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SPEAKING VOLUMES: PROFESSIONAL GROWTH IN BOOK STUDIES

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Amy Broemmel, Major Professor

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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

SPEAKING VOLUMES: PROFESSIONAL GROWTH IN BOOK STUDIES

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Elizabeth Smith Blanton
August 2014

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

- my husband, Steve who stood beside me every step of the way, cheering and lifting me up,
- my best friend, Cathy, who stood behind to me, gently pushing,
- my mother, who represents all the wonders of my life,
- the special educators who were the magnificent voices whispering in my ear. Thank you for what you do every day for students with disabilities, and
- my chair, Amy Broemmel, for talking me into beginning this journey in the first place.

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I never thought that this day would come. I am 61 years old. Who does this at 61? Something keeps driving me; however, to search for answers to provide support to students and teachers in a different way. For that I have to I have been molded and re-shaped by the people that have challenged me, questioned me, and ultimately led me to this point. Here are the people behind the voices whispering in my ears.

To my dissertation committee- thank you for all of the support, first for challenging me as a student in your classes and then as I took this dissertation journey. To Amy Broemmel- Thank you for always being there as the spark who made me believe I could (and should) do this, for your countless hours of mentorship, and friendship. To Cathy Rakestraw - Thank you so much for the constant support and friendship for the last almost 40 years, and especially for the last few, as we both worked on our degrees. “Take a deep breath! You can do this!” is stuck in my head forever. To Nell Bilbrey- you are one of a kind wonderful friend- my principal, friend, and grammar specialist! I wish I was like you. Most importantly, to the love of my life, Steve, my husband- You have been the face I look for in a crowd for 36 years. Thank you for never giving up on me. The laptop is going into the library and now we can all go on a Betty Adventure.

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative dissertation is to provide a description of the professional book study experience and gain insight into its use to support teacher professional development. Research on the use of professional book studies has been conducted in colleges, and by university researchers in public school settings. There is also a large field of research on leisure book clubs, providing insight into their popularity. Little research exists, however, on professional book studies from the point of view of the educators who were the participants. This qualitative case study examined the perceptions of 12 educators who voluntarily participated in multiple professional book studies over a period of four years in order to answer the following research questions: 1) What are the participants' perceptions of the book study experience as a professional development activity? 2) According to the participants' perceptions, how does participation in professional book studies lead to long-term learning? Data included reflective summaries and blogs completed in conjunction with each book club and open-ended interviews conducted after all book club participation was completed.

As a result of the data analysis, two major themes were developed: Process and Product. The Process Theme data provided insight into what occurred in the book studies. The case study members believed that the book study groups helped them to comprehend the text at a deeper level, allowed them to practice strategies in a knowledge community, and provided them with a source of collaboration and camaraderie leading to development of long-term relationships. In the Product Theme, participants provided insight into how they changed their instructional practice, academic thinking, and personal beliefs. This case study demonstrates the positive changes that can occur when

elements of effective professional development are incorporated into book studies. The data analysis indicated the development of a knowledge community where participants felt supported and challenged to try out new strategies in their workplaces. Finally, it is suggested that some participants appeared to experience transformative learning.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As a relative newcomer to public education, I have been increasingly confused and concerned by the apparent lack of long-term investment in the professional development (PD) of teachers. In my positions in both private and other public organizations, I was supported with ongoing training specifically designed to increase my value and expertise throughout my employment. When I became a public school teacher, however, this all changed. No longer was there a consideration of my current level of expertise or what I might require in my specific classroom situation. I sat through many redundant workshops from both “experts” who had no classroom experience, and representatives of textbook publishers who simply explained verbatim what was contained in newly adopted textbooks. These sessions were applicable to neither my students nor me. Rarely was I intellectually engaged, challenged, or seemingly even considered in these PD activities. Furthermore, there seemed to be no long-term planning involved. PD plans appeared to be made in a last-minute rush to fill the inservice time with whatever topic was most pressing at that moment. As a result of my own frustration with the PD being offered to me, I became interested in how public schools could improve professional development. This dissertation is the result of that journey.

Searching for Effective Professional Development

During the past two decades, teachers have increasingly been placed at the forefront of a purported crisis in US education (Cizek, 1999; Lemann, 2010). While overwhelming amounts of money have been poured into public schools with the intent of improving student achievement as measured by widespread academic testing, only lip service has been given to consideration of the need to provide teachers with high quality

professional development opportunities that could lead to long-term transformation in instructional practices. I continually wonder if there is a type of professional development activity that could provide what we need as educators and adult learners in order to make lasting changes in our teaching beliefs and practices.

The Possibility of Professional Book Studies

The idea of professional book studies as a PD strategy actually began as the result of a challenge from a professor in a graduate class in the fall of 2007. During a discussion, she commented that the county in which I worked had an unusually high population of students identified as having disabilities. The comment confused, then frustrated me. I spent several days constantly considering what she expected me, just one special education teacher, to do that would bring about long-term change. I returned the following week and after class, asked her what I could do about the problem. She asked if I had ever heard of professional book study groups and recommended that I pursue professional development that would change thinking in my county.

I went home and looked for journal articles and other research about professional book studies. I found a few articles but did not have a lot of success. Regardless of this lack of evidence, I resolved to continue looking for information because, as I thought more about this, book studies appealed to me for several reasons.

First, I was intrigued by the positive environment that involved social interaction in which we were able to openly discuss ideas. Through my college experiences, I found that the opportunity to talk about what I had read often solidified my understanding of new concepts and theories. I enjoyed hearing about other students' points of view and how their experiences related to our readings. I wondered why professional development

couldn't be like this. Secondly, I thought book studies could be a relatively inexpensive method of PD, requiring only the cost of the books. I believed that this would be appealing to supervisors because of the rising costs of providing outside experts. Because teachers in the state in which this case study took place are required to participate in 30 hours of in-service per year, I thought book studies might be used to provide an alternative to traditional PD activities, something that I had found boring and unhelpful, for the most part. Third, the county in which I worked was very rural with schools that were spread out throughout relatively remote communities. At that time, the school system served approximately 7,500 students in 18 schools, including eight elementary, four middle, five high schools, and an alternative school. The special education department employed 64 professionally licensed personnel who were required to have in-service credit.

In addition, although teachers worked in a school with many other adults and with classrooms teeming with students, they had often been surprisingly isolated (Kohler-Evans, Webster-Smith, & Albritton, 2013). Teachers rarely had time to talk to other adults outside fleeting meetings in the hallways or at hurried lunches. There seemed to be a lack of time to actually meet and reflect on teaching. Teachers who worked in specialized areas, such as special education, appeared even more secluded by their professional responsibilities and student needs. In this particular county, the largest school had five special education teachers and the smallest had a single special educator, while most of the schools only had two special education teachers. This structure made interaction between special education teachers less likely to occur and more challenging to achieve. Many other system-wide professionals in the department, such as school

psychologists, speech pathologists, coaches, and the audiologist were itinerant. In some cases, these professionals worked in multiple schools and spent limited time in any one school, often causing them to be even more isolated than the special education teachers.

Departmental PD activities for special educators in our county usually focused on dissemination of information like changes in special education law or on technical issues such as use of the state's computerized system for special education documents. PD rarely, if ever, gave time for teachers to be involved in inquiry, discussion, or reflection. The county's special educators were rarely able to meet to discuss their professional beliefs and practices. I initially thought this might just be a local problem, but in researching PD across the nation, I found it was standard practice (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

I decided to present the idea of professional book studies being offered as an option for PD in my county, so I wrote up a short proposal outlining how these book studies might be carried out. In the original proposal, I recommended that the department buy the books and participants be required to write a final reflection as tangible evidence of having read the book. In addition, I recommended that in-service credit be given for participation, commensurate with the amount of time spent on each book.

This proposal became the foundation for professional book studies provided by the district's special education department for the next four years. As I participated in these book studies, I observed that many of the participants returned every time a new book study started. I wondered why these educators preferred to participate in these book study groups. Could these book studies be reflective of what is needed by teachers as adult learners? What occurred in the professional book study groups that kept them

coming back? These questions continued to haunt me, and ultimately led to the choice of professional book studies as my dissertation topic.

I believed that the educators who continually participated in these book studies could give insight into what the professional book study experience was like and whether it was a viable alternative to traditional PD. In addition, I wanted to learn if the book study group provided educators with the components of effective PD that led to long-term reflective change in thinking and practice. These questions led me to others. Are there elements of professional book study groups that support teachers as adult learners? How can participation in a professional book study group enable educators to construct new knowledge? What could I learn from this line of research that can help inform other planners of PD activities?

Statement of the Problem

Professional development activities require their designers to consider critical factors. These include: 1) consideration of the needs and perspectives of adult learners (Gregson & Sturko, 2007), and 2) incorporation of the elements of successful professional development (Nevills, 2003; Porter, Garet, Desimone, Yoon, & Birman, 2000). There is a need to evaluate professional development activities to determine if they meet the learning requirements of adult learners, while also leading to long-term change in thinking in order for teachers to improve practice. While there have been in-depth studies of a variety of PD delivery activities, there have been few that specifically investigate the effectiveness of professional book studies from the participants' point of view.

The needs and perspectives of adult learners. First and foremost, educators are adult learners. Adult learners bring unique needs to learning which are different than those of children (Trotter, 2006); they require that consideration be given to both their life experience and learning needs when planning educational opportunities (Avalos, 2011; Hunzicker, 2011; Trotter, 2006). Unlike children, adult learners compare any new ideas to their current beliefs, expectations, and understandings of how the world works, while always considering a plethora of life experiences (Day, Lovato, Tull, & Ross-Gordon, 2011). Professional development activity planners often ignore this most basic starting point. Many adult learners prefer to participate in an andragogical learning approach (Chan, 2010), one in which the teacher becomes a facilitator and the adult learner has a major role in planning the direction and goal of the learning experience (Day, et al., 2011). In addition, because adult learners have multiple responsibilities outside of the learning environment, these needs should also be accommodated in planning. This is especially important to consider when planning for educators who have lesson preparation, grading, and other duties related to their school lives that must be performed outside of the workday.

Elements of effective professional development. Research on PD activities identified that less than half of US teachers are involved in sustained collaborative activities (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009). In the current atmosphere of political reform in public education, in which teacher expertise is identified as the single most crucial component of student improvement (Gulamhussein, 2013), professional development activities have taken on an importance and scrutiny heretofore unseen in American education.

Sadly, while the expectation of high-quality ongoing professional development was outlined and funded in No Child Left Behind legislation and subsequent Race to the Top Initiatives (2009), little has actually changed in public education (Hord, 2009; Phillips, 2003). In a 2001 survey by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), a majority of teachers reported receiving eight or less total hours in professional development annually (Scotchmer, McGrath, & Coder, 2005). These teachers reported mostly attending traditionally formatted learning activities such as conferences, workshops, or other trainings instead of environmentally-enmeshed activities such as mentoring, coaching, and peer observations. Kooy (2006a) explains the reasons for this:

In schools, learning is conventionally conceived as solitary practice (rows of separated desks, for instance). For teachers this image of the solitary learner has been carried out into models of professional development that mimic traditional conventions of school and are represented in the one-shot workshop performed by “experts.” (p. 3)

In addition, Scotchmer, McGrath and Coder (2005) found that teacher expertise, experience and concerns were not considered when these types of activities were planned.

More and more money is being thrown into the professional development problem expecting things to change (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). Ball and Cohen (1999) explain that even though there has been considerable expenditure on professional development activities, there is an underlying conviction that professional development is not important enough to require careful and thoughtful planning as well as a commitment by school systems to provide this to educators. These common

approaches to professional development fly in the face of research which identifies the most successful practices for adult learning (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009).

Other countries such as Australia, Japan, Finland, and South Korea have chosen to focus their monies and time on professional development believing that improving teacher effectiveness through ongoing high-quality professional development will lead to higher academic achievement (Wei, Andree, & Darling-Hammond, 2009). These countries provide PD support for teachers by providing time for collaborative learning, embedding PD into the school day, and allowing teacher input in planning. Educators work together in collaborative groups to learn and implement strategies within the school day, spending 20 % more time in planning and significantly more time in PD activities (Wei, et al., 2009).

Research on effective professional development has found that there are specific components that make an activity more likely to bring about change in instruction and student achievement (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). It has been recommended that PD designers consciously provide activities that:

- enhance content knowledge and its application to instruction,
- assist participants to understand how their students learn,
- give opportunities for hands-on, active learning,
- enable participants to acquire new knowledge, practice new strategies and reflect and revise learning with their peers,
- link curriculum, assessment, and standards to whatever is being learned,
- provide chances for collaboration within a collegial atmosphere, and are ongoing and intensive (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009)

As I learned about what composes effective PD, I became more and more focused on the search for activities and strategies that would fit these considerations. I wanted to find an activity that incorporated all of the components of effective professional development while also meeting the needs of adult learners. Professional book studies intrigued me from the beginning. Having participated in book studies, I knew how the experience had helped me. I wanted to explore this professional development model to see how other participants perceived its worth.

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide a description of the professional book study experience and gain insight into its use to support teacher professional development. I will provide data on the professional book study experience by investigating the perceptions of educators who have repeatedly chosen to participate in these studies. Exploring the reasons why educators choose these professional book studies over other formats of professional development can inform administrators on the design of future activities.

The significance of this work lies in the lack of research that specifically considers the perceptions of book study participants. In particular, this study will focus on why the participants of these book study experiences repeatedly chose this form of PD over a four-year period. In the review of the literature, I found numerous research studies on book study groups. Of these, professional book studies can be organized into two general categories and subsequent subcategories, based on participant type, setting, and degree of participant involvement in the planning process. Three different participant types were found: college students, inservice educators, and other professionals. Very

few of the studies focused on inservice teachers who voluntarily chose to participate in professional book studies over a period of years. The ones that involved choice of participation, books, and focus only took place in one book study event (Burbank, Kauchak, & Bates, 2010). None of the studies focused on why the participants chose to participate in book studies as a form of PD.

Thus, this study has the potential to offer insight into whether professional book studies can provide the elements of effective professional development practices. It should be of particular interest to those who provide and participate in teacher professional development: administrators and district leaders, principals, teachers and support staff in all areas of education. It also has the potential to provide educators with an understanding of what they should look for and expect in professional development. Analysis of professional development activities by using theories of adult learning while also incorporating effective professional development practices has the possibility to change the types of PD offered to educators.

Research Questions

The primary focus of this dissertation was to determine what factors kept the participants of the professional book studies returning time after time. In addition, the study provides information about what occurs within professional book study groups that impacts teacher learning. The following questions are the basis of the research:

1. What are the participants' perceptions of the book study experience as a professional development activity?
2. According to the participants' perceptions, how does participation in professional book studies lead to long-term learning?

Establishing Trustworthiness

It is important in qualitative research that the researcher establishes trustworthiness in his or her choice of subjects, data collection, analysis and interpretation. In this dissertation, I used several strategies to provide checks and balances, which would enhance the trustworthiness of the research. Creswell (1998) identified strategies that support the establishment of trustworthiness: 1) prolonged engagement and persistent observations, 2) triangulation, 3) peer review and debriefing, 4) negative case analysis, 5) clarification of researcher bias, 6) member checking, 7) rich, thick descriptions, and 8) external audits. Creswell (1998) recommends the use of a minimum of two of these procedures. I have chosen to include four of these in my dissertation- prolonged engagement, triangulation, thick descriptions, and clarification of researcher bias.

Prolonged engagement. Creswell (1998) explained that prolonged engagement in the field helps a researcher to build trust with participants and also learn the culture. Before August of 2012, I worked in the department in which the book studies took place for 15 years, the last five years as a system-wide coach. As I prepared for this dissertation, I was concerned that my status as a system-wide employee might affect some of the participants' willingness to be totally candid and willing to communicate their perceptions, in fear of reprisals from administration. Although untrue, some participants might also have considered that my position held some power over them as departmental employees. However, in August of 2012, I left the county and am now employed in another district. I believed this would allow participants more freedom to be open in the sharing of their perceptions.

Triangulation. Triangulation involves the use of multiple and varied sources, methods and/or theories to determine and develop themes and patterns in the data as well as substantiate evidence (Creswell, 1998). To this end, I have used multiple sources of data: interviews years after the last book study, the participants' own reflective summaries written at the end of each book study, and interactive blogs conducted during the book studies. These three different data sources from 12 participants helped to provide a large amount of varied material for analysis.

Thick, rich descriptions. According to Creswell (1998), the inclusion of thick, rich descriptions allows readers to more closely examine the setting and participants used in the research. In my role as participant-researcher, I provided thick, rich descriptions of the book studies both in my own words and those of the participants. Through these descriptions, others will be able to determine the transferability to other possible settings.

Clarification of research bias. One concern about possible bias because of my close involvement in the book groups, from their conception and throughout implementation. I was involved in half of the professional book studies as the facilitator of the book groups. As facilitator, I was responsible for arranging the studies, facilitating the meetings and blogs, and collecting the required documents to document participation. I was concerned that my close involvement might be an issue that affected my judgment in terms of the effectiveness of professional book studies. Although these professional book studies began as a result of my participation in college classes, I did not; however, immediately begin considering this topic as a

dissertation focus. It was through my participation in the book studies that I was drawn to the idea because of my experience in observing other members.

As a result of my close involvement in the book studies from inception, I have taken the position of participant-observer (complete participation) in this study (Spradley, 1980). Because the book studies involved in this research occurred in the past, I did not risk the ethical concern of having a researcher's influence on the process as it occurs. However, I considered that my role as facilitator did have considerable influence at the time. A participant-observer, according to Spradley (1980), can assume a variety of positions relative to the setting being studied. Of the five positions he outlines, complete participation most closely describes my stance. In complete participation, the researcher might have been a full participant in a particular setting prior to choosing it as a topic of research.

One of the major concerns for a participant-observer who has taken the position of complete participation is "getting out" (M. K. Smith, 1997). While I was working for the department, I was concerned about this issue; however, I no longer consider this to be problematic for two reasons. I believe that the elements of time (the last book study took place in 2011) and space (I no longer work for the county) allow me to maintain an adequate distance and neutrality to the study. Finally, I believe that my understanding of case study research helps me maintain a respectful distance in order to look at the case from a neutral lens.

