because of their access to regional and in-house school coaches. CAP PD</li> </ol>
<p><b>CAPACITY</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. State and district leaders afforded ample opportunities for problem-solving, collaboration, and building capacity in order for principals, coaches, and teachers to sustain ELFA efforts once funds are depleted. CAPACITY</li> <li>2. Better working environments and student populations in non-ELFA schools caused an increase in ELFA teacher attrition. Teacher turnover in ELFA schools are blamed for preventing more students from progressing in reading and language arts. CAP PD</li> </ol>
<p><b>FUNDING</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Decrease in ELFA funds each year translated to a reduction in force of reading coaches and interventionists, which impaired professional development and student growth. FUND</li> </ol>
<p><b>STRUCTURE</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ELFA standardized instructional practices, curriculum resources, assessments, and dedicated minutes within the three tier reading model. STRUCTURE</li> <li>2. Assessment data from DIBELS, iLEAP, and LEAP were frequently analyzed to monitor student progress and tailor instruction. STRUCTURE</li> <li>3. The standardization of practices resulted in a common language that teachers and administrators used across the state. STRUCTURE</li> <li>4. ELFA was a one-size-fits-all model, but with differentiated instruction for all. STRUCTURE</li> <li>5. Everything was prescriptive. Nothing was haphazard. STRUCTURE</li> </ol>

## Establishing Trustworthiness

In any qualitative research project, the aim of trustworthiness is to show that the inquiry's findings are "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). In order to conduct a rigorous and trustworthy study, I addressed four issues of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

- Credibility – an evaluation of whether or not the research findings represent a credible conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants' original data.
- Transferability – the degree to which the findings can be applied or transferred beyond the bounds of the project.
- Dependability – an assessment of the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation.
- Confirmability – a measure of how well the inquiry's findings are supported by the data collected.

To address credibility, I completed member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with all six participants throughout the duration of the study. I corresponded via email to provide them with the transcripts and to clarify any confusing information that was transcribed after each interview. This was an effort to maintain validity throughout the study. I was also able to verify interpretations of the data and validate themes and categories that emerged from the individual interviews. Finally, both a summary of the data analysis procedure and a summary of the final results of the study were sent to them, asking them if the descriptions formulated validated their



original experiences. All six participants contacted stated that the descriptions were correctly “captured” (Hycner, 1999, p. 154). Moreover, I had previously established trust with the participants through years of professional interactions and communications. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “the ultimate credibility of the outcomes depends upon the extent to which trust had been established” (p. 257).

To address transferability, I exercised memoing (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69), more commonly known as taking field notes. In addition to conducting interviews, I kept notes and observations to document the research experience. The purpose of keeping notes and making observations is to add to the rich, thick description (Creswell, 2003) to enhance transferability. Merriam (1998) elaborates on this strategy stating that rich, thick description, “provides enough description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred” (p. 211). Additionally, the implementation of criterion sampling and maximum variation could possibly attract more readers who can relate to the topic of study (Seidman, 1998).

To address the issues of dependability and confirmability, I relied on an independent audit of my research methods by a competent peer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). This peer is a consultant with experience in elementary and adolescent reading instruction. She has her doctorate in curriculum and instruction and is familiar with qualitative research methods. Upon completion of Chapters 4 and 5, my auditor thoroughly examined my audit trail consisting of the original transcripts, data analysis documents, field journal, comments from the member checks, and the text of the dissertation itself.

## Summary

Chapter 4 provided justification for using a qualitative and phenomenological method. It also discussed the processes of data collection, data analysis, and strategies to establish trustworthiness. Chapters 5 and 6 will discuss research findings and implications of the study, respectively.

## CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS

Phenomenology provides an opportunity for individuals to share their life experiences in order to illuminate the previously misunderstood, unknown, or discounted (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of educational leaders within the Louisiana's Ensuring Literacy For All initiative from the perspective of district, state, and school level administrators in order to: (a) identify ELFA factors that contributed to student reading performance, (b) describe the impact of ELFA leaders' perceptions on student achievement, and (c) identify the components of effective leadership that ELFA leaders attribute to the success of ELFA.

The lived experiences of six educational leaders from one public school district that participated in Louisiana's Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA) initiative are presented in this study. This chapter begins with a brief description of the six participants. I then identify five findings as essential features of the ELFA experience through a descriptive narration within the context of the participants' words. Following Creswell's (1998) standards for phenomenological representation of findings, I will conclude the chapter with composite textural and structural descriptions of the essences of the experience.

### Description of Participants

In order to capture multiple perspectives, the participants in this study represent three levels of educational governance: the state (Louisiana Department of Education), the district (Treeton School District), and the school (Holly Elementary and Sycamore Elementary). Two participants represent each level of governance for a total of six.

All six interviewees met the following research participant criteria:

- An educator with knowledge of ELFA implementation plans

- A stakeholder in the implementation of ELFA, from 2006-2007 through 2010-2011
- A reading educator with administrative and leadership responsibilities at the state, district or school level, e.g., reading coordinator in the State Literacy Department; school-based reading coach; principal; district-level literacy coach; district director.

### **State-level Informants**

#### *Shannon*

Shannon has spent almost her entire professional career with the Louisiana Department of Education. She was the Reading First program coordinator and literacy section leader before the LDOE reorganized and shifted its focus under the current State Superintendent. She has worked with every public school district in Louisiana and was instrumental in the implementation of Reading First and ELFA. Shannon's main duties included providing technical assistance to districts, organizing and facilitating state-wide professional development, and monitoring ELFA implementation. She currently works as a network team member, providing support to assigned districts in every subject matter.

#### *Paula*

Paula has over forty years of experience as an educator. Prior to joining the state department of education, Paula worked as an elementary school teacher. Her primary role in ELFA was providing technical assistance to districts. She recently expanded her role at the state department by focusing more on early childhood.

### **District-level Informants**

#### *Jade*

Jade is a former elementary classroom teacher who provided professional development and support to district schools during the entire duration of Reading First and ELFA. She worked

under four district reading directors, each with a different style of leadership. She is currently a first year principal who has already implemented many ELFA practices at her school.

*Stacy*

Stacy experienced Reading First and ELFA in several roles. She was a reading teacher during the first year of Reading First and became a coach in its second year. She then joined her district's curriculum department where she provided professional development and technical assistance as a district reading coach. She is currently a first year assistant principal and has already instituted ELFA practices under a supportive principal.

**School-level Informants**

*Kim*

Kim has been the principal of a Reading First/ELFA school since its inception. She was a Reading Recovery teacher and has witnessed the cyclical nature of reading philosophies over the course of her thirty years of educational experience. Kim passionately attests to the positive impact of Reading First and ELFA on her students and teachers and stated that no other educational reform effort measures up to ELFA. In order to sustain ELFA practices, Kim currently performs dual roles as the school principal and reading coach.

*Haley*

Haley currently plays dual roles as her school's reading coach and interventionist. She was a Reading First classroom teacher for one year before she became a Reading First/ELFA literacy coach. With fifteen years of experience as an educator, Haley believes that her classroom experience helped her empathize and build trust between teachers and herself.

## Findings

Data analysis from the Methodology chapter resulted in formulating themes surrounding the participants' experience within the Ensuring Literacy For All initiative. Further analysis of data within the context of these themes led to five essential features of the experience (Table 11). These essential features combined with the composite textural and structural descriptions in the latter part of this chapter represent the essence of ELFA for the individuals who experienced it.

Table 11. Five Essential Features of the Experience

### *Five Essential Features of the Experience*

#### ***Finding 1: Job-embedded Professional Development***

*High quality job-embedded professional development such as coaching and whole faculty study groups strengthened teachers' capacity to achieve a shared purpose.*

#### ***Finding 2: Leadership***

*Efficacious ELFA leaders believed that they could alter their school culture and increase student achievement, despite having a low performing student population.*

#### ***Finding 3: Funding***

*The gradual elimination of funds detrimentally impacted all levels of governance and created a snowball effect that ultimately decreased student achievement.*

#### ***Finding 4: Trust***

*The urgency to help students read on grade level ignited a willingness for ELFA educators to trust each other.*

#### ***Finding 5. Structure***

*The standardization of practices resulted in a common language that ELFA leaders used to produce results, ensure compliance, and build teacher capacity.*

*Finding 1: Job-embedded Professional Development.*

High quality job-embedded professional development such as coaching and whole faculty study groups strengthened teachers' capacity to achieve a shared purpose.

The proliferation of non-evaluative reading coaches, popularized by Reading First under the No Child Left Behind Act, filled gaps associated with one-size-fits-all and drive-by professional development models of prior years. The implementation of the coaching model, mandated by the state, provided funds for districts to hire reading coaches who would observe, conference with teachers, model, and provide feedback to teachers about the observed instructional practices. All six interviewees named whole faculty study groups and coaching, provided by the school reading coach and by a consultant from the Core group, as two of the contributing factors affecting teacher quality and student reading skills.

Although some teachers did not whole-heartedly adopt the coaching model, they knew that teaching in isolation and denying support would result in negative consequences for their students, most of whom were considered low-performing. Haley believed that reading coaches and the coaching model contributed most to student performance out of all the components of ELFA. Haley's experience with reading coaches was unique, since she was both the recipient of modeled lessons as a Reading First classroom teacher as well the reading coach under ELFA. These two positions helped Haley empathize with teachers and enabled teachers to more readily trust her as a non-evaluative colleague. Haley described this experience:

I feel like one thing that helped me as a coach was teaching it. So I could say. I taught that one year . . . when I was in my classroom this is what I did because we had the 105

minute [reading block]. Everybody was frustrated because it was a longer block. You're supposed to do x, y, z. How do I fit all that in? I could go back to my experience and say when I was in the classroom this is what I did. This is how we made it work. I can show you what it looked like. I think too forming relationships with them, just so they know, I'm coming in to watch you to better you. I'm not coming in to say shame on you. I'm coming in because these kids are our kids. We're trying to grow all these kids.