Assumptions

This study involved the investigation of perceptions and beliefs of participants of professional book study groups through the use of interviews and artifacts in the form of

blog entries and reflective summaries. It was assumed that all participants gave accurate and complete information when writing these artifacts. It was also my assumption that the participants were truthful and openly communicated their perceptions throughout the study, including during the interviews.

Definitions

Constructivism- The theory of constructivism was developed based on work by Piaget, Bruner, and Vygotsky (Chen, 2010). Constructivism posits that humans construct knowledge both cognitively and socially. Constructivists believe that learning is an active process which occurs based on the learner's need to make sense of the world. Knowledge does not exist without the learner constructing it in a social context. The learner continually adapts knowledge based on he or she experiences (Yilmaz, 2008).

Professional book study- A professional book study is defined as any planned group discussion of a particular text or texts as a means of furthering professional understanding of a specific subject or phenomenon. Typically members read books or portions of books or articles in preparation for each meeting (Bach, Hensley Choate, & Parker, 2011).

Professional development- Professional development can be described by Mitchell (2013) as "the process whereby an individual acquires or enhances the skills, knowledge, and/or attitude for improved practice" (p. 390). Effective professional development activities should be comprehensive, sustained over time, and provide intensive support in order to ultimately increase student achievement (Hirsh, 2009).

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. In the first chapter I began with an overview of the study in which I described the current atmosphere surrounding

professional development for teachers and the need for research on effective activities. Next, I explained the purpose and significance of the study and then, identified the research questions. In addition, I presented the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Finally, I provided definitions for the main theories and processes involved in the research.

In Chapter Two, I began with review of the literature involving effective professional development and adult learning. Next, I provided an overview of the two learning communities, communities of practice and knowledge communities, as well as transformative learning theory. Finally, I reviewed the research on book study groups. I purposely included studies involving both formal and informal book study groups in order to provide a comprehensive representation of book studies in the research. In addition, I identified major outcomes of book studies that can be applied to professional development.

In Chapter Three, I have included my theoretical frames and the reasons for my methodological choice of case study. I provided an in-depth explanation of the procedures planned for this study. I provided general descriptions of the participants and a history of the professional book studies included in the study. Next, I presented an account of the artifacts to be used and the interview method which will be used to gather further data. Chapter Three ends with the design of the study and the analyses.

The data analysis is described in Chapter Four. The organization of the data is provided, including the themes and categories which evolved during the analysis of the data. These are explained using the participants' own words from their reflective summaries, blogs, and interviews.

In Chapter Five, I provided an explanation of how the data analysis answered the research questions. Next, I discussed how the data analysis informed and reflected current research on effective professional development, adult learning, knowledge communities, and transformative learning theory. An explanation of the implications of the research for school administrators and others responsible for developing professional development activities follows the Discussions section. The dissertation concludes with my recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

It was necessary to review current literature to fully understand the place of this case study in the research base. In this chapter, I provide a review of the literature on three main subjects that pertain to this dissertation. First, I review the research on effective professional development for educators. This research provides the background for the analysis of the first research question. Next, learning communities, specifically the research on communities of practice and knowledge communities, are summarized. Finally, I will review the research on book study groups. A search of the literature provided insight into two main areas of research on book groups. One involves informal book clubs, those that occur in informal settings without ties to any type of employment, while the other involves professional book study groups that are linked to employment of some kind. In order to more fully understand what occurs in professional book study groups, I found it necessary to also review the informal book club research. As I read, I realized that both types held importance for my research, revealing similarities that were too important to ignore (Bonner & Tarner, 1999).

Effective Professional Development in light of adult learning

Most PD activities do not acknowledge and consider current research on effective professional development (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009). The No Child Behind Act (2002) identified traditional professional development activities such as short term workshops and conferences as being of little or no value in improving classroom practice and thus, unworthy of monetary support. More recently, the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) (2012), surveyed educators in Tennessee to accumulate

feedback on the new teacher evaluation system. As a result of these data, SCORE recommended that administrators “link the feedback that teachers receive with high-quality, collaborative, and individualized professional learning opportunities so that they can improve their instruction” (p. 21).

The difficulty with traditional professional development activities offered in public school settings today is multi-fold. First, most professional development activities are lecture-type activities in which teachers are expected to listen and take in the information dispensed and then return to their respective classrooms and implement that information (Ball & Cohen, 1999; McGlenn, Calvert, & Johnson, 2003). In addition, the administrators in charge of the trainings often bring in experts without input from teachers about what is needed or might be most helpful to them and their students. This “outside-in” method with an emphasis on information dissemination is unfortunately the most common approach to professional learning. Researchers have found that such traditional PD activities typically emphasize procedural learning, resulting in only surface level implementation of instructional approaches (Butler, Lauscher, & Jarvis-Selinger, 2004).

Yet, another consideration in affecting pedagogical change is the risk-taking behaviors of educators. Research has indicated that risk taking can be another reason that PD activities are unsuccessful (Le Fevre, 2014). Pedagogical change, like all change, is risky. Teachers often find change particularly precarious because they do not only have themselves to consider; they are responsible for the success of their students. Educators have to feel that the risk is worth the reward. If they are unsure of the outcome and worried that they might harm their students in some way, especially in light of today’s

high-stakes testing and teacher evaluations, they will not risk implementing the change (Le Fevre, 2014).

In some school systems, traditional activities such as workshops are slowly being replaced with reform activities. Lee (2005) explains the differences:

Workshops, seminars, and conferences are considered the traditional form of activity types while reform types of a professional development program use study groups, networking, mentoring, coaching, and regular school day meetings that may occur during the process of classroom instruction or planning time (p. 40).

These reform activities bring together components of what current research studies have found to be most effective. Most importantly, when these elements are implemented consistently and given weight and credence, student achievement increases (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001).

Lee's (2005) review of the research identifies several considerations that should be taken into account for successful professional development programs. These include 1) adopting multiple strategies, 2) considering reform organizational features (like study groups, networking and mentoring), 3) allowing longer duration and amount of time for activities, 4) building of a teacher community, and 5) making sure to appropriately match the purpose with the strategies. Best practices in professional development indicate that teachers also need a safe environment to practice, discuss, and evaluate new learning prior to implementation in their classrooms, chances for discourse, and, once implementation begins, continuing support for learning (Birman, Desimone, & Porter, 2000). In their study of the Eisenhower Professional Development Program, Garet et al.

(2001) identify six features which include three structural features (reform type, duration and collective participation) and three core features (active learning, coherence, and content focus). These closely align with Lee's identified components. Finally, teachers expect to drive their own learning based on these needs and also be given the opportunities to develop their own leadership skills (Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2002).

Finally, teachers are adult learners first. Research connecting andragogy and professional development of teachers is especially important in light of the ineffectiveness of traditional PD models. Adult learners bring a different set of needs to learning than those of children. Lawler and King (2000) recommended six adult learning principles when implementing any learning activity for educators. The six principles are:

- create a climate of respect,
- encourage active participation,
- build on participant experience,
- employ collaborative inquiry,
- learn for action, and
- empower the participants.

Incorporating these adult learning principles increases the chance for buy-in and change (Gravani, 2012). Gravani's study (2012) of educators found that unless participants are allowed to direct their own learning and it is immediately applicable to their workplaces, there will not be the commitment to implement what was introduced.

In summary, effective professional development activities incorporate a number of elements that actively involve the participants in their learning. According to Hunzicker (2011), "When professional development is supportive, job-embedded,

instructionally focused, collaborative, and ongoing, teachers are more likely to consider it relevant and authentic, which is more likely to result in teacher learning and improved teaching practice (p. 178).” Because all too often adult learners are not considered in professional development planning, other researchers have determined that this is a reason instructional change does not occur (Gravani, 2012; Le Fevre, 2014).

Learning Communities: Communities of Practice and Knowledge Communities

The term *learning community* appears in many areas of current research. A search of the term received over 2,000 hits, all linked to research articles in scholarly journals, on professional learning communities, communities of practice, online learning communities, knowledge communities and others. Two types of learning communities, in particular, may have connections to the data of this case study: communities of practice and knowledge communities.

Communities of practice. The concept *communities of practice (CoPs)* was first defined and described by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (Wenger, 2010), “Communities of practice are groups of who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2004). This grew out of their research into situated learning and the theory is based on constructivism, and its tenets are based on the belief that all learning occurs in social interaction (Wenger, 2010).

A community of practice comes into existence naturally when a group of people determine that they can benefit from sharing knowledge in order to creatively solve mutual problems. As a result of participation, members learn and their identities are shaped. Members can exist on the periphery of a group or as a core member and new members enter into the CoP through a sort of apprenticeship by learning the ways of the

group from other more knowledgeable members. This interaction between new and older members is termed legitimate peripheral participation (M. K. Smith, 2003).

According to Lave and Wenger, there are three definitive elements of CoPs (Wenger, 1998). First, there is a joint enterprise in which members interact as they negotiate and renegotiate within the community. Next, the function of the CoP binds its members together into a social entity. Finally, the CoP develops products, or a shared repertoire, in the form of routines, tools, artifacts and even language.

Any person is a member of multiple CoPs at any given time, interacting within each at varying levels of participation. These CoPs also overlap, sometimes sharing members and practices. CoPs are informal groups existing within organizational units- within departments, across departments, or across organizations (Wenger, 2010). This is different than groups which are formally organized by the company, such as teams and networks. In fact, CoPs are often unrecognized by the organizations in which they exist. CoPs can be considered to have different levels of organizational support, including: 1) unrecognized, 2) bootlegged, 3) legitimized, 4) supported, and 5) institutionalized. These relational levels progress from the first, unrecognized, in which the CoP is unknown to the parent organization, to institutionalized, in which CoP has been fully accepted and formally recognized.

Communities of practice have a life cycle that follows general developmental patterns- growing, thriving, and declining as the needs of the members change and they move on to other CoPs. The stages of development include: 1) potential -the point at which members begin to gather, seeing that they can mutually benefit from interaction, 2) coalescing- members come together and begin to realize their potential, 3) active- where

the members are vigorously involved in creative problem solving, and 4) dispersed- the point at which members leave or and the CoP becomes inactive (Wenger, 2010).

This theory of social learning has been adopted in a variety of settings, mostly in the business and educational communities. As such, it has evolved over time to become a strategy that is considered to be informative for managerial systems (Cox, 2005). The tenets of CoPs could have possible links to the research on professional book studies because of their similarities, as both CoPs and professional book study groups can be informal places for people to gather to learn and solve problems the members share.

Knowledge communities. The term *knowledge community* was first coined by Craig (1995, 2007). Knowledge communities were first identified in educational settings and are most often seen in this type of environment. In knowledge communities, participants come together because they share an interest or interests and want to learn about a specific topic. According to Craig (2007), teachers also rely on knowledge communities in times of stress to help with solutions to problems and as a source of support.

Within the knowledge communities, participants use narrative as a way of communicating their thinking (Schultz & Ravitch, 2013). Stories are used as a way of interpreting new information and gaining knowledge from other members. As teachers share stories of their classroom experiences, they incorporate critical reflection and creative problem solving into their dialogue (Craig, 2007). This use of story is paramount to the way that the participants interact and learn.

Knowledge communities do not follow a specific life cycle but members come together because of a shared interest in learning (Seaman, 2008). The community may

become inactive for indefinite periods and then members will come back together when the need for new learning arises. Need to learn drives the knowledge community's existence.

Comparing communities of practice and knowledge communities. It is important to identify which particular learning community is most closely aligned to the environment that might occur within the professional book studies in this research. For that reason, comparing and contrasting CoPs and knowledge communities can help delineate the qualities of each. The similarities between communities of practice and knowledge communities are numerous; however, the differences outnumber these (Seaman, 2008). They are similar because:

- leadership is contained within the community itself and can be formal or emergent,
- their primary reasons for existing are to share and develop knowledge, unlike networks
- they can be recognized by organizations outside the community, and
- they can exist anywhere.

According to Seaman (2008), the differences are clear and unequivocally distinguish the two:

- CoPs emerge informally while knowledge communities can be informally or are formally created by the organizations in which they are contained,
- CoPs include core and peripheral membership while in knowledge communities all members share equal standing,

- CoPs work collaboratively while knowledge communities can be collaborative or cooperative
- CoPs are bound by what the members do, their knowledge, and have a their shared practice, while knowledge communities are only bound by what they know, having a shared knowledge base,
- knowledge communities construct knowledge through narrative, and
- CoP members share competence or practice while knowledge community members share goals and interests (Seaman, 2008).

The first major difference applies to how the members of each community gain knowledge. In CoPs, it is believed that knowledge is only collected socially while in knowledge communities the belief is that knowledge is collected both through social exchanges and personally (Seaman, 2008). This seemed especially relevant to dual learning that can occur within professional book studies. Secondly, in knowledge communities it is important to reflect on learning by evaluating how the new learning fits within participants' life experiences. So narrative, or the use of story, is the main way in which knowledge community members make meaning. This also matches previous research on what occurs throughout the discussions in book study groups (Kooy, 2006a, 2006b). Finally, the members of knowledge communities are more concerned with their own personal learning while CoPs are interested in how they can redefine and improve practices collectively. This difference is significant in light of the main purpose behind professional development activities. It more accurately describes what could occur in knowledge communities.

In summary, knowledge communities are made up of individuals who share common interests and are driven to learn about a specific topic or topics. The community is informed by the experiences and knowledge of the participants, sharing stories in order to learn from each other and make sense of new ideas. The features of knowledge communities have similarities to the conditions required for transformative learning to occur. For this reason, it is also important to look at the research on this theory of learning.

Transformative Learning Theory

Throughout our lifetime, we, as humans, accumulate knowledge and understanding about how the world works. This knowledge begins in childhood as we observe the world around us, interact with others, and accumulate experiences. Through these experiences we consolidate our beliefs, attitudes, values and assumptions about every aspect of our lives. When these perspectives are challenged through new learning or a critical event, it causes us to rethink this previous understanding. If the dilemma is so earth-shattering that the person comes to the realization that his or her prior assumption is no longer valid, a dissonance occurs. Transformative learning theory is based on the belief that as a result of this dissonance, the learner proceeds on a journey that leads to transformation.

Transformative learning theory (TLT) originally developed by Jack Mezirow (Cranton, 2006), has its roots in constructivism. In 1975, Mezirow conducted a study of 83 women who were returning to college after having raised their children or having been in the workforce. Originally, he was interested in identifying barriers or facilitating factors which affected their progress. He found that, as these women were introduced to

new ideas and learned new concepts, their outlooks and thinking evolved and their long-held beliefs were challenged, ultimately leading to a transformation of perspective.

Frames of reference. Transformative learning differs from that of the formative learning experiences of children. As we grow, we consolidate a vast repertoire of expectations based on our habitual experience, beliefs and values. Mezirow (1997) believes the education of adults requires a different approach than that of children because adults bring a variety of life experiences to the classroom. As a result, these experiences lead to a world view that is unique for each person. Mezirow (1991) originally used the term, “meaning perspective,” (p. 167) for this accumulation and consolidation of beliefs, attitudes, or assumptions into a specific perspective on the way the world works. Later, he renamed this term “frames of reference” (Mezirow, 2000, p.5). Frames of reference can be divided into three types: epistemic, sociolinguistic, and psychological. Epistemic frames of references are related to knowledge and how we use what we know. Sociolinguistic frames of reference refer to those that involve language and communication- how we give and interpret messages from others. Psychological frames of reference relate to the way we view ourselves. Distortions in our frames of reference occur when we realize that what we understand based on one of these frames of reference is not in agreement with new learning. When this distortion occurs, we are at the threshold of the transformative journey.

Most frames of reference are instilled in us through our parents and other significant people in our lives, assimilated unconsciously directly or indirectly through our cultures, societal expectations, and family traditions. As we gather experience, we constantly compare new ideas and information to that which lies within our frames of

reference. New experiences are sifted through the filter of these frames, narrowing and limiting our openness to different perspectives and ideas. They tend to become habitual, hence, when something does not mesh with these frames of reference; it is usually rejected without thinking.

A frame of reference has two dimensions (Mezirow, 2000). The first is a habit of mind is comprised of broadly based assumptions through which we filter our experiences. Habits of mind include social and cultural norms and expectations, religious philosophies, These habits of mind become channels, or even ruts, in which we travel through our lives (Cranton, 2012). The second dimension is the resulting point of view based on a habit of mind. These include beliefs, judgments or opinions, and attitudes (Sutherland & Crowther, 2008).

Mezirow (2000) identified the six habits of mind that make up frames of reference. None of these necessarily work alone but overlap and impact each other. The first three habits of mind include those originally identified as types of frames for reference- epistemic, sociolinguistic, and psychological. To these, he added three more which included moral-ethical, philosophical, and aesthetic habits of mind. Our conscience and view of morality are part of moral-ethical habits of mind while philosophical habits of mind refer to religious beliefs and worldview. Aesthetic habits of mind are comprised of our concepts of beauty and personal tastes. Cranton (2006) identified that all six habits of mind are interrelated and interdependent.

The second dimension is the resulting point of view based on a habit of mind. These include beliefs, judgments, opinions, and attitudes (Sutherland & Crowther, 2008). When we express a point of view, we are giving voice to our habits of mind. Mezirow

(2000) explains that point of views are made up of clusters of meaning schemes and usually operate outside of our awareness. Other points of view are difficult to understand at times because they call our own frames of reference into question, making this feel like a personal attack. We reject other points of view, and thus, our learning can become narrowly determined by what fits with our frames of reference unless this disposition is changed by transformative learning.

Mezirow (2000) explained that “a more dependable frame of reference is one that is more inclusive, differentiating, permeable (open to other viewpoints), critically reflective of assumptions, emotionally capable of change, and integrative of experience” (p. 19). Distortions in our frames of reference occur when we realize that what we understand based on one of these frames of reference is not in agreement with new learning. When this distortion occurs, we are at the threshold of the transformative journey.

Phases of Transformative Learning. Originally, Mezirow developed a list of ten phases in which a person moves in their journey of perspective transformation. In 1991, Mezirow suggested that an eleventh phase, that of altering present relationships and forging new ones be added to the first ten (Mezirow, 1991). Although, most researchers have not added this phase when referring to Mezirow’s phases, I have included this in the list below because of Mezirow’s recommendation. These phases include:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical evaluation of assumptions, beliefs, or values

4. Recognizing that this discontent is shared by others who have also been through resultant change
5. Exploring new roles, actions, and relationships
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquisition of new knowledge and skills to support the new course of action
8. Trying on the new role
9. Altering present relationships and forging new ones
10. Building competence and self-confidence in the new role
11. Integrating the new perspective into one's life

Mezirow did not consider it mandatory that all of these phases were required for transformative learning to occur; however, he did believe that three were necessary: a disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, and rational discourse.

A disorienting dilemma is one in which the learner is confronted by an event that challenges earlier held beliefs, values, or assumptions. A disorienting dilemma might arise as the result of a single event. This type of disorienting dilemma has been termed epochal, occurring in one defining experience or moment in time. Some examples of a disorienting dilemma are the September 11th tragedy, visiting a different country, or the death of a family member. On the other hand, when disorientation occurs based on an accumulation of problematic experiences it is termed incremental or cumulative disorientation (Mezirow, 2000). Disorientation in this case occurs over a longer period of time, building from one experience to the next. The amassing of experiences during a college class might possibly lead to incremental disorientation.

Once disorientation occurs, learners have a variety of choices. They can choose to ignore the new information, deny or discard it, or decide to consider the previous assumptions in light of the new information (Poutiatine, 2009). It is difficult to believe that adults might go through their entire lives never questioning habits of mind or points of view. It is not a matter of disorientation occurring; however, but a matter of how they reacts when it occurs. It is important to emphasize that this choice is ultimately under the learners' complete control. The implication then is that learners must believe that they have control over their own learning.

The choice to continue in the face of disorientation requires learners to have developed certain emotional maturity (Mezirow, 2000). This involves facets of self-directed learning including that of self-management and learner control (Cranton, 2006). Mezirow explained those individuals had to be free of oppression in order to be able to transform their learning. In order for this to occur, learners need control over their own choices.

Critical reflection. When a frame of reference or habit of mind becomes problematic, we resolve it through critical reflection, one of the major tenets of transformative learning theory. It necessitates the learners' contemplation of the long-held assumption in light of the new information, and requires rational examination of how it aligns with previously-held frames of reference. Critical reflection can transpire in a variety of ways, depending on the type of knowledge that is being challenged.

Mezirow (2000) explains that critical reflection occurs in a variety of forms and in light of different types of knowledge. It can occur based on two types of knowledge, instrumental and communicative. Mezirow used Habermas' (1971) domains of learning

as the basis of his explanation of critical reflection (Sutherland & Crowther, 2008).

Notably, Habermas' third type, emancipatory learning, is not included by Mezirow but instead subsumed into the transformation process.

The first type of knowledge, instrumental learning, includes that which is action-based and allows us to control our environment or other people. Examples include knowing how to build a house, make a cake, or read a book. Instrumental knowledge can be tested by consideration of whether or not the objectives have been met and through task-oriented problem-solving focusing on cause-effect relationships (Mezirow, 1990).

Communicative knowledge involves understanding what is being communicated to you by others. Communication can be through verbal or nonverbal means such as body language and facial expressions, through books and media, or artwork and poetry. Mezirow considered the domain of communicative learning particularly important for critical reflection (Mezirow, 2003). In the course of communication, individuals must be able to understand the message, evaluate the source of the message, as well as the purpose and expectations of the messenger. Communicative knowledge requires the development of skills so that we are able to determine meaning through our best judgment. Transformative learning, which equates with Habermas' (1971) emancipatory knowledge, is the result of critically reflecting on instrumental and communicative knowledge. This is assisted by learners' abilities to be self-reflective and self-determining.

Mezirow differentiates between three types of critical reflection (Cranton, 2006). When problem solving, we question knowledge in terms of content, process, and premise. Reflection on content involves the questioning of the content or the description of the

problem. In general, content reflection encompasses “what” questions, process reflection refers to questions of “how”, and premise questioning includes “why” questions. Both types of knowledge, instrumental and communicative, and the six habits of mind can be evaluated in light of each type of critical reflection. In each case, the questions become:

- Content – What is happening here? What is the actual problem?
- Process- How did the problem occur?
- Premise- Why is this important?

Critical reflection on content and process can lead to premise reflection. Of the three, reflection involving premise is that which leads to transformative learning. Premise reflection is also the least evident in research (Taylor, 2007).

Mezirow warns that not all thought is critical reflection nor does it lead to transformation (Mezirow, 1994). Critical reflection takes two forms, that of objective or subjective reframing (Mezirow, 2000). Objective reframing involves critical reflection on the assumptions of others. This can be reflection based on a narrative, something communicated to you, or problem solving on a specific task. Subjective reframing, on the other hand, occurs when adults critically reflect on their own assumptions. Subjective reframing encompasses critical self-reflection on one’s own assumptions. According to Kitchenham (2008), subjective reframing can take four forms: narrative, systemic, therapeutic, or epistemic. Subjective reframing on narrative is the consideration of what someone else communicates to you as it applies to yourself and your own experience. Systemic subjective reframing applies to critical reflection of cultural and social systems. Subjective reframing of one’s own feelings and their consequences as well as in personal

relationships is related to therapeutic forms of critical self-reflection while the epistemic form involves consideration of why one learns in a certain way.

Mezirow (2000) explains that all critical reflection involves rational thinking. The learner must consciously consider disorientation in relation to previously-held assumptions through reframing. Critical self-reflection is often accompanied by feelings of shame or guilt. Poutiatine (2009) also points out that transformational change involves letting go and loss, as the old worldview is left behind. Other theorists; however, believe that transformative learning can involve extrarational thought. Dirkx offers the idea that soul work is required for this transformation (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006). His soul work encompasses subconscious processes involving symbolism, the senses, and intuition, as witnessed in the arts and appreciation of nature.

Many researchers have identified critical reflection as having occurred in the process of their investigation. Taylor (2007), however, ascertains that this seems to involve assumptions on the part of those researchers. The question of what constitutes critical reflection, as well as identifying how to enable its occurrence, is necessary in adult education.

Discourse. Other than critical reflection, perhaps the most important phase of the transformation process requires critical-dialectical discourse (Taylor, 2007). In transformative learning, discourse is explained as discussion regarding beliefs, values, and feelings related to points of view expressing a particular frame of reference (Mezirow, 2003). In order to successfully participate in discourse of this nature, the learner needs to develop critically reflective skills as described above and have the ability to make reflective judgments as a result.

Criticism of Transformative Learning Theory. Transformative learning theory, as with all theories, is not without its critics. The criticism takes three specific directions. Other theorists have identified that transformative learning theory does not give credence to the need for social action as a result of transformation (Brookfield, 2000) , that not enough attention has been given to the spiritual on transformative learning (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006), and that the theory itself has critical flaws (Newman, 2012).

There has been criticism of transformative learning theory for not giving enough attention to the importance of social change as a result of transformative learning process (Cranton, 2006). Mezirow purports that in order to make a plan for social change; one must first go through individual transformation. If that individual then chooses, societal change might then become the resulting plan of action. Mezirow also reminds adult educators to bear in mind that all transformations do not necessarily lead to social action but may instead be related to personal goals (Mezirow, 2000).

Newman (2012) outlined a variety of reasons he doubts the existence of transformative learning at all. He believes that what has been identified as transformation is difficult or impossible to prove because “the transformations can only be verified by the learners themselves” (p. 39). Franz, et al. (2009) who studied transformative experiences of extension agents and 4-H camp staff, identified this reliance on personal perspective as a possible issue, questioning the extent to which what was indicated as transformative might be typical maturation.

According to Newman (2012), there are also several flaws in transformative learning theory. While I believe some of his perceived flaws are addressed by Mezirow and other theorists, it is important to look at all points of view. For this reason, I have

included those which have not been directly addressed in other sections of this review of the literature.

To begin, Newman has difficulty seeing the differentiation between transformative learning and other kinds of learning. He believes learning should be viewed in terms of degrees instead of the kind of learning. Next, Newman pinpoints a need for transformative learning theorists to clarify the difference between identity and consciousness. He explains that one of the phases of Mezirow's theory involves the trying on of new roles but Newman believes that all learning changes the learner's roles and thus identities in some manner are also changed. Finally, Newman finds the relationship of some transformational learning theorists with associated spirituality as the most worrisome. He sees the inclusion of soul work by some theorists such as Dirkx, an implication that a supernatural force is required for transformative learning and that anyone who denies or does not recognize this is excluded from transformation.

Mezirow (2000) has requested that theorists with differing views look at ways in which these points of view can be combined into one theory base. Cranston and Roy (2003) purport a holistic view of transformative learning theory that will silence the controversial points of view. According to these authors, learning does not always take the same path and the journey of transformation is different for each learner. Cranston and Roy (2003) looked at the rational-extrarational, cognitive-creative, individual-social views as on a continuum of the journey of transformation instead of an either-or requirement. In addition, they consider the importance of looking at each person's epistemic habits of mind as evidence of how the process is an individual one. Each adult approaches learning differently, has unique experiential knowledge that has to be

considered, and frames of reference peculiar to their own development. This makes the journey of transformation one that is not easily identified, described, or quantified, leaving researchers still looking for answers about transformative learning today.

Transformative Learning Theory's place in professional development. Over the past 37 years, transformative learning theory (TLT) has found a place in adult education where it remains, constantly evolving, and being expanded upon.

Transformative learning theory is especially powerful in adult learning environments because it challenges the traditional “banking” approach of education in which the teacher allows the learner to gain knowledge if the student is deemed as worthy, much as one makes deposits into a bank. In TLT, the learner becomes the one with the ultimate control for internalization of learning, thus shifting the power, and ultimately, the responsibility, to the learner. Because educators are adult learners, first and foremost, transformative learning theory might be considered in research on teacher change and effective professional development activities.

Book Study Groups

Professional book studies provide teachers with opportunities to read literature individually then meet in groups to discuss what was read in light of personal beliefs and classroom experience. The use of professional book studies as a means of providing effective teacher professional development has not been widely studied. While research on informal book groups is numerous, research on professional book study as effective professional development is relatively rare in comparison.

The research involving informal book clubs indicates the broad assimilation of literacy in our lives, the popularity of pleasure reading, and the continuing need for social

interchange of ideas even when not required by employment responsibilities (Long, 2003). These groups of individuals come together to discuss literature outside the work day and usually without affiliation with any one particular group. While the environment of the book club group is different than PD activities, it is still important to look at these results. Though the situations are different, the outcomes and processes involved show marked similarities.

Research on professional book studies basically falls into three general categories: those involving preservice, inservice, and university-public school collaborations. Most research took place in the context of a college class with preservice teachers or as participants or involved collaborations between university personnel and inservice teachers in the public school setting (Addington, 2001; Burbank, et al., 2010; L. A. Hall, 2009; Kooy, 2006b; Lassonde, Stearns, & Dengler, 2005; McGlenn, et al., 2003; Mosley & Rogers, 2011; Reilly, 2008; Roberts, Jensen, & Hadjiyianni, 1997). A search of the literature provided insight into two main areas of research on book groups in general. One involves informal book clubs, those that occur in informal settings without ties to any type of employment, while the other involves professional book study groups that are linked to employment of some kind. In order to more fully understand what occurs in professional book study groups, I found it necessary to also review the informal book club research.

Informal Book Clubs

The first category, informal book clubs, takes place outside of the work day, is designed for pleasure reading, leisurely in nature, and is not directly related to a professional environment. Krashen refers to this type of reading as free voluntary reading

or FVR (Krashen, 1993). These FVR groups are identified by a variety of terms in the research. These terms include book clubs, literature groups, and book or reading groups. In addition, groups that focus on specific genre can be titled as such, as with classics, mystery, or romance book clubs. Regardless of the name given to the FVR group, the basic differentiation between this type and the main focus group of this paper is that this group is voluntary, involves free reading, and is not related to professional growth or tied to any type of employment. Bauman (1994) defines these as “group-directed learning in that they exist outside any specific institutional support and they are organized and sustained by group consensus” (p. 37). While, on the surface, a literature review of leisure reading groups may seem unrelated to a study of professional development of teachers, much can be learned from examination of these groups.

History of book clubs. FVR groups were studied extensively by Long (2003) in her research on the history of reading clubs in America. Historically, women in particular have been drawn to gathering in groups to discuss books. Long’s research indicates that women’s book clubs spread across the country after the Civil War almost as quickly as the frontier was settled, beginning in the city centers of the northeastern United States (Long, 2003). These women, often isolated as homemakers, considered the book club a place in which to learn and improve as individuals.

In the formal atmosphere of these groups, with strict rules and agendas, the members learned to speak in front of others, fostering the ability and confidence to express their thoughts in public. In addition, these women gained experience with organization and planning. While studying the classics and other books involving social

issues of the day, the book clubs compared and contrasted how they might improve the society in which they lived (Long, 2003).

As a result, the book clubs became socially active, believing in their mission to improve life for those less fortunate than they were (Fisher, 2005). In Houston, these groups became involved in educational reform starting kindergartens, women's college dormitories, providing college scholarships, and opening 75% of the first public libraries (Long, 2003). They also were involved in cultural reform creating parks, playgrounds, and becoming active in anti-labor laws for children. These groups believed there was a direct relationship between the books they studied and their responsibility as citizens.

Book clubs today. Long's research (2003) on present day book clubs shows that there continues to be some similarities with the book clubs of the past. She found that clubs continue to study books that increase their understanding of the issues of society today as well as the classics. *Bookmovement.com*, a popular website devoted to book clubs and with a membership of over 32,000 book clubs, provides evidence of this. Each week, *Bookmovement.com* provides a list of the books being read by the most clubs at that time. Of the top ten picks in the week of July 9, 2012, three were classics, and four others were narrative nonfiction (Hubert, 2012). The nonfiction books listed were *Monique and the Mango Rains: Two Years with a Midwife in Mali* (Holloway, 2007), *Three Cups of Tea* (Mortenson & Relin, 2006), and *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (Demick, 2009); which all provide insight into social issues in other countries. The classics in the top list included *Jane Eyre* (Brontë, 1943), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Harper Lee, 1960), and *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925). This

indicates that book clubs continue to be interested in both the study of classic works and societal issues.

Participating in book clubs. Members in present day book clubs are brought together by social networks of friends, family, and coworkers as in the earlier book clubs, often declaring isolation as motivation to join (Long, 2003). This method of membership selection provides homogeneity to these groups; however, instead of being boring, the interest lies in the discussions that members have around books because each member brings unique experiences, beliefs, and interpretations to the reading of each text. These informal groups can differ from the experiences of academic groups who read and discuss text. There is a freedom and lack of boundary when participants are not held accountable for their interpretations as compared with classroom or work environments in which responses are tied into grades or position. There is open-endedness to discussions that do not require some form of group consensus (Long, 2003).

Modern book clubs are more flexible in scheduling meetings in order to accommodate members' needs. Meetings are scheduled to work around the busy lives of the members. While book clubs of the past kept the same meeting dates for years, modern book clubs change meeting dates and times in consideration of their members (Long, 2003).

There is often a lack of formal leadership; however, some members may carry more literary authority due to their educational or vocational backgrounds while original members often carry more social clout. Long (2003) identified that participants consider their meetings "a gathering of equals" because all of the members are readers and willing to discuss their interpretations of text (p. 61). It has also been conjectured that the draw

for females to groups with only female members is that there is a feeling of safety that one's ideas will be heard (Howie, 2003; Long, 2003). This allows members to participate in an atmosphere of free and open idea exchange, mutual respect, and encouragement (Howie, 2003).

Choosing books. Informal book club groups choose the literature they read through a variety of means. Book club members want books that relate to their lives, often comparing or contrasting to their experiences, their own stories. Most allow for all members to have input, unlike traditional book clubs who chose books by formal committee or through a long-term plan. With more traditional book club formats, some members might feel marginalized when not allowed to participate in book choices. The most common methods include allowing for democratic voting, general consensus, or rotation of offerings among members (Long, 2003).

The book choices of each club reflect the lives these members live outside of the clubs, their interests, concerns, and wonderings. While many of the book selections are influenced by popular culture, such as bestseller lists, prize winners, or publisher advertising, book club members mention that one of the benefits of membership is that they read books or genres they would not have chosen on their own. In other words, book clubs open up new literary territory to explore (R. M. Hall, 2003).

Online book clubs. Online book clubs have also become increasingly popular. These clubs provide a higher level of flexibility and diversity of membership which has added to their success (Fisher, 2005). They can reach across district and national borders to bring together readers who share similar interests. Members can respond to questions and comments put forth by others at their own pace and time. As with other book club

groups, online groups are also found to help members become more proficient at reading critically, broaden their reading choices, give opportunities to voice opinions, and reflect on the opinions of others in relation to their own understanding (Fisher, 2005).

Reasons members leave. It is also important to identify issues that caused members to leave FVR groups. One of the reasons for leaving a group is marginalization of members through several different means (McArdle, 2009). These include the lack of diversity of thought, narrow or repetitive genre choice, too traditional or formal a setting. In addition, others cited the lack of input in book selection and discussion that is dominated or limited by just a few members (McArdle, 2009).

Summary. Long (2003) indicates surprise that book clubs have not disappeared altogether in today's present world of demanding lives. So why are book clubs as popular, or even more so, than ever? Social interaction, a feeling of equality among members, and the supportive, cooperative atmosphere were cited for reasons for continuing membership in these groups by researchers (Long, 2003; M. W. Smith, 1996). In a study of factors that are evident in successful FVR groups, Bauman (1994) found that: 1) group makeup should provide for diversity of opinions and experience, 2) the choice of a variety of topics and forms of literature enable exploration of new ideas and issues, 3) the groups develop semi-formal ground rules which focus and direct the discussion, and that, 4) informal context allowed for growth and development of individuals. It is important to consider how the qualities mentioned above also incorporate principles of adult learning.

Bonner and Turner (1999) see similarities between professional book studies and informal book clubs. Both groups involve adult learners who require the same elements

regardless of environment. These researchers identify that adult self-directed learners require activity-oriented, goal-oriented, and learning-oriented experiences. These authors recommend that book study groups should be formed with adult learning requirements in mind.