Haley recalled mainly positive experiences with teachers whom she coached, but distinctly remembered the few who denied her entrance into their classrooms, specifically Teach For America (TFA) teachers. Haley candidly described her experience with teachers who were resistant to the idea of being coached:

This teacher struggled in classroom management. We were in there trying to give her tips on classroom management but it was like you were invading her space if you were in her room. That's what I'm trying to say. That's not why a coach was there. It's supposed to be us. I'm not coming in to say you suck; I'm coming in to say this is weak here. How can we bump this up to make your job easier? I mean if you're struggling in management, you're not teaching too much. You're managing the whole day, so I just kind of think it depends on who they were and how they took you. It depended on who it was. Like we had some new Teach For America teachers who didn't like it. They didn't want to be told. I almost feel like they're like told in their TFA meetings to don't let people come in and tell you stuff. It's like bizarre.



The role and responsibilities of a reading coach are multi-faceted. Not only is modeling and discussing the modeled lesson important, but also collaborating with teachers on factors such as disaggregating test data and classroom management. According to Haley's colleagues, Haley is one of the most reputable reading coaches in Treeton School District because of her ability to carry out her responsibilities with professionalism and without intimidation:

The modeling made the most difference to me because you're going in and checking to see what it should look like and you don't see, so you have conversations with those teachers. You say, I can come show you if you don't know. I think this is the direction that it needs to go. Just dig into the data and then break it down. Okay, these kids are intensive low. Why are they intensive low? What can we do to bump those kids up?

Kim is an educator with over twenty years of experience. Kim oversaw the implementation of Reading First and ELFA as the principal at her school and firmly believed in the power of coaching and modeling to transform classroom practices. Kim's actions reflect her beliefs. When the district re-allocated her reading coach to a needier school, a *consequence* of Holly Elementary's school performance growth, Kim took on the dual role of principal and reading coach of her school. During the interview, Kim compared ELFA to a math reform initiative that provided innovative programs, resources, and district workshops, but lacked the coaching factor exemplified in ELFA. Kim witnessed the detrimental effects of this disparity and passionately stated the contributions of an effective reading coach or consultant:

The biggest obstacle was change. I think by the consultants coming in and helping us, they've eliminated the obstacles. The teachers learned from watching each other. They

learned from watching the consultant and they learned from all her suggestions and comments. You can't do without that.

Paula concurred with Kim. She firmly believed that the state department could improve teaching practices by providing regional coaches to work with district and school coaches.

The strategy for trying to make sure that the benefits of professional development were actually implemented in the classroom worked. That setup of having regional coaches – real DOE coaches – who went in and worked with the coach and did observations with the coach and the principal in the school – that setup meant that some teaching practices actually changed and it's difficult to change teaching practices.

Reading coaches were also seen as cheerleaders, someone who can garner support and resources for teachers and someone who can transfer information from national and state conferences to classroom teachers. Shannon, who has been instrumental in the implementation of several reading reform initiatives at the state level over the past ten years matter-of-factly described reading coaches as one of the most critical factors for successful implementation:

You don't have tons of people in leadership being the cheerleader for those teachers to make sure that they have the appropriate tools in place to be good teachers. If I were a principal, I would say, okay, here are professional development opportunities for you to attend and here's how we're going to support you when you come back to school. Here's a coach that will give you in-classroom support and provide you with feedback immediately; help support you through any struggling areas so we can maximize your classroom instruction...You have some teachers and some schools that just have low

capacity due to various reasons. It could be not enough training in a basal core program, not enough training in their pre-service education. We provide coaches within schools to help teacher that we identified as struggling to provide good effective instruction.

Most of the time, the topics chosen for whole faculty study groups (WFSG), another form of job-embedded professional development, were strategically chosen by district and school leaders. All topics were chosen based on results from assessments and every reading educator at the school was required to actively participate, either by reading recommended professional literature on the topic or sharing classroom activities that showed implementation of the topic. Suzanne, a former district reading coach who worked with Reading First and ELFA schools, described the benefits of well-planned whole faculty study groups (WFSG):

When there's a focus, then the PD isn't just surface where you can throw it out. It just gets deeper and deeper and deeper. That was probably another great thing about having that framework. One year you say, ok, we're going to really focus on getting our groups using DIBELS and grouping our interventions. The next year, we got so much better at saying, ok, now this is your group. Now we have two sections of this level. Now these kids need this level. Now these kids have phonemic awareness. These kids are letter by letter. And so on. We got so good because the PD was consistent. It wasn't just, oh we're doing PLCs [Professional Learning Communities] abandoning it next year. I mean, it was the same thing, just deeper and deeper and deeper.

Jade, also a former district reading coach, believed that the implementation factor that contributed most to student and teacher performance was deliberate, well-executed, and

consistent professional development. Jade recalled many hours of meeting and planning with her colleagues at the district level to ensure that professional development topics were driven by assessment data and feedback from teachers, coaches, and principals:

We were able to monitor and pretty much stay on top of what was actually happening and the different dynamics that were rooted there. We did a lot of whole faculty study groups, but we also did more collaborative planning within the grade levels that were extremely structured. We had protocols, and then in some cases, some schools adopted the TAP model. So it wasn't just moving students forward, but it was also moving teachers forward, developing their competencies.

The role of the district was especially crucial to ELFA's professional development component. At times, district central offices are seen as so far removed from the trenches, the school and classroom environment, that they can't identify with daily operations of the school and the needs of teachers. Jade describes a different image:

The department [of curriculum] was there to give professional development and support. We went into schools. That was the biggest thing. A lot of people said they appreciated us coming into the schools, not just dishing out information. We were actually there to model, facilitate professional development and grade level meetings, train interventionists, help teachers look at data. So I think just that constant support is what I would say is the greatest contribution.

*Finding 2: Leadership.*

*Efficacious ELFA leaders believed that they could alter their school culture and increase student achievement, despite working with a low performing student population.*

Every ELFA leader interviewed believed that shared leadership galvanizes teachers into calculated actions to benefit the common good. They practiced shared leadership because they believed that teacher participation in decision-making influence school culture and foster organizational innovation. Shared leadership was practiced at every governance level, from the state to district to school. Kim revealed what shared leadership looked like as a principal:

We sit down and talk about everything. I listen to their ideas and then we go from there. And we end up compromising somewhere in the middle. The classroom teachers, at grade level meetings, tell me what they're doing and how they're doing. They usually have a strong grade level person. If the grade level is upset with something, they usually send that person to me that is comfortable with me. They'll ask a question and we'll talk about it.

Jade discussed how shared leadership worked at the district level:

We all had a responsibility to make sure that the mission and goals of the ELFA grant was [sic] carried out. Even though at the top, we had a director of reading. And that role in our district changed often throughout the course of Reading First and ELFA, but when we did have a person working in that capacity, they first got all their information from the state. We came together as a team and determined how professional development would look, what type of support we would offer. And then we got all the principals together

and all the schools that were involved. We tried to tailor it and customize it to individual schools, so we had a skeletal framework, so to speak. We didn't start filling in and plugging in until we started looking at each individual school. Although we came to them with some ideas, they kind of shared in some of the decision-making, such as how they would look at their schools. Would they do grade levels? Would they do whole faculty? Would they do individual one-on-one PD? Modeling?

Shannon described how she practices shared leadership at the state level:

I'm a self-starter so I want my staff to be self-starters. If they have an issue, I want them to be able to come to me with two or three solutions. I've always done that with my leaders or my supervisors. I like to collaborate and look at data. I like a teaming method. We collaborate and we agree upon the best way to approach any given task, whether it's professional development, whether it's writing a report, whether it's generating an outline to support our districts.

The 2011-2012 ELFA Evaluation Report (Stokes et al., 2012) cited strong instructional leadership as one of seven infrastructure components that must be present in order to implement an effective literacy program. In the last two years of ELFA, leadership at the school level was the focus for professional development. The leaders responded to the activities of the professional development as good and useful but they lacked time to implement them at their school (ELFA Evaluation Report, 2011). These activities were not specified in the evaluation report; however, principals who actively attended whole faculty study groups and conducted observations alongside their coaches were perceived as effective. Principals who intervened and

required teachers to work with the coach or consultant in their classrooms were seen as strong instructional leaders who cared about student outcomes. Haley clearly recalled one situation when she had to involve her principal:

Ms. Jones [the principal] was good. I mean sometimes you had to have her in there. I mean I told you three times to hang up your word wall. I mean that's not a hard thing. So here comes Ms. Jones observing this. Where's your word wall? You know, it's just silly stuff like that that is ongoing.

Effective leaders often experienced effective leadership. All six participants were influenced by the leadership style of their former supervisor or a colleague. Kim currently emulates leadership actions of her former principal who later became the district's reading director and who is now deceased:

She had us as a part of the team to make decisions. When I was under her as a teacher, we always had an open door policy with her. We could go talk to her at any time. She shared. Like if she was adopting Reading First, she would call us in and say, here's another program. What do you think? Look at this. In most of the decisions, we were always included. So that's what I try to do here. The reading director would bring us in for meetings, especially at the beginning. We had a lot. When she left, we didn't talk to anyone else. It goes back to who's sitting up there.

Education reform initiatives are often accompanied by teacher resistance (Horn, 2002). Horn (2002) found that elementary teachers resisted technical changes, i.e., new instructional procedures and new curriculum, because of the disruption of their established routines and the

need to invest time in professional development. Jade, who has worked with many principals during her years at the central office curriculum department, openly revealed that principals are influential leaders who can sway teachers positively or negatively. Jade believed that great leaders can reduce resistance and influence teacher buy-in, whereas, incompetent leaders make opposite impacts. Jade provided the following example of the effects of leader efficacy on teacher efficacy and collective efficacy:

At those schools where you didn't have great buy-in, a lot of it stemmed from the principal because they probably believed that it didn't work. They felt like they were handed over certain things that they were mandated to do and of course, in my opinion, it spilled over to what the teachers would do.

*Finding 3: Funding.*

*The gradual elimination of funds detrimentally impacted all levels of governance and created a snowball effect that ultimately decreased student achievement.*

Suzanne witnessed the impact of significantly reduced ELFA funds from the district's perspective. All ELFA schools lost their reading coaches and many interventionists. The district sustained the employment of coaches by allocating Title I funds, but with one stipulation: the reading coach would coach half the day and provide interventions to strategic and intensive students the other half. Everything funded by Title I must directly involve students. Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended, provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Title I federal funds are currently allocated through four



statutory formulas that are based primarily on census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state. Suzanne commented on this impact:

The job description changed a little bit for the coach to an intervention teacher, where they did interventions half a day and supported the other half of the day. How effective this model is depends on the person. Some have been very effective with it because they get their strategies, they do their interventions, and then they go and support their teachers. The principals really miss the fact that they were full time coaches. Many teachers who need the modeling and coaching support had to wait awhile.

Even as ELFA allocations decreased, the district added more schools under the ELFA umbrella in an effort to provide them with more support. Jade candidly shared the underlying reason behind the district's decision to add more schools, knowing that funds were not available to fully and effectively implement ELFA:

We started out with eight schools, and I think with ELFA, we brought on four schools in 2008. The Reading First schools automatically became ELFA. But in most cases, we brought them on without the support. The personnel support wasn't there. The district wanted to expand and a lot of those schools that they did pull in, we were at risk for losing them. So I guess they thought that was a way to tighten the belt straps and watch them a little closer.

The gradual elimination of ELFA funds resulted in many strategic (Tier II) and intensive (Tier III) students without appropriate and necessary intervention instruction. It also caused the elimination of coaches and interventionists who played vital roles in improving teacher quality

and student performance. Every level of governance was impacted. Paula, an employee at the State Department of Education for over forty years, was deeply saddened by the end of ELFA. Paula's life-long love for reading and improving literacy played a major role in her decision to remain at the state level. Rather than feeling jaded by the change, as most would expect from a veteran state employee, Paula poignantly commented on this tragedy:

This one principal was sick when Ensuring Literacy was discontinued because he said that provided him the means to provide that intervention he needed to provide. The legislature had less money to work. They gave less money to education and then the [state] department decided to put importance on some other issues and it's just a change in direction from the state as a whole. They don't have state coaches in all the regions because the regional offices have been eliminated. There are lots of literacy coaches and interventionists who lost jobs because of ELFA. Coaches would go onto jobs in the classroom so they'll be great classroom teachers.

Shannon saw the shortage of ELFA funds as a major challenge to ELFA implementation. Shannon bluntly described the detrimental impact of the decrease in funds year after year:

Not having enough money to provide school wide training was a challenge. We didn't have enough staff towards the end of ELFA to go into and give those schools as much support as we did in the beginning stages of ELFA. We had to streamline our staff and so we were not able to provide that one-on-one assistance that we used to.

Haley, a school reading coach, spoke of a common obstacle that every school experiences, the shortage of interventionists, spawned by limited funds, to meet the needs of strategic and intensive students in small group settings.

I think the 3:1 and 5:1 pupil teacher ratio for tier II and tier III was a challenge. I mean, we had too many kids. We just did it with more kids in each group. In my opinion, it was better to meet with somebody than nobody. It was more like 5:1 or 6:1 than 3:1.

*Finding 4: Trust.*

*The urgency to help students read on grade level ignited a willingness for ELFA educators to trust each other.*

Aware that students within their charge must read on grade level or risk being struggling readers for the rest of their lives, ELFA principals and teachers placed trust in their district and state leaders to help them implement an initiative that would eliminate their chances of a state takeover. Louis et al. (2010) found that it matters a great deal whether participants in an organization trust the decision-making capacity of the organization's leaders. In the case of ELFA, the six participants were perceived by most of their teachers and colleagues as competent leaders who would support and guide them throughout the duration of the initiative. They were also desperate for a silver bullet that would increase their school ranking and, more importantly, help their low-performing students read at or above grade level. Joy's testimony revealed that ELFA principals placed trust in a program as well as people:

In my opinion, even if principals didn't believe wholeheartedly with everything we did, they went ahead and did it because they saw the results. Nothing was perfect but some of the principals I spoke to said it was better than doing nothing at all. Holly Elementary had been a big balanced literacy school. They kind of tried a lot of things and really had some good structure. But because they were not yielding the results that they wanted,

when they were approached with Reading First and ELFA, they said, you know what, we need to give it a try. What we are doing is not working. We don't know if this is the silver bullet, so to speak, but we have to give it a try. They were very successful. I think it strengthened their faculty. Now they have a great sense of culture there. It really helped make some good teachers great teachers.

Paula implied trust when she spoke of staff support within the Literacy Section at the state department. Paula's extensive career at the state level provided her with many experiences with various state reform initiatives. She also worked in close proximity with colleagues from other sections. This qualified her to compare the culture of her section with that of other content areas at the state level:

With Reading First and ELFA, we had that strong connection between the staff up here and the staff out in the districts and schools. I think we were able to get more support to the district staff than would have been available otherwise. I don't think it exists across the board in all content areas. We had a great literacy section. We had good communication among educational consultants and we were able to work with principals, district supervisors, and coaches.

Many district and school level educators often dread monitoring visits from members of the state department of education, because they associate evaluation with state visits. However, Paula painted a different scene, one of welcome and acceptance by ELFA districts. This portrays one form of trust.

It's nice to work with people who want you to be there. We tried to put an emphasis on assistance rather than monitoring so when we came out to see them, they were glad to see us in most cases.

Bryk and Schneider's (2003) study of Chicago elementary schools found that principal respect and personal regard for teachers, competence in core role responsibilities, and personal integrity were associated with relational trust among all adult members of the school. Driscoll (1978) found that such trust predicts overall satisfaction with the organization better than employee participation in decision making. Kim, the principal of a successful ELFA school, stated that she practices shared leadership. At the same time, she isn't afraid to make decisions in the best interest of her students. The example below is indicative of the faculty's trust in Kim to make decisions in the best interest of her students, even though she made this decision without shared decision-making.

Once I bought into it [ELFA], the whole school would have to buy into it. I think if I hadn't bought into it, it probably wouldn't have gone over as good. I think it was the leadership. I mean it wasn't hard to get buy-in. I probably got the best faculty.

Seriously, I really do. Once they saw the benefits of it, they saw the program was really running, it wasn't hard at all. It took a little change, once they saw it, the program was really easy to convince teachers to buy into it.

#### *Finding 5. Structure.*

*The standardization of practices resulted in a common language that ELFA leaders used to produce results, ensure compliance, and build teacher capacity.*

A repertoire of vocabulary specific to the ELFA initiative rolled off tongues of ELFA educators on a daily basis. Many identified with verbiage such as research based strategies, DIBELS, data walls, strategic, and perky pace. Based on my personal experiences as a district reading supervisor and based on interview data, many instructional resources such as textbooks and intervention materials were haphazardly purchased and implemented. Students were grouped based on teacher observations rather than test data. Reading groups were not dynamic; the buzzards remained buzzards and the bluejays remained bluejays. Job-embedded professional development was either non-existent or reserved for schools that were already thriving. Usually the term standardized implies a one-size-fits-all approach. ELFA standardized practices were founded on two decades of reading research, but also necessitated differentiated instruction within the three tier reading model. Shannon described the need for standardization:

Prior to Ensuring Literacy For All and Reading First, we did not have adequate assessments to give us any indication if students were at risk of having failure with reading. ELFA helped us engage early literacy in kindergarten through third grade. And based on all current research, we know that the earlier that we provide good reading instruction that they'll have a good pathway to graduate on time...We have learned so much through the use of data-driven practices. We have benchmark periods where we look at the beginning of the year data, middle, and end of the year. We look at how students are progressing toward or regressing away from those benchmarks that let us know if students are at risk for later reading difficulties. We can provide them with appropriate and effective intervention, which is individualized according to what those results tell us.

Having everyone implement research based practices and resources within a supportive environment produced positive results, based on the 2011 Final Evaluation Report (Asmus et al., 2011). In the excerpt below, Shannon's description of students' movement from green to yellow, from yellow to green refers to their DIBELS progression from On Level/Tier I (green) to Strategic/Tier II level (yellow) and DIBELS regression, green to yellow.

You look at the data walls and you see those teachers with their students' names moving from the green to yellow, from yellow to green. Then you correlate that to their letter grades. We did see students who were below basic moving up to basic and even proficient. Our African American students were performing at the same level as their Caucasian students, so we're closing the gap. We were proud of our ELFA results.

Haley credits the structure of the reading block and analysis of assessment data for her school's achievement:

I did see growth. I think the school grew a lot SPS-wise in those three years. I would think a lot has to do with the structure of the reading block and digging more into data. You know, trying to target your instruction.

However, Haley also mentioned that excessive prescription can be distracting and perhaps detrimental:

Regarding the school environment, they were pretty specific with what you needed up in your classroom. I think it can be both a good thing and a bad thing. I don't know if having something posted in your room means that you're doing something with it. I think too that if your coach is in your classroom, you know that your teacher was doing

it. It changed reading block because you were mandated a certain amount of time. I think that was when the district went to that uninterrupted block, even in non-ELFA schools.

The district adoption of one textbook basal provided structure based on the three tier reading model and research based practices. It also established uniformity among all schools to ease difficulties experienced by transient students and teachers who did not have the burden of learning a new textbook when they moved from one school to another within the district. Moreover, it enabled non-ELFA educators to connect with ELFA educators. Stacy, the district reading coach under ELFA, not only witnessed this transformation but also played a major role in the textbook adoption process. Stacy described this benefit:

With ELFA, they allowed more people to come to trainings and we got more buy-in from those who had a resentment to Reading First. I think it was because with ELFA, the whole district had the same textbook, so there were more joint conversations. Before, Reading First had its own so we had a lot of trainings, and the others had another textbook and another group of materials.

Shannon firmly believed that effective implementation of a high quality basal was the most important instructional component of ELFA. As one of the state informants, Shannon personally witnessed the benefits of adopting a high quality basal in many districts throughout Louisiana:

If you have a good basal, and I stress a very good basal, a teacher can use that with his or her expertise and generate pre-assessments and pull in all types of resources to enhance



the basal. The teacher can provide appropriate and good instruction with the basal or core, which goes with the three tier model. If she uses good assessment and good progress monitoring tools in addition to a good basal, then students will be on a good pathway of learning.