Professional book studies

The second major category of book study research includes any group that provides its members with an environment in which to read and discuss text as a means of professional improvement related to current employment or a future career path. These study groups are found in work and academic settings such as colleges, universities and other educational environments. They are often called by different names such as study groups, professional book studies, professional book discussion groups (Birchak, 1998) or even book clubs as with FVR groups. These professional book study groups are the focus of this dissertation and for the purposes of clarity the term *professional book studies* will be used to represent this type of book group throughout the paper.

University settings. A search of the literature on research conducted on professional book study groups indicates that most of the research data were collected in university settings in which a professor acted as the primary researcher and class requirements were attached to participation. Most of this research also involved pre-service teachers in the college setting (Addington, 2001; L. A. Hall, 2009; Lassonde, et al., 2005; Mosley & Rogers, 2011; Reilly, 2008; Roberts, et al., 1997). Consideration of the research in university settings can also provide us with information about what happens in book study groups.

Many researchers have investigated students, including preservice and inservice teachers, participating in book study groups as part of their college coursework (Addington, 2001; L. A. Hall, 2009; Lassonde, et al., 2005; Mensah, 2009; Reilly, 2008). While each study focused on different aspects of participation, their results showed similarities. Lassonde, Stearns, and Dengler (2005) concentrated on analysis of how participation in book study groups might influence attitudes toward reading, as well as the students' future teaching practice. These researchers focused on Vygotskian principles in which discussion in social groups is believed to help learners reorganize thinking. Addington (2001) compared discourse in two different classroom settings while acting as a participant-researcher in both an English seminar and a traditional English literature classroom. Addington found that the English seminar, which was set up as a book club, provided participants with the opportunity for exploratory and collaborative discussion, increasing speaker turns by participants, with fewer turns attributed to the professor. Hall (2009) and Mensah (2009) found that the participants of their studies brought both their previous learning, including assumptions to these discussions while Reilly (2008) found one group of inservice teachers used their book discussions as a way to practice new strategies. These researchers used book studies as a method for increasing student participation in collaborative and reflective discussions. While in other studies, involving preservice teachers reading multicultural literature indicated a change in thinking about the importance of using this literature in the participants' future classrooms (Mosley & Rogers, 2011; Roberts, et al., 1997).

All these studies typify the issues that could limit research in these settings. Primarily, it is difficult to identify the true intentions and honesty of students

participating in book study groups connected to a college grade because of the hidden power relationships between professor and student. In fact, in Hall's study(2008), some students viewed their participation as a requirement for the course instead of internalizing the belief that the researchers hoped they would; that teachers need to constantly keep abreast of professional reading. Secondly, all of the studies took place in one semester and the discussions were short in duration, seemingly too brief a time period to invite any permanent change or allow for in-depth discussion. Finally, participants were not usually given the choice of topic or text, thus limiting their input on decisions about the direction of their study. It is important to consider how these conditions might affect participants' long-term learning.

Professional book studies with inservice teachers. A review of the literature found surprisingly little research involving professional book studies within the school setting as a means of professional development for inservice teachers. Research on professional book study groups has mainly related to university settings or partnerships between universities and schools. This is probably because inservice teachers rarely act as researchers within the context of their positions. Four studies, in particular, were related to my research focus (Burbank, et al., 2010; Kooy, 2006a; McGlenn, et al., 2003; Selway, 2003).

Kooy (2006a) compared two independent groups of teachers, one of novice teachers and the other made up of experienced teachers. Both groups read the same books. Kooy found that the participants, regardless of experience level, used the meetings as a chance to share stories of their experiences, often initiated by reflections on the readings. She found that the teachers developed close relationships as result of the social

nature of the interactions within the groups, just like FVR groups. Kooy found that these close relationships and sharing of stories helped teachers deal with isolation and were strong reasons participants' continued to participate in the book studies.

Burbank and Kauchak (2010) compared preservice and in-service teachers participation in book study groups. These researchers asked teachers to voluntarily participate in book study groups at schools in which the preservice teachers were located. They found that inservice teachers discussed and examined beliefs and values, and teaching practice. Preservice teachers, on the other hand, were more focused on technical aspects of curriculum delivery, the "how to" of teaching.

Two particular studies most closely represent that of the focus for my dissertation research in that they provided participants with voluntary participation and choice in book selection: McGlenn, Clavert and Johnson (2003) and Selway (2003). Both of these studies involved professional book study groups that lasted three and four years, respectively. This research involved in-service teachers, and allowed for voluntary participation.

McGlenn, Calvert, and Johnson (2003) formed a professional book study that lasted three years and involved inservice teachers and college professors in a collaborative group with equal input from all members. Participants were mainly eighth grade teachers from various disciplines that originally met to discuss multicultural young adult novels in order to use them in their respective classrooms. The members chose the books, and rotated facilitation of the discussions. Over time, the book topics changed to better meet the needs of their students: historical novels, fantasy and science fiction, and nonfiction. In addition to providing a source for reading in the classroom, participants

also modeled different teaching strategies as a component of their turns in the facilitator's role. The authors of this study believe that professional book studies are a viable alternative to traditional PD because it allows participants to become a community of lifelong learners who supported and challenged each other to expand their own learning and improve their classroom practices (McGlenn, et al., 2003).

Like me, Selway (2003) wanted to share her collaborative experiences in college classes by promoting book study groups as professional development in her school. She started a professional book group that lasted four years. The group met four times per year for one and a half hours. Books were chosen based on a main topic: diversity in schools. Selway, as a co-facilitator, described what she observed in these book study groups including choosing of books, keeping conversations moving, dealing with conflicts and meeting the diverse needs of its members. She identified how some of the participants changed classroom practices as a result. Selway also explained that an issue that she dealt with as co-facilitator was the different rates of changes in thinking and practice that members exhibited. It was also difficult to keep all members involved, especially when new members came into the group. These new members did not have the benefit of having read the materials or participating in the previous book events which put them at a disadvantage in relation to the older members. The facilitators had to consider that all members might not be in the same place in their learning and transformation, and had to take this into consideration in planning.

All of these studies involving inservice teachers include different components, such as voluntary participation and choice of materials, the learning and discussing of new strategies and ideas, development of relationships in a trust-filled social group in

which all members play an equal role, and the groups participating for a longer duration of time. One interesting difference between these studies and my proposal is that none of these studies were done by an inservice teacher as the primary researcher. In addition, the previous studies were mostly short-term in nature, usually only over the length of one semester. The time frame for this case study is a period of roughly four years.

Book studies involving other professional groups. Book clubs are also being used by other groups as a form of personnel training and development. Smith and Galbraith (2011) researched the use of book study as a training model for library personnel. According to their survey and interview data, they found that the book club format enabled participants to retain more information, and better internalize the concepts than traditional training. The participants in this study preferred this format above all other types.

Smith and Galbraith (2011) identified that successful book study groups have three specific factors: group direction, diversity of participants, and an informal atmosphere. Group direction is explained as the use of a self-directed learning model in which the participants share individual and collective responsibility for learning. Participants in this study were allowed to choose their own books, and participate freely in discussions. Based on conversational learning theory, this study described how learners constructed meaning based on bringing their experiences to the group's collective knowledge, thus enhancing everyone's learning. The researchers found that diversity of members does not necessarily refer to ethnicity and gender but more to life experience and point of view. Smith and Galbraith found surprising diversity in the backgrounds of the library employees involved in the book club.

Bonner and Turner (1999) also described a group of human resource professionals who have been involved in a book study group who read books related to their profession. The authors emphasize how the needs of self-directed learners can be met through participation in this type of group. They identify three components of self-directed learning that specifically apply: an orientation by goal, activity, and learning. Both these studies indicate that professional book studies allow participants to have their needs met as adult learners. While the setting and professional focus may be different, the members of these professional book studies also found benefit in participation and preferred it to other forms of PD.

Chapter Summary

Effective professional development has been shown to provide teachers with the opportunity to participate in active learning that is directly applicable to their instruction. The research on effective professional development is closely aligned to needs of adult learners. Transformative learning theory also has potential to provide insight into how meeting the needs of educators as adult learners can lead to long-term changes in thinking and practice.

Book studies have been researched in both informal and formal settings. Informal book studies provide participants with a safe social setting in which to share perceptions, insights, and beliefs while discussing literature with others. These outcomes have also been identified in results from studies of professional book study groups in college and various work settings. The main body of research on formal book study groups has occurred in the college setting as part of the class requirements for preservice and inservice teachers. Studies involving teachers and educational administrators, however,

were short in duration and usually implemented as part of a researcher's study. Little research has been conducted involving teacher groups who voluntarily participated in a variety of book study groups over a number of years as part of professional development activities. The focus of this study is to close a gap in the research by examining the perceptions of teachers and other educators who voluntarily participated in professional book study groups over a period of several years.

Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide a description of the professional book study experience and gain insight into its use to support teacher professional development. In this chapter, I will provide the rationale for my choice of methodologies and theoretical framework. I will also describe the participants, the reason for their selection, methods of data collection, and analysis.

Theoretical Framework

I believe that knowledge does not preexist outside of human understanding. Each person's understanding is unique, and each constructs knowledge based on a myriad of experiences that form a complex network of beliefs, values, and perceptions. It is impossible to understand or know one truth because the truth vacillates within all human beings; "Meaning is an interpretation" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 4). For these reasons, my research is conducted through the lens of constructivism.

In social discourse, the learners listen to how other learners interpret information, respond with related thoughts, and then repeat the interaction, constantly reframing their thinking. Through this interplay of language, the learners construct an understanding of what is discussed, and via this social dialogue, refine and solidify their thoughts. As learners discuss what they think, they extend each other's understanding (Little, 2003).

The consideration of the needs of adult learners finds a connection within constructivist learning theory. As adult learners, when teachers learn new methods, they rely both on connections with their own experience and understanding of teaching practices, and on their positions as educators (van den Berg, 2002). This learning takes time, and I believe, cannot typically be accomplished through traditional forms of

professional development. For these reasons, I believe that the study of how educators interact within professional book study groups is particularly relevant in terms of constructivism.

Rationale for Methodological Choices

With these beliefs in mind, I am interested in investigating what occurs in professional book study groups. In particular, I am interested in identifying and then describing what elements of participation drove educators to choose to take part in the studies repeatedly over several years. It is important to me to begin my research without any preconceived ideas of the reasons for the participants' involvement.

This research will be conducted using the design of a case study methodology. Merriam (2009) defines case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). Because the end product of this case study is a thick description of what occurred in the book study groups it will be descriptive in nature. In descriptive case studies, researchers use multiple sources of information, such as interviews and artifacts, to provide a thorough understanding of a particular case (Creswell, 1998). In the “bounded system” of the professional book studies being studied, data will be collected from interviews, reflective summaries, and blogs. Based on Stake’s case study types as cited in Merriam (2009), this case study would be considered intrinsic in nature because its study is based on this researcher’s interest in this particular case, making it intrinsically motivating.

The case study will include participants from different professional book study groups within the bounded system of one special education department (Merriam, 2009). These book studies occurred in a rural school system in the southeastern United States.

The participants of the case study were all members of the department from 2008 to 2011. Thus, this research study is considered of the single-case embedded design type (Yin, 2009). These book studies were provided by this department as one method of ongoing professional development. This site was selected because it provides a unique sampling of members of book study groups who chose to participate in this form of professional development over and over again.

Participant Selection

Originally, I gained access to the district as one of the system-wide coaches in the department. I proposed the professional book studies to the supervisor in the fall of 2007 after learning about them from a professor at the university I was attending. The proposal was accepted and, as the system-wide literacy coach, I was asked to coordinate the book studies. The other system-wide coach and I facilitated the book study groups as part of our job responsibilities. Toward the end of the third year of book studies, which coincidentally correlated with the ending of my graduate coursework, I began to consider the professional book studies as a possible topic for my dissertation research. I approached my district supervisor with the idea and she wholeheartedly agreed.

By December of 2011, there had been 10 book studies with a total of 28 different participants. Excluding me, 12 other educators participated in at least four of the book study opportunities. I considered that this was indicative of an ongoing interest in, and commitment to this form of professional development. Because participants only had the option of participating in one book study each semester, participation in four book studies represented a commitment of approximately two full school years. Table 4 in Appendix B indicates available artifacts for each of the book studies.

All of the qualifying participants were invited to take part in the research, because I believed that their positions, background, and experience had the potential to represent different points of view and a diversity of perspectives. Their voices and perceptions can provide insight into what occurs within the book study groups and its alignment with the components of effective professional development. I also wanted to find out what changes, if any, they made to instructional practice and professional beliefs as a result of their participation.

Introduction of the Participants

The study participants represent a comprehensive sample of the types of professionally licensed personnel in this county's special education department. Four of the participants taught at the elementary level, five taught at the middle and/or high school levels and the remaining three worked in multiple schools or county-wide as professional support personnel. Eleven of the twelve participants are female and white, and one participant, Crystal (all names are pseudonyms), is African American. Their years of professional experience range from 7 to 35 years.

Elementary school educators. There were four participants who taught at the elementary level throughout the book studies: Ava, Ginger, Crystal and Hannah.

Ava has been with the county for seven years, all at the elementary level, with the exception of her first year at a local middle school. She has worked as a resource teacher in the same school since August of 2007. She taught in two different states before coming to this system and last took graduate classes in 1994.

Ginger has taught for 29 years at the same elementary school as Ava. She has primarily worked with students with multiple disabilities in a self-contained classroom

setting. Ginger had a Master's degree at the time of the studies, earned in 1997. Ava and Ginger are the only two special education teachers at this elementary school; however, Meg also worked at this school as the speech therapist during the first two years of the book studies before being given another assignment.

Crystal teaches at the same school as Hannah and Meg in the resource and inclusion classroom settings. She has been at this school for her whole career. Crystal is has taught for 35 years and has a Master's degree.

Hannah also teaches in the county's largest elementary and has been with the county as a special educator for 22 years. She has a Master's degree, earned in 2007. Until her move to the elementary level six years ago, most of her educational teaching career was at the county's special needs preschool.

Middle and high school level participants. Five of the participants worked at the secondary level.

Melody is a middle school special education teacher who has worked mainly in an extended resource setting but has also worked as a system-wide coach. She is currently in her 13th year of teaching and received a Master's degree in 2004. She teaches in a very rural and relatively isolated middle school.

Juanita has taught in special education for 32 years, mainly in middle school resource and inclusion settings. She is one of two special education teachers at her middle school in one of the county's small towns. Juanita received a Master's degree in the early 1990's.

Prieta has a science undergraduate education and has taught at both middle and high school in special education resource and inclusion settings. She transferred from the

county's largest middle school to the neighboring high school after the first year of book studies. She has taught for 29 years in public school and has a Master's degree received in 1986.

Stella teaches at the middle school where Prieta used to work. Stella has taught for 20 years and received her Master's in 2004. She has worked with all types of students with disabilities in a variety of settings, including CDC, resource, and inclusion classrooms.

Natasha retired from this same middle school in May of 2013. She taught for 34 years in inclusion and resource classrooms. She has a Master's she earned in 1974. Her teaching career has included placements in one elementary and two different middle schools.

Other educators. The remaining members worked in numerous schools as professional support staff.

Suzie was one of the facilitators of the book study groups and has worked in special education for 20 years. She graduated in 2004 with an Ed.S. Prior to her current assignment as a system-wide coach, she worked with elementary students in a Comprehensive Development Classroom (CDC) in the county's largest elementary school for 13 years. For the last seven years, she has coached special education teachers on students' transition and prevocational needs.

Meg is a speech pathologist in her seventh year in the school system. She has worked at several of the county's elementary and middle schools as an itinerant. Meg highest level of college is a Master's received in 2006.

Lily is a school psychologist and has worked in most of the county's schools for the past 24 years. She earned her Ed.S. degree in 2000. She has consistently worked with

Crystal, Hannah, and Meg at one of the largest elementary schools, but has worked with students at all grade levels.

Context of the Case Study

The study took place in a rural county in east Tennessee. According to the US Census Bureau (2014), this county had an estimated population of 53,470 and a poverty rate of 14.4% in 2012. It is important to note that the individual schools' poverty rates varied greatly due to the isolation of some communities and the lack of job opportunities. The county's school system has 18 schools which include a preschool/alternative school, six elementary schools, four middle schools, and five high schools.

The professional book studies took place as part of the special education department's professional development from 2008 to 2011. During this time period, there were 10 book studies with a total of 28 different participants involved. Seven of these professionals were involved in seven different book studies, the maximum amount in which anyone could participate because some of the book studies were offered concurrently. Of this core group, two were the facilitators and the other five included two middle school teachers, two elementary school teachers and one teacher who moved from middle to high school level in 2009.

Five additional participants were involved in at least five book studies. These include a school psychologist, speech pathologist, a pre-school/elementary teacher, an elementary teacher and a middle school teacher. The remaining participants were teachers who participated in four book studies.

Timeline, procedures and expectations of the studies

Before presenting the analysis of the data, it is important to understand the timeline, procedures, and expectations of the professional book studies. By understanding the specifics of the organization and timeline, readers are assisted in placing the case study in context. The following timeline and description will provide a narrative explanation of the sequence of events for the professional book studies.

The initial invitation. The original invitation and guidelines for participation in the book study groups were sent out early in the spring of 2008, via email. The email outlined that the book studies were totally voluntary and were open to any of the department's professional staff. The professionally licensed staff included school psychologists, speech pathologists, audiologists, system-wide personnel, and special education teachers. Participants were required to attend all meetings and write a reflective summary to receive either the \$150 stipend or six hours in-service credit. Until the winter of 2010, when the supervisor changed the expectations for participation, the book study members could receive partial stipend amounts, if they missed sessions due to illness. Beginning with the 2010-2011 school year, the supervisor changed the requirements to include attendance at all meetings, at least one entry in the online blog, and completion of the final reflection before the stipend was paid.