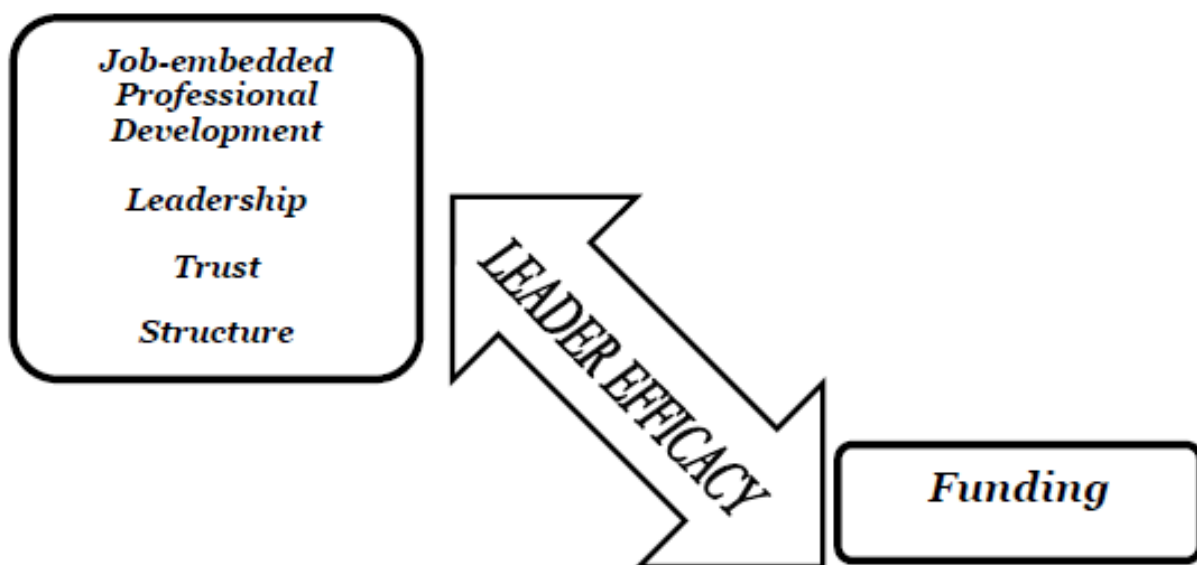
School and district leaders adopted a core that streamlined teaching of the five components of reading and was aligned with the three tier reading model. The structure and format of the textbook provided ease of use within each tier of instruction with the reading block: core, strategic, and intensive. As a principal, Kim walked the halls and observed classes on a daily basis. She believed that the basal program contributed most to student achievement:

Because the basal was written so that all teachers could just follow it and go with it, perky pace is what they called it. They knew exactly what to do with the kids with all the yellow pages. They just followed it and they improved. And maybe because we have Treasures [title of textbook], it gave us the road to follow. The component that I credit for the success of ELFA is the scripted plan that we followed. They pretty much are scripted for the teachers, so that helped a lot and just the good reading strategies that were in there. This year, we don't have a road to follow and it's so bad [referring to Common Core implementation].

The findings and subcategories of those findings align with the theoretical framework of this study, Bandura's (1982) theory of self efficacy. According to Bandura's (1986) model, people are motivated when they believe their circumstances are conducive to accomplishing goals that they deem personally important. Louis et al. (2010) found that people's working

conditions affect people's motivation and capacity by limiting their application of skills. In alignment with Bandura's theory and consistent with Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom and Anderson's (2010) findings, the results of this research study indicate that leader efficacy increases or decreases based on their working conditions. The working conditions referred to in this context equate to the five findings of this study as illustrated in Figure 8. Data analysis revealed that trust, job-embedded professional development, shared leadership, and structure increased leader efficacy, whereas the shortage of funds decreased it.

Figure 8. Effects of Findings on Leader Efficacy



## Phenomenological Descriptions

Based on the findings discussed in this chapter, textural and structural descriptions of the ELFA experiences of all research participants were constructed in Table 12 and Table 13. The textural description addresses *what* was experienced, while the structural description addresses *how* it was experienced (Moustakas,1994). Together, they represent a synthesis of the formulated meanings and findings (Table 10) to describe the essences of the experience.

**Table 12. Textural Description of the ELFA Experience**

*The Ensuring Literacy For All initiative was the effort of leaders in the Louisiana legislature and the Louisiana Department of Education to sustain the Reading First model. During a span of four years, 2008-2011, six educational leaders representing the state, district, and school levels collaborated with each other and with other ELFA educators for the purpose of one goal: to increase the reading performance of K-4 students. They achieved this goal and much more. Progress took place in terms of student achievement, gap closure between Caucasian and African-American students, and significant reduction in the number of special education referrals. A prescriptive, structured implementation of ELFA and clear, effective means of communication of information from state to district to schools resulted in a refinement of the reading block, one that provided differentiated instruction to all students within a monitored, controlled environment. The urgent need to address the harsh reality of Louisiana's poor educational national ranking ignited a willingness for school level administrators to place trust in state and district leaders. Every leader wanted to help students read at or above grade level and every leader believed that they had the ability to overcome obstacles to tackle this problem. Self efficacy and collective efficacy played major roles in the successful implementation of ELFA. Self efficacy from district level ELFA administrators transferred to principals who transferred it to their faculty, resulting in collective efficacy. The domino effect of this growth mindset could not have occurred without the building of relationships and establishment of trust within the entire ELFA community, from state program consultants to teachers. Two years after the extinction of ELFA, these leaders continue to embrace the knowledge gained from countless hours of professional development and overall ELFA experience while simultaneously shifting their thinking and practices to address the Common Core State Standards.*

**Table 13. Structural Description of the ELFA Experience**

<p><i>ELFA leaders perceived their shared leadership style galvanized educators into calculated actions that led to the successful implementation of ELFA. Active and consistent monitoring within a supportive environment enabled growth in student achievement and built teacher capacity. Job-embedded professional development in the forms of regional and school literacy coaches and whole faculty study groups forced teachers to implement a structured instructional model founded on research and refined from previous Reading First years. The coaching model, a strong, teacher-friendly basal, and a supportive school environment were all factors that eliminated obstacles to increasing student performance. Despite serving low performing students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, an unprecedented level of collaboration among state, district, and school leaders combined with the belief that they could alter their school culture resulted in iLEAP scores that outperformed state and district averages.</i></p>
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These phenomenological descriptions and findings were emailed to each participant for their validation of my findings. Four out of six participants responded with brief affirmations. The other two did not respond to my email.

From a phenomenological perspective, my intention was to accurately capture the participants' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors of their lived experiences in order to provide the reader with the feeling that "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that." (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46).

## CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a discussion of conclusions and implications for educational reading leaders as well as considerations for further research. The body of knowledge derived from this study may aid state and district leaders in designing effective implementation models for schools that have not been successful with increasing student reading achievement and building teacher capacity. It will enable educational leaders to examine their own beliefs and perceptions as they relate to leadership factors, implementation factors, and instructional factors, while fulfilling the purposes and goals of state initiatives.

The results from this study point to the ELFA experience as contributing to the growth of ELFA leaders, teachers, and students. The leadership experiences of six research participants at three educational levels of governance within the Ensuring Literacy For All initiative constructed the foundation of this research study. Bandura's (1982) theory of self efficacy provided a theoretical framework for this study and framed its findings. A multi-governance level approach revealed how state leadership influenced district efficacy, how district leadership developed school leaders' efficacy, and how the school principal and literacy coach influenced teacher efficacy. The leaders' sense of efficacy was positively influenced by job-embedded professional development, leadership, trust, and structure. Funding negatively impacted leader efficacy as it eliminated the crucial roles of literacy coaches and interventionists.

I will begin this chapter by summarizing the study. I will follow with a discussion of the implications of findings related to prior research, policy, and practice. Next, I will discuss limitations and delimitations. Finally, I will offer considerations for future research as well as concluding remarks.

## Summary of Findings

The ELFA leaders who participated in this study and their perceptions of the leadership, implementation, and instructional factors that contributed to student reading achievement were examined through in-depth interviews, memoing, and a validation process conducted pre, during, and post data analysis. Analysis of interview data through data reduction and meaning construction processes resulted in five findings that defined the essence of the experience.

Reported as essential features in Chapter 5, these findings are recapped below:

### Finding 1: Job-embedded Professional Development.

*High quality job-embedded professional development such as coaching and whole faculty study groups strengthened teachers' capacity to achieve a shared purpose.*

### Finding 2: Leadership.

*Efficacious ELFA leaders believed that they could alter their school culture and increase student achievement, despite having a low performing student population.*

### Finding 3: Funding.

*The gradual elimination of funds detrimentally impacted all levels of governance and created a snowball effect that ultimately decreased student achievement.*

### Finding 4: Trust.

*The urgency to help students read on grade level ignited a willingness for ELFA educators to trust each other.*

### Finding 5: Structure.

*The standardization of practices resulted in a common language that ELFA leaders used to produce results, ensure compliance, and build teacher capacity.*

The Ensuring Literacy For All grant contained many variables that could have created a recipe for disaster. The leaders in this study believed that they had the ability to perform the

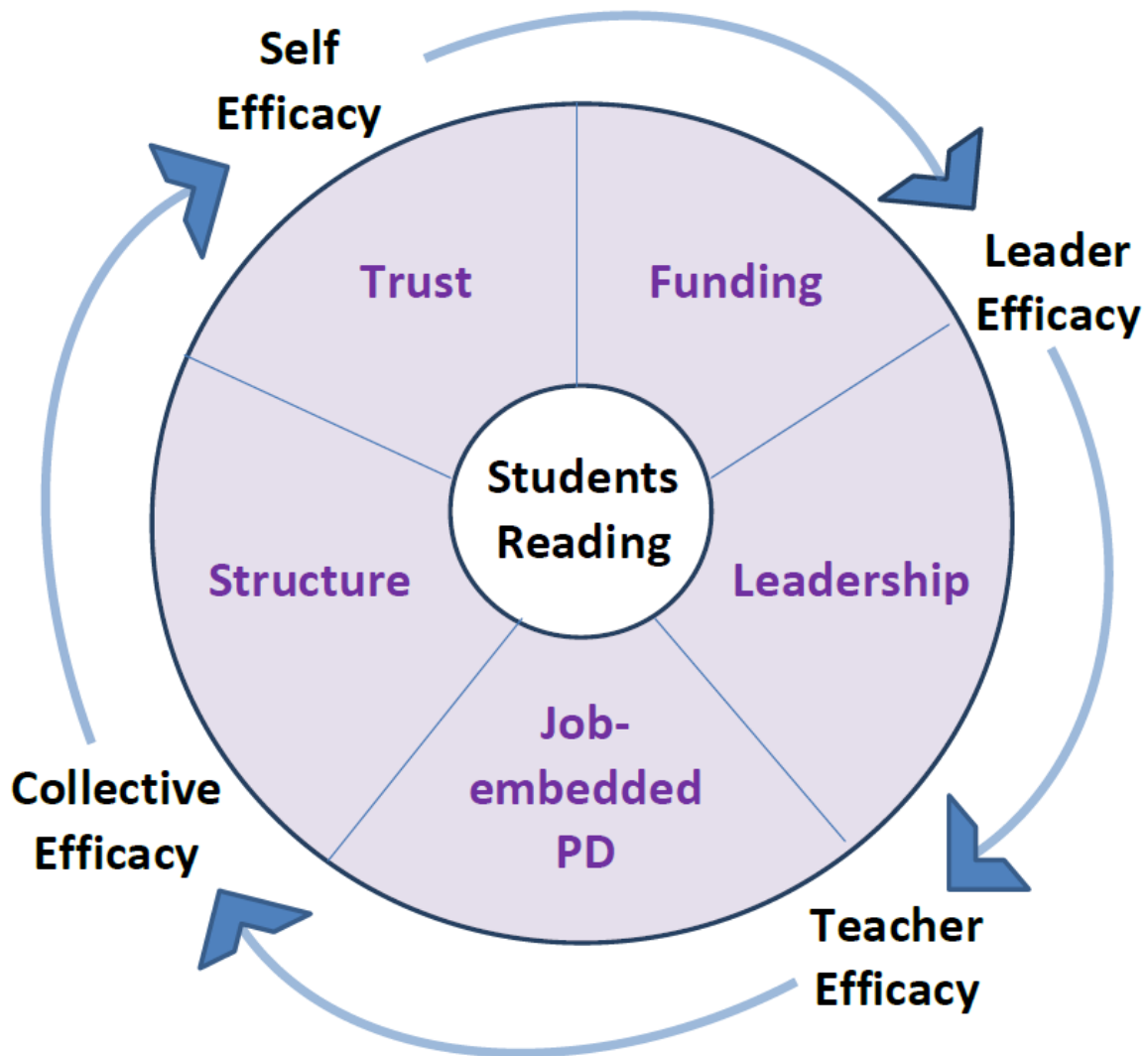
arduous task of helping students to read on grade level, despite their low socioeconomic background, ethnicity, or test scores. Their sense of professional efficacy can be attributed to having a vertical, supportive community of literacy leaders, from state to school, and intentional, quality job-embedded professional development. The interaction within the ELFA community and the use of a common language identified by all established relationships and built a lasting trust. Even as ELFA funds decreased each year, from 2008 to 2011, the leaders continued to creatively seek avenues to sustain ELFA components that they believed were instrumental in student growth. These components included the employment of reading coaches and interventionists, since research based resources were already in place and did not require residual costs by the schools.

The structure of the ELFA initiative, established previously by Reading First, continued to provide students with differentiated instruction within the three tier reading model. Driven by data, instruction took place within whole groups and small groups, and was heavily monitored by the classroom teacher, school reading coach, principal, district reading coaches, and state literacy program consultants. The structure of ELFA also referred to the dedicated minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction, observational checklists, and the use of uniformed sets of resources and materials throughout the entire district, including non-ELFA schools. Although this structure may have been perceived by teachers as micro-management by ELFA administrators, it was implemented within a supportive climate and overseen by leaders who practiced shared leadership. Figure 9 condenses the results of this study using a wagon wheel. Located between the spokes of the wheel are the findings: trust, funding, leadership, job embedded professional development, and structure. All of these were perceived by the ELFA leaders as factors that contributed to student achievement, which is in the center of the wheel or



the hubcap. Powering the rotation of the wheel are four types of efficacy that served as the theoretical framework of this study.

Figure 9. Wagon Wheel of Findings



### Implications of Findings Related to Prior Research

The findings of this study are considered essential features of a successfully implemented state initiative. Each feature contributed to an overall productive learning environment where students thrived under the direction of teachers who allowed the expertise of regional, district, and school coaches to refine their instructional practices. Combined, these features were perceived by ELFA administrators as keys to students' reading progress.

Previous research and literature have concluded that the improvement of instructional practices and changes in student achievement are dependent upon the types of professional development provided for teachers (Rutherford, Hillmer, & Parker, 2011; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Williams, 2013; Mokhtari, Thoma, and Edwards, 2009; Fischer and Hamer, 2010; Castle, Arends, and Rockwood, 2008; Swafford, 1998; Knowlton, 2008). Consistent with the research, ELFA leaders in this study reiterated that high quality job-embedded professional development strengthened teachers' capacity to achieve a shared purpose, the purpose of increasing students' reading performance.

In this first finding, job-embedded professional development included whole faculty study groups led by teachers, principals, district reading coaches, and school reading coaches; the coaching model which included observations, modeling, feedback, and discussions between the reading coach and teacher; and grade level meetings where teachers, principals, and coaches delved into data to discuss instructional gaps, grouped students, and discussed any other issues affecting student progress. The topics for whole faculty study groups were usually prescribed by either state or district ELFA leaders, based on teacher observations, surveys, and teacher and principal feedback. For example, when student engagement was observed as lacking in classrooms, state leaders provided inservices on the topic at regional monthly leadership

meetings. From there, state regional coaches worked with districts to translate that knowledge into classroom practices via whole faculty study groups and the coaching model.

Rutherford, Hillmer, and Parker (2011) suggested that once teachers are presented with new content knowledge, literacy coaches, leaders, outside partners, and peers are responsible for providing job-embedded professional learning that fosters teachers' effectiveness in the classroom. Dean et al. (2012) stated that reading coaches are necessary to help teachers implement specific reading programs and provide professional development and resources essential to reading success for all students. The ELFA leaders echoed the necessity of reading coaches to improve teachers' instructional practices and ways of thinking about pedagogy. Coaches comprised the core of the coaching model and ELFA leaders perceived them as part of transformational (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004) professional development. Within the ELFA initiative, effective coaches worked with principals and district reading leaders to provide ongoing, job-embedded professional learning that included data analysis, team-based discussion of student needs, sharing and refinement of research based strategies, modeling, and observations. This professional collaboration (Follett, 1924) has burgeoned since Follett's time as an alternative to the one-shot staff development approach. As evident by the interview data, ELFA leaders instituted Guskey's (1985, 1986) professional development model: (a) change is gradual and challenging; (b) teachers need regular feedback on student achievement; and (c) teachers require ongoing support and follow-up after the first training. ELFA leaders believed that affording teachers opportunities to collaborate and providing a consistent model of support through the coaching cycle enabled them to learn research based strategies and translate them into classroom practices. The ELFA leaders, specifically the district and school coaches and principal, corroborated Jhanke's (2010) findings. Jhanke (2010) stated that by providing teachers with a

positive and supportive environment, clear and understandable vision and goals, significant amounts of quality professional development, and shared leadership, educational leaders were effective in developing collective teacher efficacy.

Collective teacher efficacy is defined as “teachers’ perceptions that their effort, as a group, can have a positive impact on students” (Goddard, 2001, p. 467; Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000, p. 480). One can deduce from this definition that teachers who have high levels of collective efficacy will be more persistent on overcoming the obstacles and challenges while educating students (Demir, 2008; Goddard, 2002; Hoy, Sweetland & Smith, 2002).

To clarify, only ELFA leaders who had positive ELFA experiences and who saw the fruition of effective implementation in their school assessment data participated in this research study. Many cases exist within other ELFA schools and non-ELFA schools in which the reading coach’s role is misunderstood by principals. The International Reading Association (2006) attributed this to the lack of consistency in the training, backgrounds, and skills required for such positions and little consistency in the general competence of coaches. State and district ELFA leaders cited instances in which principals selected coaches because of their personal relationships with them or because they are popular among the faculty, rather than their competence level in reading and leadership. Bean and Zigmond (2006) concurred, finding discrepancies in the roles and responsibilities of literacy coaches. One hundred reading coaches from 161 Reading First schools documented their time spent while performing their weekly coaching duties. The documentation occurred three times throughout the school year. According to the results, reading coaches spent less than three hours a week implementing the coaching cycle with teachers, and devoted more than four hours per week performing duties that did not fall under the category of literacy coaching, such as attending meetings.

According to the district ELFA leaders, reading coaches within Treeton school district received extensive support from both the district and state level. The school based reading coaches attended monthly professional development sessions that fostered their growth as reading coaches. Also, district and regional coaches from the state department visited their schools on a regular basis. During these visits, the coaches from various levels collaborated to problem solve, plan professional development opportunities for teachers, or co-presented. The role of the reading coach within ELFA was perceived as a critical part of a reading initiative and essential in improving reading instruction. Therefore, in instances where the reading coach was not effective, it was not for lack of support from the district or state level.

The second finding of this study revealed that efficacious ELFA leaders believed that they could alter their school culture and increase student achievement, despite serving a low performing student population from low socio-economic backgrounds. As a reminder, ELFA leaders in this study included two district reading coaches, one school based reading coach, one principal, and two state education program consultants. The inclusion of two ELFA leaders from each level of educational governance was an attempt to clarify various perceptions and leadership characteristics within a heterogeneous group of educational reading leaders as they relate to student reading performance within the ELFA initiative. This study does not aim to draw conclusions about each level of governance. Since a paucity of research exists to illuminate the impact of leadership on teacher and student achievement for all three levels, some implications of this finding related to prior research will be discussed separately at the school, district, and state level.

It is not enough to merely launch state reading reform initiatives such as ELFA and expect teachers and students to thrive. Many variables come into play to determine the success

or failure of a program's implementation. This study revealed that ELFA leaders believed that they could overcome challenges such as having a low performing student population and obstacles such as shortage of funding and low parental involvement. The ELFA leaders' self efficacy beliefs directly impacted their actions and behaviors as well as those under their supervision. Efficacy beliefs are task and situation specific and are not believed to be a trait of an individual (Bandura, 1997b). Instead these beliefs are an active and learned system of beliefs that are held in context and vary in strength, level, and generality (Bandura 1997). Given appropriate skills and adequate incentives, efficacy expectations are a major determinant of people's choice of activities, how much effort they will expend and how long they will sustain effort in dealing with stressful situations (Bandura, 1997a). Prior to ELFA, the ELFA leaders in this study experienced many successes with Reading First that heightened their sense of leader efficacy. The continuation of Reading First in the form of ELFA provided them with more opportunities to improve teaching practices and test scores. This translated to increased school performance scores, an incentive worthy of achieving.