Facilitator's role. Each book study group had a facilitator whose duty was to take attendance and keep discussion flowing using open-ended questioning techniques. The Special Education Supervisor asked the Transition Coach, and me, the Behavior/Literacy Coach, to facilitate the discussions. Our responsibilities were to keep track of attendance, decide what would be read for each meeting, and lead the discussion. In addition, we

were expected to collect final reflection papers. Later, when the blog was added, it also became the facilitators' duty to provide oversight and management of the blog, including making sure all participants were able to make entries and that they had written at least one entry for each study. Facilitators were given the same choices of compensation and did not receive any additional amounts.

Before each new book study, the Transition Coach and I, the only two facilitators throughout, met once to discuss organization and our responsibilities as facilitators. We decided what chapters should be read for each meeting, as well as setting of the dates, times, and locations for the two book study groups. The length of each week's readings was determined by the length of the book and complexity of text. Each week the members were to read two or more chapters in the selected book. If the book provided strategies, the participants were asked to implement one in their respective classrooms or workplace, if applicable, and report the results back to the group. This was not a requirement but a recommendation and there were no additional rules for participation in the discussions, leaving them open-ended conversations. At the end of the study, the participants were required to complete a reflective paper, not a summary, of what they read.

Book Selection

The procedures for choosing books for each study evolved over time. For the first studies in the spring of 2008, I chose the two books. These were books that I felt were very influential in my learning during my graduate level classes. The Special Education Supervisor selected the next book and a subsequent book for the one of the studies in the spring of 2009. The rest were chosen by democratic vote from a list of recommendations

compiled by the department's Research and Development Team (RAD). In the summer of 2011, the Research and Development Team wrote a five-year professional development plan in which book studies would be an option. The RAD Team recommended books to be offered each semester over the course of the five years.

For the first book study, I recommended a choice of two books, *The Fluent Reader* (Rasinski, 2003) and *Choice Words* (Johnston, 2004). My reasoning was to provide one book geared toward the needs of elementary teachers and another geared toward middle/high school teachers; both being heavy on strategies that could easily be implemented. At the time this decision was made, I did not expect or consider that other professionals, such as speech pathologists or psychologists, would be interested in attending. The Special Education Supervisor also requested copies of each of the books so that she could read them, an expectation that continued throughout the studies.

The Out-of-Sync Child (Kranowitz, 1998) and *New Passages* (Sheehy, 1995) were both recommended by The Special Education Supervisor. She chose the first of these two books after it was recommended by the occupational therapy contract provider. She had read *New Passages* (Sheehy, 1995) while participating in a book study facilitated by the county's superintendent of schools and believed it would be a good choice for the department's studies.

The last recommended book was offered in the spring of 2009, along with the *New Passages* (Sheehy, 1995) book study. *I Read It but I Don't Get It* (Tovani, 2000) was recommended by me for the same reasons I recommended *The Fluent Reader* (Tovani, 2000) and *Choice Words* (Johnston, 2004). This book was actually chosen by

the group of educators after I gave a book talk at the last meeting of *The Out-of-Sync Child* (Kranowitz, 1998) book study.

With the exception of these five books, the typical procedure for choosing books was to send out an email to all professional staff, advising them of an upcoming book study, including a list of proposed book choices and a short summary of each. Those who were interested in participating sent back their top choices. The top two books were selected and these two book studies were conducted concurrently. The participants chose which study group to attend based upon their needs and/or interests.

The professional book studies

There were 10 book studies from the spring of 2008 to the spring of 2011. The essential information about the books is shown on Table 1.

Table 1.

| <i>Professional Book Studies</i> | | |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Date | Title | Author(s) |
| Spring, 2008 | <i>The Fluent Reader: Oral reading strategies for building word recognition, fluency, and comprehension.</i> | Rasinski, T. V. |
| Spring, 2008 | <i>Choice words: How our language affects children's learning.</i> | Johnston, P. H. |
| Winter, 2008 | <i>The Out of sync child: Recognizing and coping with sensory integration dysfunction.</i> | Kranowitz, C. S. |
| Spring, 2009 | <i>I read it but I don't get it: Comprehension strategies for adolescent readers.</i> | Tovani, C. |
| Spring, 2009 | <i>New passages: Mapping your life across time.</i> | Sheehy, G. |
| Spring, 2010 | <i>The essential 55: An award-winning educator's rules for discovering the successful student in every child.</i> | Clark, R. |
| Spring, 2010 | <i>Going with the flow: How to engage boys (and girls) in their literacy learning.</i> | Smith, M. & Wilhelm, J. |
| Spring, 2010 | <i>Thinking in pictures: And other reports from my life with autism.</i> | Grandin, T. |
| Fall, 2010 | <i>Classrooms that work: They can all read and write</i> | Cunningham, P. M., & Allington, R. L. |
| Spring, 2011 | <i>Rules in school</i> | Brady, K. |

Spring, 2008. I chose *The Fluent Reader* after reading it for a class at the local university. I felt that this was a good choice for the first book study because it was full of strategies that could be easily implemented, a relatively easy read, and interesting to elementary and middle school level special education teachers. There were seven participants for the study, including myself. All the participants taught in elementary resource or extended resource classrooms. The books were distributed and the teachers asked to read the first few chapters before the meeting two weeks hence. This group met on four separate occasions from 4:00 to 5:30 every other week. During the meeting we talked about particular sections or strategies that were particularly interesting or that raised questions. At the end of each meeting, the participants were asked to implement a strategy from that week's readings. At each subsequent meeting we started by discussing the implementation of those strategies. Ava, Ginger, and Crystal were members of this first group.

After reading *Choice Words* (Johnston, 2004), in a college class I felt it would be a good second selection for middle and high school teachers because of its focus on how teacher language affects students. Seven educators, in addition to the facilitator, Suzie, participated in the book study group. Six of the participants were middle school special educators and the seventh was a school psychologist. The group met at least four times throughout the time period, meeting every two weeks for an hour and a half each. There is no additional information about this study other than artifacts in the form of comments made by the participants at the end of the study, as well as the reflections completed by the participants. Stella was the only one of the study's participants involved in this professional book group. At the end of these two studies, the participants were asked to

write a reflection and these comments were quoted in a letter to the Superintendent of Schools. The Special Education Supervisor requested that the professional book studies be continued based on this feedback.

Fall, 2008. *The Out-of-Sync Child* (Kranowitz, 1998) was chosen by the Special Education Supervisor for the first study of the 2009-2010 school year. She wanted all of the participants to read this book because she felt the subject matter was particularly important for special educators to understand in light of their particular student populations. This book describes Sensory Processing Disorder, its characteristics, types, and ways to support students who demonstrate related issues. Seventeen participants signed up, not including the Transition Coach and me. There were five elementary school teachers, two preschool special educators, three school psychologists, and four middle school teachers. In addition, one speech pathologist and two more system-wide staff members joined the studies for the first time. Eleven of the twelve participants of this study- Lily, Suzie, Crystal, Ginger, Ava, Meg, Hannah, Juanita, Prieta, Suzie, and Stella - were part of the *Out-of-Sync Child* book study group.

This was the first book study in which the members participated in one of the meetings, via an online blog, instead of in person. The decision to use online discussion groups was based on two reasons: the supervisor's expectation that we make better use of technology and my perception that online discussion groups might make book studies available to those who might not participate otherwise. As a result, there were three face-to-face meetings, one in December, and two in January, after the holiday break. The virtual discussion board "meeting" occurred during the winter break. For this online discussion, the teachers were asked to reflect on chapters three through seven. They were

taught how to use the online discussion board in the first book study meeting in December. This new use of technology proved to be a challenge for several of the members who had never blogged before.

Spring, 2009. In the spring of 2009, two books were chosen from by the supervisor and me. These books were *I Read It but I Don't Get It* (Tovani, 2000) and *New Passages* (Sheehy, 1995). I had read the first book at college and felt it was an excellent choice because it focused on reading comprehension and had helpful strategies, much like *The Fluent Reader* (Rasinski, 2003) while the supervisor chose the second after reading it with other supervisors in a book group led by the school system superintendent. I am unsure whether these were pre-chosen or if they were the top vote getters from a list sent to potential participants. Seventeen participants signed up to participate in the two studies, ten for the former and seven for the latter.

The participants who signed up for the *I Read It but I Don't Get It* (Tovani, 2000) book study included five elementary school, two middle school, and one high school teacher. The last member was a retired part-time system-wide staff member. I led this study. Ava, Prieta, Melody, Crystal, and Ginger were part of this group. Of the seven who signed up for *New Passages* (Sheehy, 1995), Suzie, Lily, Stella, Meg, Hannah, and Juanita were amongst the participants.

Fall, 2009. For the 2009-2010 school year, the supervisor made a major change to the books studies. As a result of some absences in the previous year's studies, she made the decision to require participants to participate in all aspects of the study. If a participant did not attend all required face-to-face meetings, participate in the online blog,

and turn in the reflection paper by the deadline, he or she would not be paid. This was made explicit to the staff at the beginning of the school year.

The previous summer, the Research and Development Team made a list of suggested books for the year's book studies based on a survey of staff PD needs. They matched the book list to these requests, by researching books on the recommended topics as well as reviewing books I provided from the professional library and my own personal collection. The books were taken from a variety of topics specific to special educators and the population they served.

The first book chosen by vote was *Sisyphus and the Itsy Bitsy Spider* (Hartsell, 2008). When I tried to order the books; however, I found that this particular book was unavailable because it was out of print. This resulted in a delay in having the book study because we had to repeat the process of allowing participants to vote on a book, giving time to sign up for the study, and ordering the books. In the end there was no fall book study due to these delays. The next book studies did not begin until January of 2010.

Spring, 2010. The two books for the early spring study, *The Essential 55* (Clark, 2003) and *Going with the Flow* (M. W. Smith & Wilhelm, 2006), were chosen by popular vote from the list compiled by the Research and Development Team the previous summer. *The Essential 55* (Clark, 2003) is a book on classroom success by teaching and incorporating rules and expectations to help classroom management, written by the 2001 Disney Teacher of the Year, Ron Clark. *Going with the Flow* is the sequel to the popular book *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys* (M. W. Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) which describes the authors' study on the literacy attitudes and preferences of young males. *Going with Flow*

(M. W. Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) uses this research to provide instructional strategies in which to support male students in developing positive attitudes toward reading.

I was the facilitator for *The Essential 55* (Clark, 2003) book study group. There were twelve original participants, excluding myself, with four teachers of elementary level students, three at middle school, and two from the special education preschool program. In addition, one school psychologist and a speech pathologist made up the remaining members of the group. By the end of the study, three of these members had missed from at least one meeting and as a result, did not receive the stipend. Two of the three, however, did complete the reflective paper and complete the study in spite of this fact. Prieta, Crystal, Ginger, and Stella were part of this group.

The blog for this study had fifteen entries, three more than the one required per person. The entries reflect a change from that of summaries to connections with their classrooms and explanations of how the participants were using the rules explained in the book.

The Going with the Flow (M. W. Smith & Wilhelm, 2006) book study originally had seven group members signed up to participate. Two of the members taught at the high school level, two at the middle school level, and one at the upper elementary level. Another worked with gifted students system-wide. By the end of the study, two had missed at least one meeting and were not paid. Melody, Prieta, Juanita, and Suzie were involved in this professional book study.

Because these two studies were completed by mid-March, we were able to squeeze in another book study before the end of the year. The chosen book, *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996) was voted on in the same manner as the previous two and came

from the same RAD Team list. This book is the autobiographical account of Temple Grandin, a renowned animal scientist, who provides first-hand insight into the world of autism.

Twenty staff members signed up to be part of this book study. Of this total, two received the book but dropped out before the first meeting. All of the remaining members completed the requirements for the study and received a stipend, except one person who opted for in-service credit of six hours. Participants were asked to choose either a Monday or Wednesday meeting day; however, if they missed their usual day, they were allowed to attend the other meeting as long as it was in the same week and over the same material. There were five participants each from the elementary and middle schools, one high school teacher, a speech pathologist, a school psychologist, one preschool teacher and two system-wide staff, in addition to the facilitators. All twelve of the case study's participants were involved in this book study.

Fall, 2010. *Classrooms That Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2003) was chosen for the first book study of this school year. It was, once again, taken from a new list generated by the RAD Team that June. While this book was ordered early in the fall, the book order was only partially fulfilled and about half of the books were back ordered. This delayed the start of the book study and made it impossible for a second book study to be offered in the first semester.

Sixteen people participated in the book study and all of these completed the requirements to receive the stipend of \$ 150.00. Two weekly meetings, on Tuesday and Wednesday, were set. Once again an online blog date was offered in lieu of a face-to-face meeting. Ten of the participants attended the Tuesday meetings I facilitated and the rest

attended on Wednesday with Suzie. A new system-wide staff member, the audiologist, joined for the first time. The rest of the study's participants included five elementary and four middle school teachers, one high school teacher, one speech pathologist, and one school psychologist. Once again, all twelve of this case study's participants were involved in this book study.

This book study typifies all of the studies in several ways. First, the participants were given the books and the agenda which included dates and times of meetings, as well as the chapter assignments for each meeting. For this study in particular, the books were given out the last week of September. At that time, the participants were told to read chapters 1-4 prior to the first face-to-face meeting, the week of October 12th. Before the second meeting, participants were to read chapters 5-7. The third "meeting" took place the first week of October in the form of the online blog. All participants were expected to blog at least once on their reflections, comments, and questions during this week. During the blog week the study group was expected to read chapters 8-10. The fourth meeting was set for the week of November 30th and participants were expected to read the last four chapters and turn in their reflective paper at this final meeting.

The blog for *Classrooms That Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2003) had 27 entries. Interestingly, I had begun to notice two variations in the blogs. First, I observed that the participants' entries were evolving from superficially summative entries into those with reflective questions and responses to other members. In addition, the members began questioning each other about accepted practices across the county for the first time.

Spring, 2011. By the spring of 2011, the book study groups had become a permanent part of professional development activities for the department. There was a

consistent system for book selection and expectations for participation. *Rules in School* (Brady, 2003) was selected for the spring book study. The topic of this book is classroom management by teaching students self-discipline using strategies such as rules with logical consequences for inappropriate behavior.

Thirteen participants were involved in this book study which occurred from February through April. Of these, there were three elementary and four middle school teachers, as well as one high school teacher. Two school psychologists and one speech pathologist participated, in addition to the facilitators. All twelve of the participants in this study were part of the *Rules in School* (Brady, 2003) book study group.

The book study meetings included three face-to-face meetings and one blog week. Once again, two different days of the week were chosen and participants were asked to choose one. Every participant completed all requirements of the study and was paid the accompanying stipend.

Data Collection Methods

Data for this case study came from three sources. It included open-ended interviews of selected participants and two different artifacts collected during the book studies: blog entries and reflective summaries. The use of a variety of methods provided triangulation, as well as within-case, and cross-case comparison of the data (Merriam, 2009). A list of the artifacts associated with the participants is included in Appendix B.

Blog Entries. The first artifact included entries from online blogs. Participants were required to provide at least one entry in each book study beginning with the winter 2010 book study, *The Essential 55* (Clark, 2003). These online blogs were password encoded and only members of the book study could make comments. Once each book

study was completed, the blog was closed. I had access to the blog entry transcripts for three of the book studies: *The Essential 55* (Clark, 2003), *Rules in School* (Brady, 2003) and *Classrooms That Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2003). These blogs were used for data analysis and also during interviews as a visual reminder of participation during the book studies.

Reflective summaries. While engaged in the book study groups, each participant was required to write a final reflective paper and turn it into the supervisor as part of the professional development requirement. This was the second document type used for data analysis. The reflective papers provided a record of the perceptions of the participants during the book study process and will be used to offer another level of triangulation. Because these papers were written at the time of the book study's completion, information provided in them was used in formulating interview questions as well as in pattern analysis.

Participant interviews. All of the participants who agreed to participate in this study were interviewed from April 23rd to June 17th, 2013. Individual interviews were of the semi-structured type (Merriam, 2009). They were conducted at the participant's convenience and outside of school environment, usually in the participant's home or a local restaurant, in order to allow for consideration of each participant's comfort level. To help support recall, the interviewees were provided a copy of their reflective essays and/or blog entries at the interviews. Each interview lasted from 30 minutes to an hour and a half. All of the interviews were audiotaped. Protocol questions were developed and were reflective of the research questions as well as my participation in the book studies. The interview protocol is included in Appendix C.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the steps in inductive analysis outlined by Hatch (2002). Each interview was transcribed by the researcher using InqScribe software. After initial transcription, each transcript was analyzed and any comments that correlated with the research questions were highlighted. All data were then analyzed in order to identify sets of categories (Hatch, 2002) using ATLAS.ti software. Themes were created based on relationships within these categories. Salient categories were assigned codes and all data were reviewed again to look for further examples (and/or non-examples) of these categories. Categories (and related subcategories) were then adjusted or changed based on this analysis. Themes were analyzed both within and across categories.

Evolution of the themes. The themes became apparent as the data were gathered, transcribed, and analyzed. This process began with the transcription of the interviews and artifacts. Because the only copies of the essays and blogs were in paper form, these had to be re-typed in preparation for the use of the Atlas.ti software program, which was used to assist in data analysis. Reading, rereading and typing these artifacts provided the chance for close analysis of what the participants wrote.

As the data were gathered and transcribed, these artifacts were organized by participant and uploaded into Atlas.ti. software. Each primary document was then re-read closely looking for excerpts in which there were clear examples of the participants' thinking about the book studies. Once an interesting quotation was found it was given a code, a short title for the identifying its subject. Existing codes were assigned to evidence with the same subject and new codes created for new ones. After the coding of all the primary documents, the codes were reevaluated for patterns and redundancy.

Redundant categories were combined and codes renamed to reflect the best label for the subject matter.

Next, the codes were grouped according to similarities. These groupings became the first categories and subcategories. The categories were again evaluated and it became apparent that there were two major themes or domains, Process and Product. These two themes exhibited unique characteristics.

Chapter Summary

My dissertation involved conducting a qualitative case study to describe what occurred in professional book study groups. Twelve participants, all employees of county's Special Education Department participated in the case study. These participants were chosen based on their repeated voluntary involvement in professional book study groups that occurred between 2008 and 2011 as part of PD offered through the department.