Louis et al. (2010) found that stable and consistent district leadership contributed to principals' sense of efficacy. Although the position of reading director in Treeton public school district turned over four times during the combined implementation of Reading First and ELFA, the group of district reading coaches remained stable. Since principals interacted more with the reading coaches rather than the reading director, the principals' commitment to the district reading plan and directions remained firm. Louis et al. (2010) also stated that it would take high-quality implementation at the district level to produce higher levels of principal efficacy. ELFA district leaders pride themselves on their hard work and effort. Stacy described her group of eight district reading coaches as "professional" and "tight-knit." They collaborated on many

projects and co-presented on many occasions to various audiences within the district. With Reading First implementation experience under their belt, they were more confident implementing ELFA components in thirteen schools. In turn, principals who believed themselves to be working collaboratively toward clear, common goals with district personnel, other principals, and teachers in their schools were more confident in their leadership (Louis et al., 2010).

Instructional leadership had a significant direct and positive impact on collective teacher efficacy (Calik et al., 2012). ELFA leaders believed that they could alter the school culture, defined as the way teachers and other staff members work together. By providing professional development and supervision in a supportive, non-threatening way, their instructional leadership behaviors had positive and significant effects on teacher self efficacy. Derbedek (2008) found that school principals' instructional leadership behaviors predicted approximately 15% of teachers' self efficacy. Similarly, Howard (1996) mentioned a causal link between these two variables. Ross (1994) expressed that leadership is an important variable in determining teachers' self efficacy. Weisel and Dror (2006) noted that there is a positive and significant relationship between supportive and non-threatening leadership and teacher self efficacy.

On the other hand, the ELFA leaders' efficacy slightly decreased as funds decreased. In the final Ensuring Literacy For All Evaluation Report (Stokes et al., 2012), a strong correlation revealed that the average percent of grades 1-3 students performing on benchmark (on grade level) increased when funds increased (Figure 2). Likewise, student performance decreased when funds decreased. The third finding of this study corroborated Stokes' (2012) correlation, in essence, demonstrating that money matters. The effects of gradually diminished ELFA funds between 2008 and 2011 led to the elimination of ELFA-funded reading coaches, layoffs of

interventionists, and significant reductions of professional development opportunities at the state, district, and school level. In turn, the needs of many students who required additional minutes of reading instruction in small group settings were not met and teacher support provided by coaches were obliterated. The district softened this impact and sustained the coaches' positions with appropriations of Title I funds, but changed their job title and altered their responsibilities by requiring them to work as half coach/half interventionist. The changes in duties, job titles, and funding source impacted the fidelity of the coaching cycle. Based on interview data, coaches replaced modeling with mere discussions of the reading strategy or they reduced discussion time when problem solving and actual coaching usually occurred. Therefore, teacher capacity and teacher quality were impacted.

Previous research on leadership (Armstrong-Coppins, 2003; Cagle & Hopkins, 2009; Demir, 2008; Hipp, 1995, 1996; Lee et al.; Kurt, 2009; Nicholson, 2003; Ross & Gray, 2006; Oliver, 2001; Williams, 2010) stated that some leadership behaviors determine teachers' perceptions of self and collective efficacy. The absence of reading coaches, who are considered ELFA leaders, impacted teacher efficacy. Scurry (2010) emphasized that positive feedback and leadership behaviors that strengthen teachers professionally significantly predict teacher efficacy. Teachers' self efficacy (Derbedek, 2008; Howard, 1996; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007), which has been developed in Bandura's concept of self efficacy, generally consists of teachers' beliefs about effecting and coping with students who have difficulty in motivation and learning (Guskey, 1987; Lewandowski, 2005; Yilmaz & Çokluk Bökeoglu, 2008). Without the daily support of a non-evaluative colleague and without job-embedded professional development in the form of modeling, the implication for teachers is a decreased sense of efficacy. A low-efficacy teacher is detrimental to the motivation of low-achieving students. In contrast, students



have a chance to increase their self efficacy with a high-efficacy teacher (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989). The domino effect caused by the lack or total absence of funds is catastrophic for educators, but more so for struggling readers who will most likely continue to struggle without appropriate and adequate intervention.

The fourth finding of this study revealed a willingness for ELFA educators to trust each other in order to address the urgent need to help students read on grade level. The trust factor has been a major determinant of the success of ELFA. Trust is a critical component of school improvement and effectiveness (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) defined trust as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other party will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that party" (p. 712). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) reviewed a wide variety of theoretical articles and empirical studies on trust as it related to relationships within schools and concluded that trust included such constructs as willing vulnerability, benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) further concluded that trust is required for many of the reforms in American schools and collaborative decision-making and teacher empowerment depend upon trust.

Although trust was not specifically mentioned in the interviews with this study's participants, examples of displays of trust abound within the ELFA community. The practice of shared leadership by every ELFA leader was indicative of the leaders' trust in her staff to collaborate and make informed decisions in the best interest of the students. The use of grade level meetings and district meetings to problem solve implementation and instructional issues was a display of leadership transparency and trust. The acceptance of reading coaches into

classrooms showed trust between teacher and coach. An overall supportive school climate and positive test data increased teacher efficacy and trust in their leadership.

The final finding of this study is also among one of the most debated issues in reading instruction, primarily because of Reading First. It is the issue of structure. In the context of a state reading reform initiative, structure connotes rigidity and fidelity. Whereas others may challenge the notion of a reading classroom with prescribed textbooks, computer programs, and visual wall displays as robotic and lacking innovation, the ELFA leaders perceived this structure as a positive component. They believed that the standardization of instructional practices and curriculum resources enabled them to produce results, ensure compliance, and build teacher capacity. They believed this because they personally witnessed the positive reading results from Reading First. Learning from Reading First mistakes, ELFA was a more refined model. According to The Center on Innovation and Improvement (2011), a program or practice with demonstrated effectiveness in some schools can be ineffective elsewhere if the way it is being implemented takes it far away from its original, evidence-based design.

Structure was found in almost every fabric of ELFA. From the dedicated instructional minutes for each tier of the reading model to the required displays of data walls and word walls, ELFA teachers were required to meet a lengthy list of observational items. This standardization resulted in a common language used among ELFA educators. Even when ELFA educators did not fully understand terms such as *three tier*, DIBELS, and *fidelity to the core*, they knew these terms were ELFA-specific. The uninterrupted reading block, intervention groups, research based basal, dedicated minutes, and the use of reading coaches to provide job-embedded professional development were all specific practices or programs executed in order to have fidelity of implementation (Berends, Bodilly, & Nataraj Kirby, 2002). These practices and programs were

frequently monitored by the state, district, school coach, and principal. As Jade, one of the district reading coaches, stated, “Everything was prescriptive. Nothing was haphazard.” In the words of Fixsen and Blase (2009, p. 2), “Only when effective practices are fully implemented should we expect positive outcomes.”

### Implications for Policy and Practice

This paper raises several implications for reading administrators, elementary educators, and policy-makers to consider. The findings of this study suggest that state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) provide ample opportunities for teacher leaders and administrators to collaborate on common issues. Educators in administrative positions must exhibit the ability to work collaboratively with their school community, involve others through shared decision making, and demonstrate thorough understanding of the instructional demands of the school setting. Collaboration is associated with increased job satisfaction and motivation. Without collaboration, leader efficacy and teacher collective efficacy are unlikely to increase. Additionally, state leaders should acknowledge the increasingly important role of districts as collaborators in the policy process. Louis et al. (2010) suggested that state policy makers rarely incorporate the views of district leaders in the legislative and agenda-setting process. Opportunities for districts to collaborate with state policy makers would create more systemic policy initiatives.

Funding was a major determining factor in the growth of ELFA students. State reform initiatives often begin with sufficient allocations to districts, but end with the same mandates without the funds. This pattern of funding has been observed time and time again, and always results in profound ramifications for students. Educational reform should be supportive, not punitive. This study suggests that policy makers and leaders should find realistic, sustainable

methods to ensure the availability of funding to schools that demonstrate overall growth and performance. Rather than punish a successful ELFA school by re-assigning the reading coach to a needier school, for example, leaders should sustain the school's growth by leaving her there.

Moreover, educational leaders should mirror and monitor proven practices and programs in all schools but differentiate based on individual school strengths, weaknesses, and circumstances. This study found that the practice of having job-embedded professional development, for example, increased teacher efficacy and produce positive student outcomes, yet many schools continue to engage in less effective types of professional development. The problems usually lie in the manner which districts use to implement even the most well-intentioned mandates. For example, local educational agencies should heterogeneously pair principals and teacher leaders together. Average principals should be paired with an exemplary principal, with consideration for personality, to share ideas, problem solve, and implement mandated programs and practices on a frequent, monitored schedule. A collaborative effort that involves conversations would more likely lead to trust and friendship.

### Delimitations

This research study was conducted within four parameters. First, participation in this study was delimited to ELFA administrators who were (a) educators with knowledge of ELFA implementation plans; (b) stakeholders in the implementation of ELFA, from 2006-2007 through 2010-2011; and (c) reading educators with administrative and leadership responsibilities at the state, district or school level, e.g., reading coordinator in the state literacy section; school-based reading coach; principal; district-level literacy coach; district director. These criteria allowed only knowledgeable administrators, who were considered reading leaders at their respective level of educational governance, to share their lived ELFA experience.

Second, all steps of phenomenological methodology were completed within a two month period (August to September 2013). This placed a limit on the overall magnitude of the study. Third, parameters were established for the selection of participating schools. Only schools that successfully and effectively implemented ELFA, as indicated by their iLEAP Spring 2010 language arts test data and recommendations by the district central office were chosen for this study. These schools outperformed state and district averages on the iLEAP Spring 2010 language arts section.

The final delimitation pertains to the study of the Ensuring Literacy For All initiative itself. This study targeted the Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA) initiative for several reasons. First, ELFA was the most recent Louisiana reading initiative (2008-2011) that was fully implemented based on two decades of converging reading research. Timing was a relevant factor since ELFA was a refined product of Reading First and a foundation for the Louisiana Comprehensive Literacy Plan (LDOE, 2011). Further, investigating the perceptions of ELFA leaders required a phenomenon that occurred in recent memory, so that the participants' experiences were accurately shared. Finally, the mandate of iLEAP in the Spring of 2006 provided a consistent assessment measure to quantify the performances of third graders in this study's targeted school district for every year of ELFA implementation.