Data were collected from multiple sources, including semi-structured interviews and artifacts from the book studies. The artifacts include blog entries and reflective summaries written by these participants. Data were analyzed using inductive analysis methods as outlined by Hatch (2002).

Based on the literature review of existing research, this appears to be a unique case based on several factors. Pre-existing studies have not investigated participants who have voluntarily chosen to be involved in multiple book study groups, returning time after time, over a period of several years. The voluntary participation of members and democratic book selection give credence to this assertion. In addition, I bring the unique experience of being an inservice teacher who originally participated as a

member/facilitator of these professional book studies before consideration of this as a possible source of the dissertation research.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

In Chapter 4, I provide a comprehensive presentation of the data, organized into themes, categories and subcategories. These themes became evident during analysis of the data collected from the interviews and artifacts. In each section, the theme and category will be explained and evidence from the data will be included. The data analysis is based on the purpose of this dissertation: to provide a description of the professional book study experience and gain insight into its use to support teacher professional development. Finally, the research questions will also provide the background for the data analysis:

1. What are the participants' perceptions of the book study experience as a professional development activity?
2. According to the participants' perceptions, how does participation in professional book studies lead to long-term learning?

After analyzing the interview and artifact data, and consolidating and rearranging patterns, it is apparent that there are two major themes. The first theme involves the processes of the professional book studies and the second involves the products. The Process Theme includes the structures that were put in place as a requirement of participation and, more importantly, those which developed as a result of the environment that was created by the participants themselves. Process data include three categories: 1) book study elements, 2) perceptions of what occurred in the book studies, and 3) the evolving of a learning community. The Product Theme identifies the changes the participants made as a result of their involvement. The three categories that were created

as a result of analysis of this theme involve 1) changes in instructional practice, 2) changes in academic thinking, and 3) changes in beliefs.

Process Theme

The Process Theme encompasses what occurred within the boundaries of the professional book studies and answers the research question: “What are the participants’ perceptions of the professional book study as a professional development activity?”

There are three categories within this theme. These include: Elements of the Book Study, Perceptions of What Occurred in the Book Studies, and Evolving of a Learning Community. Table 2 shows the organization of the Process Theme.

The first category, *Book Study Elements*, describes the members’ perceptions of how the book studies were organized. It includes the requirements for participation set up by the administrator. In this section, I provide an explanation of critical elements of the book studies as described by the case study members. The members identified several important elements they felt added to the experience. For instance, they believed that the voluntary nature of the book studies and the ability to choose the books provided autonomy in decision-making. *Perceptions of What Occurred in the Book Studies*, is the second category in the Process theme. In this category, the participants explain how the discussions impacted their comprehension, their perceptions of the books, and comparisons of book study groups and other formats for professional learning. The third category in this theme, *Evolving of a Learning Community*, provides insight into how the participants developed a collegial atmosphere in which companionship, collaboration, and mutual respect. The book study members described how they developed long-term

Table 2

| <i>Process Theme</i> | | |
|---|--|----------------------------|
| Category | Subcategories | Participants contributing* |
| Elements of the Book Studies | Choosing the books | 10 |
| | Discussions | 12 |
| | How discussions unfolded | 10 |
| | The Facilitator's Role | 9 |
| | Blog | 9 |
| | Stipend | 3 |
| Perceptions of What Occurred in the Book Studies | Comparison to other learning opportunities | 12 |
| | -Comparison to other PD experiences | |
| | -Comparison to college experiences | 11 |
| | Perceptions of the books | |
| | -Perseverance | |
| | Impact of discussions | |
| -Different points of view | 10 | |
| -Being challenged to think in different | | |
| - Sharing ideas with other participants | 10 | |
| Participants validated/applauded each other's ideas | | |
| Evolving of a Learning Community | Companionship | 9 |
| | Collegial Atmosphere provided a support network | 11 |
| | Building relationships | 9 |
| | -Being accepted unconditionally | 12 |
| | -Motivating | |
| | -Fighting the feeling of isolation and lack of support | |
| Collaboration | | |

Note. *Participants who made comments related to the category

relationships, were challenged to think in different ways by other members, and provided each other with a support network for learning, all components of a learning community.

Elements of the book studies

In this section, I provide an overview of the elements of the professional book studies. These include the initial signup, choosing of the book, and the members' preparation before the meetings, the discussions, the blog, and the reflective summary. I use the participants' own words to describe these elements.

Choosing the books. Book choice was one of the elements of the process that the participants felt added to the success of the studies. It is important to evaluate how the choice of books affected the group and discussions. Ten of the participants identified the importance of being able to choose the books read. Hannah explained, "I liked always having a choice...we voted and got to choose our books so it could be relevant to the group's interests." Ava remembered that in at least one study "When we were finishing one book, we'd have two or three books to look at, to decide which one we wanted."

Participation in the book studies was ultimately the choice of each individual, whether the books were chosen by the group or not. While it was the perception of some of the members that book choice was always voluntary, in the beginning, the books were chosen by the supervisor or the Literacy Coach. This was true for the book studies involving *The Fluent Reader* (Rasinski, 2003), *Choice Words* (Johnston, 2004), *New Passages* (Sheehy, 1995) and *The Out of Sync Child* (Kranowitz, 1998). Prieta was the one who recollected, "At the beginning, I believe, the books were chosen for us but as we moved through the books, we had some choices. We could, if there were two or three books to choose from, I could make that choice." After the first four studies, the

participants were given a choice of books and interested participants chose which one would be read by voting for the most popular one.

In the last two summers of the studies, the department's Research and Development (RAD) Team reviewed and chose books for the studies for the upcoming school year. Suzie explained that, "I think the RAD Team reviewed a certain number of books and then presented them as options to us. And then we voted on that small group of books." Lily also recalled this, saying, "I think we may have given some input in our summer Research and Development [Team] about which books that we might be interested in." Natasha was on the committee that chose the books. She explained, "The next to the last year I did RAD, that was part of our team's [responsibility], to come up with the list so I was involved that year with coming up with suggestions for different ones [books]." In her interview, Hannah explained that, "[It] starts off from the beginning. It gives you...an opportunity to express your needs...I mean, the choice in books, I got something out of everything!" These comments provide insight into how the participants were able to have a voice and choice in the books they read.

Discussions. Before each meeting, participants were asked to read a specific number of pages but there were no other requirements before the discussions. There is evidence that the participants took preparation for the meetings seriously by taking notes, using sticky notes, and highlighting passages in the books as they read. For instance, Suzie described this, "We would highlight as we read the text so we would know what stood out to us and we would know what to bring up in discussion." Natasha added to this perception,

I had to have a highlighter in my hand when I read it, to highlight and remember what I read. So self-imposed, my participation was to read it and to bring something to the table when I came, something to share, something I'd learned. As a facilitator, I noticed that this was commonplace within the discussions. The participants' books were typically full of highlights, notes in the margin, and Post-it notes.

The group members described the actual meetings as loosely structured, with an informal format that was dictated by the groups' needs, as well as the facilitator's role. Several participants described it in different ways, leading to this general impression. For instance, Suzie, the facilitator of one group, described the discussions, "I think we started the meeting by saying, 'Who implemented or who tried what we discussed last week and how did that go for you?' and we... sat in a circle and we'd go around and get input." Prieta explained that:

We took turns speaking as we worked through the text, but we could question one another. We could make comments. We could read little selections and illustrate it with situations from our classrooms, give examples of our own lessons and how we might implement ideas that we gleaned out of the texts.

Suzie and Prieta both mentioned that discussions centered not only the text but also on how the members could utilize the ideas and strategies contained within the text in their classrooms. This is repeated by Juanita in her interview, "We'd just start on the page that was assigned and people would discuss ... 'I found an interesting point on this page and what do people think about this?' and then, they'd say how they tried that."

Storytelling during discussions was an integral part of how the participants related what they were reading to their own experiences. Suzie elaborated, “That was always my favorite part, to hear about what was really going on in their classrooms with their kids. And it would spark somebody else...bringing out a story from their classroom...just hearing stories about real kids.” Later in her interview, Hannah continued,

I liked it a lot because it gave me exposure to other people, in a relaxed way. We shared a lot of stories that were, of course, relevant to our reading, but yet it gave you a different take on everybody else. So you’re learning not just from the book but from other people’s life experiences in the classroom.

The use of story helped to provide an equalizing effect on all members’ ability to participate fully, for everyone had a story to tell.

The members felt that everyone participated equally in the discussions. The sense of story and a nonjudgmental atmosphere allowed everyone to feel they were part of the group, thus motivating them to fully participate. Natasha explained that, “Nobody was ever quiet. There was never a lull in the conversation...I think everybody contributed. I don’t remember there not being a person who didn’t have something underlined and want to discuss it.” Stella also explained, “That helped everybody get more out of it than if they just read it on their own.”

The atmosphere that developed within the groups helped the participants to open up and share their thinking. Several members described this experience. Interestingly, Juanita identified her initial reluctance to speak up as something that eventually helped her build confidence in speaking in public. She explained that, “When I started out, I

wanted to read the books but I really didn't want to go to the discussions." She identified how her initial reluctance changed based on the comfortable environment,

At first, I didn't want to discuss anything because [I am a] kind of backward person in the group at times. You know, I don't like to get up front. I don't like to discuss things. So, at first I...listened. But after a while, I had ideas and I just couldn't keep my mouth shut...Then after that, I just felt more comfortable. I knew everyone. And I knew everybody had ideas and a lot of them weren't that different from me. Actually it helped me be able to discuss things more with people.

Juanita provides an important point about the ability of the group's support to help one member overcome fears and grow as a result of her participation.

Increasing comprehension through discussion. A majority of the participants described the way that the group discussion impacted and enhanced their understanding of what was read. Eleven of the 12 case study members believed that their understanding of the information was clarified as a result of the discussions. This enhancement of comprehension took several forms.

First, other members filled in gaps in the reader's understanding by pointing out ideas that were missed. Stella explained,

You could sit there and say, 'Okay, well now I can see it. I don't have to talk about it, but so-and-so feels the same way I do.' or 'Oh, is that what it meant?' and hearing people discuss it. You're like... "Well, I didn't get that, but now I do.

She repeated this sentiment later in her interview, "You got to tweak things...as you got

into the discussion and you could understand more. If there was something you were questioning, you could sit and talk about it and go, "Oh, that's what that meant!"

While this sounds like the participants always agreed with each other and the authors, they clearly identify that while there were problems at times, the spirit of mutual respect helped all members. Meg described an incident in which there could have been disagreement but the situation was diffused by the group's mutual respect. She remembered,

I don't remember which book it was but one teacher said something, somehow evolution came up. A particular teacher said the line, 'Well, we all came from fish.' Well, I don't know about you but I didn't come from a fish. That was a big deal that a lot of them were laughing about...It didn't get us mad at each other or anything.

Stella explained that the members understood and appreciated that not everyone always had the same point of view, "There are different perspectives on the books and not everybody in our groups even, we're not going to see things exactly the same way." She also wrote about this in her summary of *Choice Words* (Johnston, 2004), "This was an interesting way to approach the reading of this book, I enjoyed meeting with the other teachers and getting their take on the information and the different ways it was interpreted."

In fact, 11 of the 12 participants described how they enjoyed the different perspectives that the others brought to the table. Crystal said, "It gave me more in-depth insight sometimes." Stella explained further,

You got to see other points of view and you understood that just because you saw it one way didn't mean that was the only way it could be...being able to hear other people's thought on things sort of made you look at things in different ways. Ginger identified why she enjoyed the discussions, "I do better if I can talk ...after I read a book. If I can talk about it, 'What did you get out of that?' or what that really meant...I feel like I can internalize better once I'm oral." There was a clear understanding by the participants that reading the book was just the beginning of the journey of comprehension of that book's ideas.

The facilitator's role. The participants felt that the facilitator played a role in the development of a safe atmosphere of collegiality where the participants could share a leadership role equally. Ten of the twelve participants in the case study made comments about the impact of the facilitator. Natasha described the facilitator's stance that the participants should lead the discussion, "I don't really remember...anybody ever saying, 'But we have to talk about this or we have to talk about this.' We just talked about what was passionate, what people felt a passion for in the chapters." She also added, "We weren't locked into any kind of format or you know, it wasn't step one, two, three, four." She explained how the lack of rigid expectations allowed everyone to relax and feel comfortable enough to participate. "Nobody was trying to impose their beliefs on you, you know, 'Read this book so I can make you think like I do.' I didn't ever feel that." Juanita explained how the facilitator did not dominate the discussion, "Usually there was a person there that did lead the discussion; however, it all evolved away from that person. There was really not a focus on the leader." Hannah further explained that,

I think that you [the facilitator] would present certain questions but oftentimes it would develop from responses. You know, like one person would get a feeling and respond and another could relate to that in some way. So [the facilitator] would give a base... and the discussion could grow from that. And you [the facilitator] were always really good to listen and let people do that.

Melody explained how knowing the facilitator was an important reason for her repeatedly returning to the book studies. She said,

So it wasn't so much that I knew who was in the group, as much as I knew whose idea it was and if you have a charismatic leader doing...an in-service ... or a book study of this type, then you know that you want to participate because you know you're going to learn something.

According to these data, the way the facilitator led the groups added to the positive experiences of the participants.

Blogs. Beginning with *The Essential 55* (Clark, 2003) in late 2010, the participants were required to post at least one blog entry in lieu of a face-to-face meeting sometime during each book study. For most of the participants this was the first experience with this type of technology. It became a group learning experience as several members discussed in their interviews. Suzie explained how the blog worked. She said,

Instead of physical meetings every week, we might meet one time physically and then type our comments in a blog. And that would be on our own time. So if you were home and your kids were in bed, you could blog at 11 o'clock at night.

Juanita elaborated, “After a while, we’d go online and we’d respond to certain questions and we’d discuss with other people online... and you’d respond to comments other people made plus you could make your own comments.” Melody described how reading the other participants’ blogs helped her to make changes in her classroom. She explained,

About two days after I posted my blog about this article, Betty sent out an e-mail saying how great our blog information was and that we needed to make sure that we took the time to go back and read each other's blogs. Honestly it was about three days later before I had time to do it, but I was so glad that I did. There were several ideas posted that I have since started using in class. So far, my favorite was Ginger’s idea about the "story strips".

This, too, became a learning experience for the book study groups.

Getting used to new technology did not always go the way that was expected with malfunctions sometimes as the members and facilitators learned the program. Surprising, this added to the feeling of community as described by Juanita in her interview, “We had issues with the blog and that was difficult, but we got through it. Everybody was pretty well chilled about it.” Hannah remembered it the same way,

That part of it was a struggle but in another sense, it didn’t bother us because you [the facilitator] didn’t make a big deal of it. Like if there was a problem with A, go to B, and don’t stress over it.

Suzie elaborated,

Oh yeah, at first I think it was confusing, We didn’t know how to reply or start a new thread...and I think it was good in giving people that don’t use their

technology or don't feel comfortable with it, [it made them] a little more comfortable.

In spite of issues with this new technology, the participants agreed that it became a valuable component of the book studies' popularity. Suzie added, "I think it probably got a few more people interested because to commit after school, people have so many other things they're doing, where the blog was something you could do on your own time whenever convenient." The members described how the blog gave them another way to interact with each other.

The members explained that the use of technology gave them a chance to learn a new skill. Ginger described why this was a new experience, "That was before Facebook and social networking... I liked the social networking part. I liked being on the cutting edge with that. I thought it was [a] cutting-edge thing that we were doing..." Prieta added, "It was just another way for us to branch out and be better teachers because it gave me another little extra skill." In her reflection on *Rules in School* (Brady, 2003), Suzie, the facilitator, added,

I think most of the participants in this book study feel the same way I do based on the blog. The blog responses have been amazing. I know from reading them that most, if not all participants will agree this is one of the best books we have studied.

Melody agreed with Suzie's perception. She gave this advice in a reflective summary of *Classrooms That Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2003),

The best suggestion I can provide is to go back into those blogs and reread them. Several of the best ideas that I have used have all come from things that [I] read from our blogs and then modified to fit my own students.”

The blog gave the participants the chance to try a new media and also the ability to communicate between meetings. They felt this added to their experience while also teaching them a new skill.

Stipend. As a result of completing all the requirements for participation, the members were eligible for a small stipend of \$150.00 or inservice credit of six hours. All participants chose the stipend. It was interesting, however, that only two of the participants mentioned this, making this an outlier in the comments. Suzie and Meg commented about the stipend as a benefit in their interviews. Suzie said, “I think offering the stipend was a good idea. It got people interested that maybe wouldn't have been interested otherwise.” Meg’s comment showed this was an added benefit but not the major reason she had for joining, “Yes, I like to read and learn things that may benefit me and make me...better at what I do and it's nice to have the extra money too. We got paid a little extra to do it.” By the very lack of mention, it is possible that 10 of the participants did not consider this important to their participation.

Perceptions of the book studies

The second category in the Process Theme provides understanding of the participants’ views and beliefs about the book study. In many of these cases, the members made comparisons to traditional PD activities and other formal learning experiences. In addition, this category includes subcategories on perseverance in reading, fighting a feeling of isolation and lack of support, and the diversity of participants.

Comparison to other learning environments. In the interviews, the participants were asked to compare the book studies to other types of traditional PD and other learning environments. Every interviewee believed that the professional book studies were superior to others they had attended. The main reasons they provided were: 1) active involvement, 2) ongoing learning instead of one-shot workshops, and, 3) direct application to the educator's specific needs. Some of the participants also made references to the changes in the research since they studied in college. Without the book study experiences, they would not have been aware of these changes.

Comparison to traditional PD. First, the participants believed that the ability to be actively involved enhanced their experience and learning. Many of the participants described traditional PD as experiences in which they had a hard time keeping focused. They used phrases such as: "You are just sitting in a seat thinking, "When do I get outta here?" (Natasha), "You're just listening or watching something but you really don't have interaction." (Ava), "That's what, I think, lacks in a lot of professional developments is that you don't have an opportunity to respond! It's just, "Okay, what time is it?" (Hannah), and "Just sitting and listening for hours upon hours or a whole day is difficult just to sit still and listen." (Meg)

In comparison, the participants identified that the interactions and their personal commitment to professional book studies required that they were always involved.

Ginger explained that,

I felt more proactive and more involved. I felt, instead of somebody teaching me a book or technique or just talking at me, I felt like I had some greater insight just from reading the whole book myself and then being able to have our lively

discussions and proactive solutions to problems. And it kind of, gave a full-body feeling of what you are doing. You didn't feel like you were talked at or talked to. I felt, like I was participating, and a member of a group that was accomplishing something.

Juanita echoed Ginger's thinking in her reply to being asked to compare the professional book studies to traditional PD, she said, "You couldn't just sit there and tune things out or, you know, you weren't just putting in your time." Hannah also pointed out that the ability to interact was a difference between the two types of PD:

Well, whereas the professional book studies is give and take, you know, communication is going both ways. Where a lot of professional developments, you just sit there and listen and they expect you to take notes, and but there's no give and take so... You are just expected to show up... and then leave.

Meg explained why she preferred the active learning of professional book studies over traditional PD, "It was not as boring (laughs) because we all got to participate and discuss." Crystal's perception of book studies provided a picture of active learning, something she had not experienced in traditional PD, "The book study gave me the opportunity, again, to collaborate and then practice what I read. So it gave me opportunity to actually have more hands-on [learning]." Lily spoke to how the book studies were more personalized for her needs,

Well, I think this is more tailored to some things that pertain strictly to me because most of the in-services in the county, professional developments, don't hit the topics that I need as a school psychologist so [in] a book study I'm able to... hit areas and focus on things that pertain to my job.

Unlike their traditional PD, the participants believed that the professional book studies allowed them to experience personalized, active learning directly relating to their needs. They reported feeling more engaged and as having greater autonomy in an ongoing, collaborative environment.

The second pattern that I noticed in the interviewees' remarks was the ongoing nature of the professional book studies. Because participants meet multiple times and share learning as they try out the strategies in their classrooms or daily work, book study members felt that this form of PD provided them with support that was lacking in other PD experiences. Hannah mentions this in her reply,

When you can share back and forth and you have to give... some kind of feedback regularly, you know, because it's an ongoing thing. And you meet several times and you're reading certain parts of the book and...instead of just sitting there, where it's real easy to get the ... "What am I supposed to get at the grocery store?" thing. (Laughter) When you're with a group that...you're reading the same thing and you're giving feedback and you're listening to theirs, it just gives you so much more learning than just a regular professional development where you just show up and sit there and leave.

Prieta also believed the ability to meet over time could support their learning, "...what was new was listening to the other teachers and how they used the information and how they made changes in their classrooms... it was ongoing learning... It was like being able to share a hobby together." In her first reflective summary, Juanita wrote, "The notion that someone can teach for nine months and then start to learn two weeks of the summer

is fatally flawed. This is a wonderful new approach to creating lifelong learners in our teachers!”

Finally, the participants described how the professional book study met their specific needs where other PD activities typically did not. Natasha explained, “Because it doesn't pertain to you...you don't feel like it has anything to do with making you a better teacher in the position that you're in.” The references participants made to active learning, being involved in an ongoing, interactive process, and their ability to have input in choosing the books as a means of meeting their specific needs differed from their perspective of traditional PD.

Comparison to what was learned in college. While all of the case study members made comparisons to other forms of professional development in the workplace, four of the twelve participants made a comparison to what they learned in college in their reflective summaries. Prieta wrote about this in her *Out of Sync Child* (Kranowitz, 1998) reflection, “As I read, I often wondered why I had not been introduced to these concepts sometime in my special education career.” Juanita also repeated this belief in her *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996) essay, ““Thinking in Pictures” by Temple Grandin has shown me how much things have changed since I was introduced to the topic of Autism in the 1970’s. At that time, the majority of the textbooks did not address the topic.” Ava realized that research on the topic had advanced understanding since she had been in school and this lead her to wonder, “Once you start finding out facts that weren't the same as they were when you were in college you're thinking, "Hmmm. What's changed?”” These realizations allowed the participants to see that there

were other ideas being proposed and other strategies used than what they had learned in other learning environments.

Perceptions of the books

The reflective summaries provided an opportunity to discover the members' perceptions of the books. Sometimes, in fact, the books served as the basis for insight in their teaching and thinking. Ginger explained that, "I found myself in this book. Along with the others in the book study, I found myself analyzing my teaching style, past and present." Crystal thought that the book helped her, "I really enjoyed the book. The ideas were practical and very user friendly. As a veteran teacher, I find it refreshing to get new ideas to use in my classroom." Meg said that, "I feel like reading this book has made me a better speech therapist. Natasha wrote about *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996) this way, "This book will definitely be one that will stay on my shelf as a reference. There are many places where a lot of the information is highlighted so I can read it again and again." These summaries revealed that, more often than not, the participants thought the books were very helpful and insightful.

Like all readers, these educators made constant comparisons to their experiences as they read. They made connections to their students, teaching, their previous learning, and even their families. Hannah's comment shows this constant comparison, "When you can relate it a real classroom or real professional experiences...you can see it,...apply to your own experiences.

Melody saw her child in one author's words,

Her story hit home when she talked about how concerned her mother was when she wasn't speaking by age 2. As she described her tantrums due to lack of

communication skills, I could close my eyes and see my Brady laying in the floor of the kitchen screaming because I couldn't figure out what he wanted out of the cabinet.

As she read and reflected, Prieta also made connections to a family member. In her interview, she spoke of *Thinking in Pictures*,

I found that just absorbing and I, if I, I think that's probably one that I was aware of her and looked forward to and not only read it for myself and my professional cohort group but shared it with my family and my son, even. With my high school son who shares some of those same... spectrum issues because of ADHD, and could relate to her understanding animals. And so, it, it- I could relate to that one in a personal nature, probably myself too when it comes right down to- (Laughs).

The participants' initial comprehension of the text was filtered through their life experiences. These perceptions changed, however, when they entered the discussions and heard the differing interpretations of the other members.

Perseverance. Even though the book did not always turn out to be exactly what they expected, the teachers reported that they persevered in their reading of the book in every instance. As a result, they changed their thinking about the book. Suzie wrote in her *Rules in School* (Brady, 2003) reflective essay, "I wasn't very excited about this book being chosen for our book study because I was hoping for a different book. My opinion has totally changed. I have enjoyed every chapter." Stella felt strongly that reading *New Passages* (Sheehy, 1995) changed her thinking as well, "This book was interesting to say the least. As I stated in my first blog entry, this is not a book I would have chosen for myself. I was however enlightened on some things I hadn't thought about before." Suzie

explained that there was one time that the group was divided in terms of their opinion of the book, “I can't remember exactly which book but some people loved it and there were others that [were] just really against it. It was just surprising that people have that different of an opinion.”

The participants repeatedly expressed their positive perceptions about the choice of books and how they enjoyed and learned from each one. Sometimes the participants voiced an initial reluctance to read some of the books. For instance, in her reflective essay, Natasha identifies *Rules in School* (Brady, 2003) as one such book, “Although this book was not exactly what I thought it was going to be, it did bring to light and remind me of the overall atmosphere that must be in the classroom for rules to work.” Juanita also described this same perception in her *New Passages* (Sheehy, 1995) essay:

New Passages is not a book that I would have picked up and read on my own. I would have made excuses stating that it was too long or I did not feel like reading anything that heavy right now and so on.

In her interview Juanita elaborated, “Some books were more relevant to me than others or my teaching situation but I got something out of every one of them.” Juanita also struggled with maintaining interest in *Going with the Flow* (M. W. Smith & Wilhelm, 2006). In her essay, she wrote,

I had a great deal of difficulty getting into Chapters 1 and 2. However, by Chapters 3 and 4 things started to come together. By the end of the book I actually felt that I had gained insight into a number of areas. I wondered if this was how students sometimes feel before it began to come together for them. If so, no wonder so many give up.

Melody's perception of *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996) mirrors Juanita's sentiment. "I don't think I can actually compare this book to a fine wine, but it did get better with time." It is apparent from these comments that the participants believed it was important to keep going even when they struggled because of their commitment to the book study group.

The impact of discussions. The participants also believed that the discussions provided them with support in several different ways that added to their desire to continue returning. First, they felt that the other members challenged them to consider other ways of thinking because of the different points of view, varied interpretations of the text, and the experiences of the other members. Next, they felt that as they shared strategies the other members accepted and supported their ideas. Finally, they were able to hear and share their own experiences through stories.

Being challenged to think in different ways. The participants not only enjoyed the support of each other within the professional book study groups but they were also challenged to think differently than they had before. Ava and Natasha explained this in their interviews. Ava said, "And so I want somebody who sees it different than I do because then I'm going to say, "Oh, I think that's fabulous" or "I really disagree with that." So that's what I liked." Natasha also wanted to hear how the others interpreted the readings and, as a result, learned something about herself, "You read something and it's like, "Oh, this is what it means." and then somebody else goes, "Well, this is what I got out of it." and it's kind of like, "Ohhh". Well, you know...I'm always not number one." According to these data, the participants were aware that the discussions gave them the

chance to share their individual interpretations and they welcomed the chance to hear others thinking differently.

Different points of view. While on the surface all of the participants seemed very similar in experience as special educators, in reality, they identified their diversity as one of the reasons the group was successful. One third of the participants had references to this diversity in the data. Ginger believed that the members had a variety of different capabilities, “[It] gives you different perspectives and everybody's from different directions instead all of us being all resource teachers, you know, or all speech teachers, or all psychologists.” As a school psychologist, Lily enjoyed hearing from educators in the classroom, “Most of the other people in the discussion group were teachers, so, yes, that was helpful to hear from the teachers’ perspective.”

Prieta explained further,

I think it was, for the most part, pretty enlightening, too, because even the school psychologists, who are very knowledgeable in their assessment and the defense of students and modifications, ...probably don't have- a full understanding of ...the day-to-day instructional process. So it, I think it gave them a fresh awareness just like it gave us information and we could play off one another's strengths.

Diversity wasn't only evident in the differences in positions and job responsibilities. It was also provided through the varied points of view the educators had based on their classroom and life experience, as well as the types of students they served. In her *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996) essay, Natasha reflected on how she had learned about students with autism from the stories and ideas related to her during one of the book studies,

If I have an autistic child in the future, I have learned how much I don't know and how valuable other professionals will be to me...Having ideas from this book and other teachers that I have talked to in our discussions will be so helpful. I would never have known to wrap a student in a blanket to calm them down or to turn the lights [off] or keep reflections at a minimum to reduce fear or over-stimulation.

Crystal also learned from other participants in the same book study, "If we were discussing say *Thinking in Pictures*, for example. Somebody might, would give an example of a child they had in their classroom, where I might not have the experience, you know, but someone else did." Lily, the school psychologist, also believed the sharing of their unique experiences was important, "I like hearing other people's perspectives because based on their experiences...Somebody may have a different take on it than I did just because their experiences were different than mine." Ava had a different point of view. She believed that the diversity was explained by each member's "filters",

That was the best part...the sharing of other people's experiences because you can't possibly, even having a various children [of] different types, you [are] never going to have the same experience as other people because you have your own filters to go through. And so, how I would respond and another person would respond would be very different, even though our classes may be basically the same.

The participants gave several examples of the diversity of the members even while they appeared to be a homogenous group of educators. These examples included the different

positions and job responsibilities, experiences with specific types of disabilities and their “filters”.

Continually learning from others. One of the research questions involved the commitment these participants made to the professional book studies by returning to attend additional studies. Five of the interviewees made a direct reference to the fact that the discussions added to their reason for coming back. Hannah believed that, “I always learned something, something I could take back to the classroom. Whether it's dealing with behaviors, organization in my classroom, methods of teaching, I mean, it touched on everything.” Ava reflected on what she learned in the book studies in light of what she already knew,

For me, it enlightened it. It made it more rounder, and a bigger picture. Instead of being...narrow, with blinders on, “This is how I see it.” Somebody says, “Well, but look at this” and I like that because I want to be challenged. If I'm learning the same thing over and over again, why would I be there?

Ava also added that the comingling of ideas was one of her favorite parts,

Well, I guess...it's more intimate...It's sharing, and it's an open share. Nobody is critical of another person. They're just sharing ideas and responses and concepts and problem solving. Whereas when you're in a lot of these other places, you don't get that. You're just listening or watching something but you really don't have interaction.

Within the group discussions, the members felt that this give and take provided them with an experience that went to a deeper level.

Participants validated/applauded each other's ideas. Another reason the participants gave for wanting to come back to the discussions was that they felt the other members saw their ideas as valid and helpful. For instance, two participants believed that the way the group members treated each other helped them to open up. Hannah's perception was that,

It was encouraging...when they would say, "Well, that's a good idea!"...they'd pat you on the back and say, "Oh, that's a good thing that you're doing!"...when a lot of times you don't get many pats on the back.

Stella believed that the unconditional acceptance by the other group members grew from the way they treated each other within the discussions,

Over time, it became easier because we found out that everybody sort of felt the same way because it was, "Well what if I say something and it's just not right?" And then we found out later on that it didn't have to be right because what we got was what we got. And it was our take on what we read. And sometimes we got weird looks and sometimes it was, "Oh! Well, I didn't see it that way! But, yeah, now I can." And so it helped us to be more comfortable and open to say what we thought.

This is particularly interesting because, Stella, in fact, was the one participant who felt reluctant to discuss what she had read. This indicates, however, that she opened up as she relaxed in the atmosphere of the book study group. She describes her reluctance, for example, with writing the blog as well as in discussions (quoted in previous sections),

I found that weird to write things without knowing what other people had gotten from it. You start wondering, "If I write this and they read it, am I really off-

base?" and are they going to go, "Well, she's dumber than a bag of rocks!" and "That's not what that's about!" and so it's like, "What do I write? and "How do I write?" and "Oh my Lord, is somebody else going to read this?"

In the book study environment members validated and applauded each other's ideas during the sharing of experiences and provided additional support outside of the discussion group when it was solicited.

Evolving into a Learning Community

The third category in the Process theme provides data that indicates that the book study groups may be developing into a learning community of some kind. The participants gave evidence that the way they treated each other led to a collegial atmosphere. As a result, they felt the group provided companionship, a support network, and a safe environment in which the participants accepted each other unconditionally. Participants also identified that they were motivated to learn more. Finally, they identified the building of a collaborative atmosphere in which long-term relationships were developed and nurtured.

Companionship. References to a sense of companionship or camaraderie were frequently seen in the data. This was directly referenced by three-fourths of the participants. In fact, three different members used the term "camaraderie". This companionship developed as the members began to see that they could open up without worrying that someone would be judgmental. Companionship among the participants was not automatic because the members were not well acquainted before the studies. As Stella explained,

There were several people in the group I hadn't really, what you'd say, had conversations with. We've been in the same situations, same meetings and things but we didn't know each other. So this pulled people that normally didn't talk to each other into discussing how they felt about things.

Stella went on describe how her initial reluctance changed over time,

We became more comfortable with each other and [were] willing to hear what other people had to say. Because we had gotten to know each other a little better and it wasn't like, "They're going to think I'm dumber than a bag of rocks." It was "Well, they know I am, but they love me anyway."

Ginger explained how the group developed into a place she wanted to go at the end of a work day, "You're in a classroom with 10 children for hours a day, every day, and there's no adult companionship for conversation. You actually get to talk to an adult about other things than just school." Natasha added to Ginger's thinking in her interview,

I enjoyed the camaraderie, enjoyed the "How's your week been?" you know.

"What's positive or negative?" "How can we share what's going on in different classrooms in different schools?" I liked being with the different teachers that I didn't get to be with very often.

In the interview, Prieta referred to the camaraderie too, "Having the camaraderie with the group of people that I work with and have a pretty common understanding of their background...I can be up front and truthful." Melody agreed, "I was able to discuss the various ways to teach kids with different forms of autism with my coworkers. Our special education peer group is a wonderful resource. I took away a lot of good information."

Some of the other comments identified the group as a place they could go to experience this sense of companionship. For instance, Hannah said, "It's so hectic and you're in the midst of doing your job and worrying about this kid and that, just to have that moment to take you away...and share those experiences and get the support of other professionals." Finally, Natasha reflected that, "Just being able to have the sounding board, somebody that you respect, that you know is in the same profession that you're in, facing the same challenges..." The companionship the members described was on a personal level. The participants used phrases such as "sounding board", "respect", "camaraderie", "ownership", "support", "friendship", and "comfortable" to describe their perceptions.

Collegial atmosphere. Through participation in the book studies, the members began to look to others as experts in different areas. This expertise was unknown before the book studies; however, the participants learned about each other's strengths through the discussions. Stella explained how she asked for support from the other members to help her with problems,

We actually started talking to one other and thinking about how the other person perceived things. And was more open to be able to say, "Well, if I don't understand this, I can call so-and-so and they can and we can discuss what is going on." or she may have an insight on something that I don't. You could even network and call somebody in the group and discuss, something maybe not related to the book, but because of the book study, you had that extra person, extra professional person, to talk to.

Prieta added her perception that it had to do with the mutual respect all of the members displayed, "Nobody was, you know, they weren't critical. It was all done in, very

accepting of one another's, very respectful of one another's viewpoints...and I think there has to be that common courtesy and respect of various viewpoints.”

As they developed this learning community, the participants came to rely on each other to enhance their learning not only of the books they read but because of the study members' varied experiences. Hannah reflected on this, “So you're learning not just from the book but from other people's life experiences in the classroom. I liked that a lot...and then just learning from their successes and experiences.

In the interview with Prieta, she referred to how the book study group was a more effective sounding board,

I have always through the years, gone home and talked about, without names, talked to my husband and I would listen to his forestry and he would listen to my classroom. And so, and we would give one another feedback and so- This was, this was a much more efficient group because...I didn't have to explain the background of the classroom and the law and...the types of disabilities and all of that.

Ava found that the group support provided her with a new energy, “It got me unstuck. I've ...gotten to know people who knew what their strengths were. So, if I needed to go to them, I knew where to go.” Prieta also felt that the group gave her the support she needed to try new strategies, “Probably what was new was listening to the other teachers and how they used the information and how they made changes in their classrooms...”

Natasha believed that this collaboration empowered her to feel responsible for her own learning,

Well, it's definitely, again, where everybody talked and you learn from each other. And then you feel like- I don't think this is haughty in saying this- but you feel a part of something. You feel some ownership. You feel...again like you're in control more than just being told what to do.