#### Limitations and Considerations for Further Research

Several limitations of the present study need to be addressed. First, the participants consisted of only female reading administrators. Future investigations might target feedback from males, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans. Additional insight from the perceptions of males and minority administrators could enhance the understanding of the relationship among state reading reform initiatives, leadership, and student achievement.

Second, efficacy scales were purposefully omitted from this study. Bandura's (1982) theory of self efficacy provided the theoretical framework for this study and any conclusions drawn were based on the body of literature rather than efficacy data derived from an instrument. Further research is warranted to determine the influence of leader efficacy from the state, district, and school administrators on teachers and students.

Third, all of the participants experienced successful implementation of ELFA. While the intention is to examine their perception of leadership and implementation practices in order to replicate them in other schools and districts, future studies can investigate all ELFA schools, regardless of their test data. This would allow educational leaders to compare and contrast differences in leadership and implementation.

Finally, self-reported data by the participants is a recognized limitation of this phenomenological study. Self-reported data contains several potential sources of bias that are noted as limitations (Brutus et al., 2013):

- (1) selective memory: remembering or not remembering experiences or events that occurred at some point in the past;
- (2) telescoping: recalling events that occurred at one time as if they occurred at another time;
- (3) attribution: the act of attributing positive events and outcomes to one's own agency but attributing negative events and outcomes to external forces; and
- (4) exaggeration: the act of representing outcomes or embellishing events as more significant than is actually suggested from other data (p. 65).

Because “phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved” (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 189), the raw interview data were taken at face value without any independent verification.

It is hoped that this study ignites further debate about the use of research based practices to teach students to learn to read and read to learn. The last two decades have provided a plethora of reading research that points to proven instructional strategies and programs. The onset of the Common Core State Standards for reading has caused the proverbial pendulum to swing again, leaving both leaders and teachers frantically searching for direction. Stay tuned.

### Concluding Remarks

One of the most important parts of educational collaborations that work is the professional personal relationships and trust that are developed through working together towards a common vision of reform (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Spector, Strong, & King, 1996). The talent and skills of the ELFA leaders in this study are commensurate with their emphasis on professional collaboration to help struggling readers. I hope that this study accurately captured the essence of their experiences so that educational leaders can replicate their successes wherever reading reform is needed.

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## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

# Protocol for Semi-Structured Interviews

*Khanh K. Nguyen-Dufour*

*Summer 2013*

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**Interviewee:**

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**Interview Date:**

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- 
1. Describe your role within the ELFA initiative.
  2. Tell me about your experiences with the ELFA initiative.
    - a. PROBE for each level: district, state, school
  3. How did this student population's grades and assessment scores changed as a result of ELFA?
  4. Of all the instructional factors within ELFA, which factors do you think contributed most to student achievement?
  5. Of all the implementation factors within ELFA, which factors do you think contributed most to student achievement?
  6. How did ELFA compare to other state reading reform efforts you have been involved with in the past.

7. How has reading instruction [at your school] [in your district] [across the state] changed since the implementation of ELFA?
8. What factors/conditions do you attribute these changes?
9. What are the impacts ELFA has had on students and teachers in your charge?
10. What are the impacts ELFA has had on you as an educational leader?
11. How was professional development supported?
12. How were teaching practices improved because of professional development?
13. How did the state/district/school influence your leadership style?
14. How would you describe the academic needs of the student population served by ELFA?
15. Did the implementation of ELFA contribute to your development as an educational leader? In what ways?
16. How was information from state to district to school level communicated? How did this affect day-to-day operations?
17. How would you describe your interaction with other ELFA administrations, i.e., principals, district supervisor, instructional specialists, state personnel regarding professional development, communication, etc?
18. How did you ensure that all stakeholders, i.e., teachers, parents, etc. were involved in the effort to improve literacy achievement?
19. Is there anything else that you want to add?

## APPENDIX B

### LETTER OF CONSENT FOR ADULTS

(Typically used for studies that would not exceed minimal risk or for studies that would qualify for exempt status)

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Belinda Cambre in the Department/Division/College of Education at the University of New Orleans.

I am conducting a research study to investigate the perceptions of educational leaders regarding the ELFA components that they believed contributed most to the success of third grade students in a Louisiana public school district. Since millions of tax dollars have been invested to prepare all students to read by the end of third grade, beginning with the K-3 Reading and Math Initiative in 1997 to the present day, we must seek to understand the leadership practices and perceptions that contributed to the performance of ELFA students, in hopes of replicating the same effective practices and avoiding problematic ones in other schools. This study targets the Ensuring Literacy For All (ELFA) initiative for several reasons. First, ELFA was the most recent reading initiative (2008-2011) Louisiana that was fully implemented based on two decades of converging reading research. Timing was a relevant factor since ELFA was a refined product of Reading First and a foundation for the Louisiana Comprehensive Literacy Plan (LDOE, 2011). Further, investigating the perceptions of ELFA leaders requires a phenomenon that occurred in recent memory, so that the participants' experiences are accurately shared. Finally, the mandate of iLEAP in the Spring of 2006 provides a consistent assessment measure to quantify the performances of third graders in this study's targeted school district for every year of ELFA implementation. Interviews with current and former ELFA administrators at the state, district, and school level will be conducted to examine the influence of shared leadership, leader efficacy, and leader perception on student achievement by tapping the institutional knowledge that participants feel comfortable providing. The study will conclude with recommendations about what state, districts, and schools might do in the future to improve student achievement in reading. The study will fulfill the final dissertation requirements for the researcher, Khanh K. Nguyen-Dufour.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve 2-3 hours of your time. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is to reflect on your ELFA experience and replicate the successes in future literacy initiatives.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me or Dr. Belinda Cambre at (225)

Sincerely,

Khanh K. Nguyen-Dufour

By signing below you are giving consent to participate in the above study. (Release statement for videotaping or relinquishing confidentiality must be inserted here if applicable.)

_____	_____	_____
Signature	Printed Name	Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, please contact Dr. Ann O’Hanlon at the University of New Orleans (504) 280-6501.

## APPENDIX C

### Horizontalization of Jade's Experience

#### Codes:

<b>COL</b>	<b>Collaboration</b>	<b>CAP</b>	<b>Capacity</b>
<b>GRO</b>	<b>Growth</b>	<b>FUND</b>	<b>Funding</b>
<b>LEAD</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>STR</b>	<b>Structure</b>
<b>PD</b>	<b>Professional Development</b>	<b>TRUST</b>	<b>Trust</b>

1. We supported coaches, mimicked the Reading First model, did all the professional development. Actually did in-school modeling, tracking of data. LEAD PD
2. It was a good experience. LEAD
3. The support that we initially received with Reading First was scaled down tremendously. But with ELFA, they gave us little support but not much. FUND
4. But I still think that we were able to bring on a lot of good things, a lot of the training that we got through Reading First, we carried over. GRO
5. We had explicit teaching models, all of the PD. We really looked at data and interventions were really in place. I think all of those things helped us. PD STR
6. Prior to that teachers were allowed to do whatever they wanted to do, teach it in the manner that they desired , and it didn't matter – the outcomes. CAP STR
7. I think the program, tier three, and assessments contributed on the same level because they all sprung from instruction. STR
8. We used the basal as the main curriculum, the driving force, taught teachers how to add engagement, then we used assessment to determine the next level of instruction as well as intervention to really scale down and look at student needs. STR
9. I think all of the assessments contributed most to student achievement. DIBELS and then LEAP. We always looked at data. We tried to find correlation between those outcomes and what students were actually doing. GRO
10. The implementation factor that contributed the most, what I believe, is the professional development. PD
11. We were able to monitor and pretty much stay on top of what was actually happening and the different dynamics that were tooted there. LEAD STR
12. We did a lot of whole faculty study groups. PD
13. But we also did more collaborative planning within the grade levels that were extremely structured. COL PD
14. We had protocols. STR
15. In some cases, some schools adopted the TAP model. CAP
16. It wasn't just moving students forward, but it was also moving teachers forward, developing their competencies. CAP
17. I think it was shared leadership because we all had a responsibility to make sure that the mission and goals of the ELFA grant was carried out, even though at the top we had a director of reading. LEAD



18. That role in our district changed often throughout the course of Reading First and ELFA. LEAD
19. They first got all their information from the state; we came together as a team and determined how professional development would look , what type of support we would offer. COL
20. We got all the principals together and all the schools that were involved. COL
21. We tried to tailor it and customize it to individual schools, so we had a skeleton framework, so to speak. We didn't start filling in and plugging in until we started looking at each individual school. COL
22. They kind of shared in some of the decision-making. Would they do grade levels? Would they do whole faculty? Would they do individual one on one PD, modeling? Some schools were better than others. COL CAP
23. At schools where you didn't have great buy in, a lot of it stemmed from the principal, because they probably believed that it didn't work. LEAD
24. They felt like they were handed over certain things that they had to do that they were mandated to do and of course, in my opinion, it spilled over to what the teachers would do. LEAD
25. Those principals who were highly successful, we saw good results. LEAD
26. Those schools had principals who were in the forefront of collaborative planning. LEAD COL
27. They always kept in touch with what we asked them to do. LEAD COL
28. In my opinion, even if they didn't believe wholeheartedly with everything we did, they went ahead and did it because they saw the results. LEAD TRUST
29. Nothing was perfect, but some of the principals said it was better than doing nothing at all. LEAD COL
30. One school had been a big balanced literacy school. They kind of tried a lot of things and really had some good structure, but they were yielding the results they wanted. When they were approached with Reading First and ELFA, they said we need to give it a try. LEAD
31. What we are doing is not working. LEAD
32. We don't know if this is the silver bullet, so to speak, but we have to give it a try. LEAD
33. They were very successful. GRO
34. It strengthened their faculty. CAP
35. Now they have a great sense of culture there. LEAD
36. It really helped to make some good teachers great teachers. CAP GRO PD
37. The coach retired last year. The funding ran out was the determining factor for her retirement. FUND
38. The onsite professional development for the entire faculty was the most effective. PD
39. We actually had enough money to bring in consulting groups, they came in from all around the nation and provided state of the art, unprecedented support. We had support from the basal we adopted. PD FUND CAP
40. It gave us a little more common language to give to the best of our ability. STR

41. We were able to structure what we wanted to be taught, looking at the five components of reading more closely, looking at systematic, explicit instruction which was pretty much unheard of until Reading First. STR
42. I don't think ELFA was better than RF; here again, I think it was the money issue. FUND
43. We could not bring back all of our reading coaches. FUND
44. I think it was sad because our district had to pick up some of the funding and where we got the funding from there were a lot of stipulations as to what the person can do. FUND
45. We went from providing onsite professional development and support to this person now had to be like an interventionist because of the funding source. FUND
46. A lot of the teacher support was gone, a lot of the analyzing of data and going back to monitoring became slim. FUND CAP PD
47. Some of those teachers who really had embraced Reading First they continued on, the best practices and good things that they felt like, hey I can utilize this for a lifetime. CAP
48. The lack of funding really hurt us because we were limited in resources and we were starving for information. FUND
49. It became a lot of the district's responsibility and our department's responsibility to seek out different things, to get with instruction and then we didn't meet with coaches as often and then when we did meet with them and expectations for them to go back to their school and redeliver, they really couldn't because they were interventionists. COL CAP FUND
50. That was the way the grant was written at the state level, to include, to expand to PreK and bring on fourth grade. It was the state's hope that if it expanded to other grade level then we would catch more kids in third and fourth grades who couldn't read. STR
51. So let's expand the efforts to remedy the situation because they had a lot of things that they initially mandated they could no longer do, enforce. FUND STR
52. We were able to really scale down what their deficits were, the students that is. GRO
53. Try to push up some of that professional development and training. PD
54. Some teachers welcomed the change but others didn't really embrace it as much because they just, I guess, were opposed to changes. Didn't see it initially. PD CAP
55. Some of them we had to do a lot of convincing. Tons of training. Oh my goodness, training, I say forceful monitoring something that I don't like to do. LEAD PD
56. Lack of personnel. Human resources. FUND
57. We had some leadership changes at those schools. We brought on some additional schools. We didn't have time to do a lot of the frontloading, so to speak, so it was like here you are, this is what we need you to do, and not a whole lot of time to say why. LEAD PD
58. We started out with 8 schools and I think with ELFA we brought on 4 schools in 2008. The RF schools automatically became ELFA. But in most cases, we brought them on not with the support. The personnel support wasn't there. FUND
59. The district wanted to expand and a lot of those schools that they did pull in, we were at risk for losing them. I guess they thought that was a way to tighten the belt straps and watch them a little closer. LEAD

60. We spent a large percentage of our time at those schools. Did what we could to train.  
PD CAP
61. We actually had what we called contact people and to the best of our ability empower.  
CAP
62. We trained, we supported principals, but it depended on whether the principal wanted you there. PD COL LEAD
63. The contact people were reading coaches or teachers on the campus. And they were supposed to be like the lead teacher to go back and train. CAP LEAD PD
64. 14. I don't know if it was a result of ELFA but this year, because we were so structured, and we carried over the three tier model and RTI model, our score as a district went up a letter grade. GRO
65. We attribute that to our humble beginnings and really looking at instruction. For that time period, that really was the thing to do. LEAD GRO STR
66. We put in the reading block and we monitored down to the students, who we needed to move, who we needed to support. STR
67. Being very strategic, nothing was haphazard. Nothing was haphazard. STR
68. We welcomed it even though with less money. We looked at it as an opportunity to help remedy some of the issues that we were having in the upper grades. FUND GRO
69. They liked that we wanted to continue in some form and they liked it. Even those who didn't do their best with Reading First, they liked it, it was some kind of structure. They felt like they got more special attention than the other schools. STR PD
70. They saw the continuing professional development, they saw the support, they saw kids actually being helped in intervention. PD STR GRO
71. Obviously the things that we were doing and put in place helped to move our letter grade up from D to C. As of this year's score, I think we got 11 schools out of danger, being taken over. We're doing really well. One thing I can say is that they recognize all the hard work, all the monitoring all the hard work paid off. GRO
72. I keep referencing the tie to money but that was another way the department saw it as helping the teachers, helping the students. We were able to get more interventionists in the schools that actually worked with students. PD GRO
73. Definitely the literacy plan that was in the classrooms, a lot of the work stations, a lot of the PD, protocols that we had in place. STR
74. A lot of collaborative planning. COL
75. It's more structured because of ELFA. You see the explicit teaching in reading, even though we moved into the common core. STR
76. We still teach teachers about explicit teaching, engagement, vocabulary development, increasing listening and speaking. PD
77. Nothing in education stays the same, if we find something better, we're going to change. Some teachers said you told us that we would have Treasures for seven years, we did say that but things change. LEAD
78. I think I really learned how to support and unfortunately support is not just giving them materials. LEAD CAP PD
79. In yesteryear, departments like this was good for handing out materials and if you need training we were available, but I really think that it helped me become a real

- instructional support person because I had to learn the support materials and I had to stay current on the research we did a lot of onsite, district wide professional development. We helped analyzed data. LEAD GRO CAP PD
80. We got a little bit of support from the state. They would do their monthly meetings, sometimes they would come into the schools and do training. COL PD
81. But a lot of things really they said that we were ahead of the game. They would get some of our things, but didn't give us credit. Like the whole literacy plan. I guess what we were doing was actually right. TRUST
82. At the district level, we kind of set our own parameters and our own ways. I think what it did do for us and the Department, we built and we gained a lot of respect and we were valued. LEAD TRUST
83. They valued what we did. It was to the point when we got on campus, those principals who believed that what we did to help their teachers. Whatever we said, it would went. That was very encouraging. That helped to build our confidence and we saw that our work was not, you know, just in vain. TRUST
84. I think that each year we took things and tried to make it better. Like we learned more our few first years. What good instruction should look like, then we focused on intervention, then we focused on small group instruction, then one year we looked at vocabulary more. GRO LEAD
85. I'm more of a shared leader, distributed person. I kind of look at things from all aspects and I really try to take into consideration what others had to say, really try to build capacity on our campus. LEAD CAP TRUST
86. I seek out those who have contributed to schools, and those who are great role models and great leaders to help win over some people that I would not be able to win over so I definitely consider what everybody has to say. LEAD CAP
87. I'm always one that meet with teachers. What do you think? This is what I think. What do you feel and why? CAP
88. I had several. The principal that I was under and the first Director of Reading that I had. She was no nonsense, whatever it takes, no excuses. We went by the book, we followed the rules, and we wanted to make sure that we did the very best we could. LEAD
89. Because under her leadership we had regained the curriculum and instruction department, so she made it very clear all the time, we have no room for error so if we want them to believe why we should keep this department, we had to show them how we are valuable. LEAD TRUST
90. I believe that we finally started to see the fruits of our labor with our district score and grade. We moved up to a C and people recognize that what we're doing was great, great work. TRUST GRO
91. As much they hated to disband the department, but they're new. They kind of felt like putting us in some schools with high needs and we can agitate some schools and help them grow. LEAD GRO
92. The department was there to give professional development and support. We went into schools. That was the biggest thing. COL PD LEAD TRUST

93. A lot of people said they appreciated us coming into the schools, not just dishing out information, but we were actually there to model, facilitate professional development and grade level meetings, train interventionists, help teachers look at data. So I think just that constant support is what I would say is the greatest contribution. COL TRUST
94. I would see that there would be more of us. GRO FUND
95. We got information from top down. The state would train the curriculum department. In some cases they would train principals and coaches. We were expected to go back into the schools. CAP
96. I think it really rested in the hands of the principal. LEAD
97. I mean when I tell people, that hard work really paid off and I really think we could really go so far. GRO
98. Knowing that we were able to accomplish and now we've proved the point and I hate to say that now that we're gone, but I hope that they take whatever and replicate. GRO LEAD
99. We always needed more than what they were offering, and they couldn't give us more, but we always communicated that. They as in the state. COL FUND
100. They were downsizing and couldn't do it. They didn't have the resources to do it. FUND
101. We did the best we could with what we had. We funded people when the state only gave a third of people. We had to get funding from ESS, which their funding was contingent upon what we had to do, they had to work with children, not with teachers, so that limited what they could do, in turn the support that we gave made it more difficult to carry out. Because we got stuck at school sometimes, trying to be the coach and the coordinator. FUND
102. Well, I guess, teachers we were visible at the school. We still did training. As far as parents, we gave suggestions on what they could do or what teachers could recommend them to. CAP
103. The professional development first. Then, teacher collaboration. At the end of ELFA, we did a lot of across school collaboration, training the grade level. PD COL
104. I just think it kind of fizzled out and that's sad, I know it was tied to a lot of funding, but I just think that we could be so much farther along if we could just maintain, sustain it and follow through all the grades. FUND
105. I know that they put it in K-12 Comprehensive Literacy Plan, but again like all the people who were in the literacy department, they're not there anymore [at the state level]. LEAD FUND

## APPENDIX D

### ***University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research University of New Orleans***

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#### *Campus Correspondence*

Principal Investigator: Belinda Cambre  
Co-Investigator: Khanh Nguyen-Dufour  
Date: August 20, 2013  
Protocol Title: "An Examination of the Perceptions of Louisiana Educational Leaders on the Ensuring Literacy for All Initiative's Impact on Student Reading Achievement"  
IRB#: 04sep13

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures described in this protocol application are exempt from federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.101 category 2, due to the fact that any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Exempt protocols do not have an expiration date; however, if there are any changes made to this protocol that may cause it to be no longer exempt from CFR 46, the IRB requires another standard application from the investigator(s) which should provide the same information that is in this application with changes that may have changed the exempt status.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project.  
Sincerely,



Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair  
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

## Vita

Khanh Kim Nguyen-Dufour was born in Phan Thiet, Vietnam and grew up in New Orleans, Louisiana. Khanh's past career experiences in the Jefferson Parish Public School System include elementary and middle school teacher, district literacy coach, elementary supervisor of reading language arts, Section 504 coordinator, and Reading First administrator. She has also worked as a sales consultant for McGraw-Hill Publishing Company. Khanh has earned her Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education from Loyola University as well as three degrees from the University of New Orleans: Master of Education in Special Education/Gifted and Talented; Master of Education in Educational Leadership; and Ph.D. in Educational Administration. She resides in Baton Rouge, Louisiana with her husband and three sons.