The participants identified that the collegial atmosphere allowed them to learn about other member's areas of expertise. As these relationships developed, they felt that they could rely on each other for expert advice. The group members expressed the belief that this helped them fight the isolation in their jobs.

In addition to the mutual learning and the expertise provided through the book study group, a few of the participants also felt that the group gave them another level of support at a more personal level. Ginger, in particular, used these references, "it was kind of like a place I could go for refuge when I was having trouble" and "the actual group therapy of it was actually the panacea for me."

Building long-term relationships. The combination of the elements described in the previous sections led to the development of long-term relationships. Five of the participants found this to be true for them. Even though the department was relatively small, the members were only passing acquaintances until the book studies. Stella explained that although she was with other educators in PD activities, she usually didn't get a chance to interact, "We were in the same meetings but we never talked." She added that in the professional book studies there was a difference, "You actually get down and you meet the person and get to know how they take things and it's not just, "Oh, yeah. We work together." You actually get to know that person and their perspective on things." She felt that as a result, "You did build relationships and it wasn't just a bunch of people

that- "Oh, I don't know her." She felt that the consistency of the membership provided her with consistency in what to expect from the other participants, "We were in the same company. It wasn't somebody different every time. We knew who you're going to be with. You knew, sort of, how they were going to react to what you were going to say."

Ginger's remarks mirrored Stella's thinking, "One or two were personal friends of mine but others were just teachers from the different schools and we learned to know each other and got to know each other better through...common ground through the books." She explained further, "Sometimes we'd share parts of our life." When I asked her if she still kept up with the book study members, she replied, "[I have] continued some relationships with them, yes." Ava enjoyed this element of the book studies, "I really liked getting to know the girls and since we're not all in the same school." When Suzie was asked how the relationships developed, she said,

I think it built... as we met, time after time, people opened up little more and what was really interesting was they would start talking about how things were done in their schools and just seeing the surprise in other people's faces that we don't all do that. Our principals aren't all the same and how they handle things and that, they finally...were able to see what I was saying, because I went to all the schools and they are totally different. And they were just shocked sometimes the way things were done.

Suzie, Ava, Ginger, and Stella provided information about how important the building of relationships was to the group's members. According to these data, these relationships appear to continue as a result of this experience. There is also evidence that

these participants did not have close friendships before the formation of the professional book studies even though they often encountered each other in departmental meetings.

Collaboration. All 12 of the participants acknowledged that the book studies provided them with the chance to try out new strategies. In addition, they received ongoing feedback from the other participants who were also experimenting with different instructional approaches. Crystal reflected on this, “I think the best part was the collaboration between the teachers. You know, hearing what they thought and had applied certain skills that were gotten from the book.” Crystal also addressed this in *The Fluent Reader* (Tovani, 2000) reflective essay, when writing, “I would like to begin my overview... by applauding the system for allowing teachers to study and collaborate together. Our collaboration will not only improve the quality of our reading instruction, but also be useful in improving student learning.” Melody also mentioned the collaborative atmosphere helped her to relax and be open to new ideas,

Well, the first thing that comes to mind is collaborative learning. It was more than just a group of educators coming together to... review a book. I mean, we learned from the materials that were presented. We learned from the books, but we also learned things from each other. It was a time to de-stress. It was the time to learn.

It [was] just...really good peer collaborations...it was just a great group effort.

As the facilitator of one of the book study groups and a system-wide employee, Suzie had a regular opportunity to observe teachers’ instruction. She found the collaboration exciting because she was also seeing a difference in the classrooms,

Just seeing educators come together and want to learn or use [new strategies] in their classroom to help students, I mean, it was something they wanted to do, not something they had to do. That was a neat part about it.

Juanita felt that the helpful strategies generated by her peers gave her support as she tried out new ideas,

You get feedback from other people and they kind of level you out. They help you see if you're thinking reality, if something's a possibility and also other people come up with ideas that you might never think of. And also I felt like I had things to contribute.

Juanita learned new ideas from the other members by listening to their stories of what worked in their classrooms, “Just getting ideas from other people, getting feedback and seeing what they think of, things that you might want to try that you never tried before.” She then implemented some of the ideas the others found successful. She explained, “Other people did give me some ideas that they said worked well with their kids; but with my kids, they just did not.” She also learned to pay attention to their own experiences, “And also if you have an idea and they totally failed with it, why waste your time? So that was feedback, too.”

Hannah found that the collaborative atmosphere was important to her, “And then just learning from their successes and experiences. I think the whole book thing was the whole share part, that's the big word to me- it's sharing.” She identified how this sharing provided her with different ideas on which to build,

It's a springboard! When...you talk about how it's relevant to you and then to somebody else, how it's relevant to them...you combine those two things and

...it's like a flower blooming. You're like "Wow! Yeah, I like that! I wouldn't think about that!"...you get so many ideas from each other when you can share.

Stella agreed that the other members helped her to see new possibilities, "When we talked how things were used in the classroom other people were like, "We could do that in ours!" Suzie clarified how she felt about the trying out of new instructional strategies,

I think it was neat that we could meet talk about strategies and then you go back to your classroom and implement them and we meet later on and talk to discuss about how they worked and how to modify it, how it worked for different teachers.

The sense of collegial atmosphere, camaraderie, and companionship enabled the participants to build long-term relationships. As they shared ideas and experiences during the discussions and blogs, they came to look to each other for support and expertise. All of these elements combined to create a learning community which was something they may not have experienced before.

Summary

In summary, the Process Theme included three categories. In the first category, the participants commented on the main elements of the book studies, including the discussions, the blogs, and the facilitator's role. The second theme revolved around the perceptions of the case study participants. Data in this category included comparisons to other learning environments, their perceptions of the books themselves, and how the discussions unfolded. Finally, it became evident from the data that the participants had developed long-term relationships because of the collegial atmosphere, companionship,

collaboration, and sharing of experiences and ideas. Finally, the last category included the elements of some type of learning community.

Product Theme

The second major theme, Product, developed as I analyzed the data and found that as a result of the professional book studies, the participants made an assortment of changes. These changes became organized into three main categories, *Instructional Practice*, *Academic Thinking*, and *Personal Beliefs*. In *Changes in Instructional Practice*, evidence is presented to indicate the ways classroom instruction improved and professional expertise increased as a result of participation in the book studies. In the data in the *Academic Thinking* category, the participants explained how they began to see the importance of reading literature and using action research-type activities to inform and improve their instructional practice. In the final category, *Personal Beliefs*, there is the presentation of data that shows changes in thinking about their own pedagogy, beliefs and attitudes toward others. Table 3 shows the theme's categories and subcategories.

Instructional Practice

In many of the book studies, the chosen text was heavily laden with instructional strategies. For instance, *I Read It but I Don't Get It* (Tovani, 2000), *The Fluent Reader* (Rasinski, 2003) *Classrooms That Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2003), and *Rules in School* (Brady, 2003) provide a plethora of strategies that are directly applicable to classrooms or schools in which the educators work. For these book studies, the facilitators made a conscious effort to empower the participants to choose a strategy to try in the classroom or workplace between meetings. Usually, the members each chose one strategy at the meeting, implemented it in the interval between the meetings, and then

Table 3.

Product Theme Categories and Subcategories

| Category | Subcategories | Participants involved |
|------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Instructional Practice | Implementing new ideas during the book studies | 11 |
| | Continued use of the books strategies | 9 |
| | Academic Learning | 9 |
| Academic Thinking | Application outside of the book study | 9 |
| | Change in thinking about students | 9 |
| Personal Beliefs | Changes in thinking about people with disabilities and their abilities | 10 |
| | Change in thinking about teaching | 10 |
| | Changes in thinking about themselves | 9 |

Note. *Number of participants who had comments in this category

reported back about the outcome. Stella explained this in her *The Essential 55* (Clark, 2003) reflection,

She [the facilitator] wants us to pick one of the rules and use it in our classroom and tell how it goes. I find myself saying, "We do this one, and that one, and this one too." My TA [teaching assistant] and I discussed the idea of introducing rules one by one and building social studies/social skills lessons around them. These are working out splendidly for all involved.

All 12 of the case study's contributors commented on the changes that they made to instructional practices during and after their involvement in the book study groups.

Implementing new strategies. In between meetings, the participants often tried out a specific strategy. Some of the examples the case study members listed included managing student behaviors, empowering students to become their own advocates, or changing the instruction of reading comprehension in their classroom. Eleven of the members contributed to this category.

Sometimes, the participants used the chosen strategy with one student, a small group, or the whole class, depending on their specific needs. Juanita chose a single student on which to focus for the *Choice Words* (Johnston, 2004) book study,

One boy, "C", in particular comes to mind. He is a sixth-grader on my caseload. He goes through most of his days without anyone speaking to him. Other students are not intentionally cruel. He is not at their same social/maturity level and, therefore, just does not exist. Adults only speak to him to give directions and to correct his numerous inappropriate behaviors. Throughout the course of this study

I decided to make "C" my project and incorporate ideas presented in the book while working with him and the rest of the class.

Others implemented a strategy with their classes, Natasha wrote in her *The Essential 55* (Clark, 2003) essay, "One of the specific rules that I have begun to follow is: during discussion, only one person can have their hand up at a time." In Stella's reflective essay from *Classrooms That Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2003), she explained how she implemented one of the strategies,

I really liked the "Reading and Me" activity on page 13. I tried it in my classroom to see where the students saw themselves as readers. Several said that they like to read. The problem though is that they have such difficulty decoding that's their comprehension level is very low. I'm hoping that by the end of the year there will be more students wanting to read to read, not just because they have to.

A few of the participants worked in inclusion settings which necessitated collaborating with another teacher in order to implement the strategies. Juanita and Natasha explained how this required getting the other teacher to agree to try the strategy. In another reflective essay, Juanita wrote about the use of a strategy in the inclusion classroom,

Copying and memorizing definitions still remains a common practice especially in Science and Social Studies classrooms (p. 88). The students will copy definitions that they cannot even read. When introducing the words *archaeologist*, *anthropologist*, and *geologist* I suggested [to the regular classroom teacher] that I bring in some of my son's artifacts and tools (pg. 91). I brought in arrowheads, flat chips, fossils and other rocks, a shovel and a sifter. These items in themselves

brought about the discussion of the meaning of other related words. Students seemed to do better on this test than they had on the previous one.

Because of the delicacies of collaboration in the inclusion setting, Prieta reflected how she changed her approaches in more subtle ways in the essay for *Choice Words* (Johnston, 2004),

I have attempted to model differing opinions and even, with respect and great care, corrected other adults where before I might have "ignored" a co-teacher's mispronunciation or misinterpretation of an academic rule. I tactfully pull a dictionary or text from the shelf to "clarify for myself" to put myself in the position of not knowing "the answer" in order to teach that it is acceptable to disagree or to be corrected when wrong, and that there is an appropriate way for adults to learn from one another... just as students need to be open to constructive criticism or need to "cross-check their warrants", and can solve differences by searching for common solutions.

The teachers in these classrooms made use of the strategies within their own classrooms and in inclusion classrooms, with individual students and whole classes. The special education classroom and inclusion teachers were not the only ones to try to implement the strategies.

Other participants worked outside the classroom as support services personnel. They found that they were also able to use the books' ideas. Lily, the school psychologist, and Meg, the speech therapist, also used the strategies in their practice. Lily described how she used information from *The Essential 55* (Clark, 2003), "I have used some of Mr. Clark's rules with my after-school groups at two elementary schools." Meg related how

she used strategies in her small speech therapy classes. She used two examples of seemingly small instructional changes that she was making in communication with students. In *The Out-of-Sync Child* (Kranowitz, 1998) reflective essay, Meg wrote,

There were a couple of other pointers that I especially liked in the book that I have already used with children. To avoid learned helplessness about tying shoes or anything the author suggests saying, "I know it's hard for you to tie your shoes but each time you do it, it will get easier." The other pointer that I really liked and have used was concerning children with hard to understand speech. The author suggests if you catch one word say, "Tell me more about the truck". I used to say, "Something about a truck".

Interestingly, both these case study members were able to creatively apply what they learned to settings outside the classroom environment.

Finally, the participants also described how the students were responding to the new strategies. In *The Essential 55* (Clark, 2003) blog, Stella wrote,

It is interesting how, so far, each rule seems to build on or relate to the one before it. My students seem to enjoy talking about how the rules do apply to our little world as well as the school and our community.

Crystal also saw a change in her students after implementing read alouds in her classroom,

As a result of being a part of the study group, I began to implement novel reading into my program. Our first novel that we read was "Because of Winn-Dixie". My students loved it! Not only did they like the story, but they enjoyed being read to. It was a great way to begin class or change to another activity. It is not so much a

chore to get the students to read when their peers are helping and encouraging them.

Meg described how the use of another strategy changed the atmosphere within her small speech therapy group, “I have also incorporated having everyone in the group clap for other students when they do a good job on something during therapy. I feel this has made therapy more fun for everyone including myself.”

In her interview, Juanita remembered the practice of trying out strategies. She had this to say, “That was really the point...of most of them, I guess; to try things in the classroom and see if it worked with your students, or make adaptations with it, so it would work.” Even when it didn’t work the way they hoped, the participants did not completely forget the strategy, but as Juanita pointed out, they would “make adaptations” and try again. She spoke more about this in her essay for *Classrooms That Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2003),

I tried the activity on page 107 for students to self-assess their vocabulary knowledge. It did not go over well with my reading group. They all either responded with a "1= I have never heard of that word" or a 4= I know what that word means." I do not feel like these were accurate responses for the majority of the students. The 1's did not want to be called on. The 4s did not know the correct definitions. I simply decided to wait and try it again after the students had gained greater self-confidence.

It was clear that she assessed the failure of the strategy in light of what her students needed instead of the strategy’s basic worth. As a result, she began working on building her students’ self-confidence. The comments made in this category showed that the

strategies were used in all areas of their professional lives- in their resource and extended resource classrooms, inclusion settings, small groups, and with individual students as well as with other teachers.

Continued use of the books' strategies. Nine of the 12 participants directly referred to the continued use of the strategies originally learned in the book studies. This continued use of the strategies took two main directions. Some still use the strategies in their practice while others use the books as personal resources which they refer to often.

Participants described how they were still using the instructional strategies they used with their students. Ginger explained that she continued to use at least three of the specific strategies she learned. In her interview she said, "I added Reader's Theater. We added Question-Answer-Response...I added making my file folders for...my sensory integration-disordered children." Meg explained that she uses one of the ideas with all of the students at other times of the school day,

The clapping hands, you know, the certain handclaps to get their attention. I have used that and I was reminded, by glancing over *Rules in School*. That was the book it was in and I even use that when I'm on bus duty or car duty in the lobby. All the kids know that when we do a certain handclap, they do it back and know to be quiet.

Meg also added another strategy she modified for use with one particular student,

With *The Essential 55*, where I printed them [the rules] up. I put them on index cards. I have [a] high functioning kid that has Asperger's and...when he was in 5th grade last year... I kept a copy of them in his notebook. And when we'd play games or whatever, he'd take his turn and he would remember the rules and repeat

them to the other kid in the group as needed, appropriately, like "Don't show anger when you lose a game."

Natasha explained another strategy she had permanently added based on the book studies, I had rules forever but ...when they made them it's not something somebody else is making them do. They chose that rule, and they believe that...The way I presented my rules to kids in the classroom changed dramatically after reading that book.

Juanita and Stella indicated that they had added skills and ideas to their repertoire. Juanita reflected that, "If you run across a kid, and realize a child's not getting it, you think, "Okay. Oh, yeah! I remember this is what the suggestion was." Not all of the participants could remember an exact strategy they now used. During her interview, Stella reread her essays, and was reminded how valuable the books had been. She remarked, "So I can go back and read what I said because they're inspiring me now. I was kind of flagging this year on what to do."

As described in the previous section, the book study members explained how they shared the books with others both in the school and outside. In their reflective essays, the participants also commented frequently about how they would continue using the books for their own needs. Three-fourths of the members provided insight into why these books were particularly appropriate for their own future reference.

Several participants commented on the importance of adding the books to their professional library. In her *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996) essay, Natasha wrote, "This book will definitely be one that will stay on my shelf as a reference. There are

many places where a lot of the information is highlighted so I can read it again and again.” Over two years later she again referred to this in her interview. Natasha observed,

Those books are on my shelf now at school that I know I can go back to and pull and flip through and see those highlighted places... I go back and find it to make sure I am not forgetting something when I implement something, not forgetting all the suggestions.

Crystal, in *The Out of Sync Child* (Kranowitz, 1998) reflective essay explained that “Although the information in the book may not be something that I can use in my classroom today, however, it is information that can be used to help another student or parent along the way.” Suzie felt the same way about *Classrooms That Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2003), “This was a very practical book-one I plan to keep readily available.”

Other members provided insight into how they would use the books for planning and other opportunities. For instance, Lily explained that *The Out of Sync Child* (Kranowitz, 1998) would be used as a way to support her advice to others,

I believe this is the section of this book that I will be able to incorporate [into] most of my job as a school psychologist. Sometimes, being able to reference suggestions from a published source is more acceptable for parents and teachers. It is my intent to make a list of referenced suggestions from this book that can be given directly to parents and teachers and attached to evaluations.

Melody planned on using some of the strategies she learned in *Rules in School* (Brady, 2003) in the next school year. In her reflective essay, she wrote, “It [*Rules in School*] was really easy to read and offered many great, practical uses within the classroom. I have

several pages of material that I have highlighted to continue to use or implement in the fall.” Prieta, on the other hand, reflected how she could utilize some to her new learning, from *The Out of Sync Child*, with her students, “This text adds a new dimension to my resources and has opened my mind in a new way to observe my students, and to incorporate concepts into the modification/accommodations to be implemented in the classroom.”

These remarks provide insight into the continued use of strategies they learned. There was also reference to the use of the books as professional resources. As I read the data, I became aware that there were other changes that the participants identified that were not as clearly observable as strategies.

Academic Thinking

In the second Products category, *Academic Thinking*, the data indicated shifts in thinking toward ongoing learning. This category is organized into four subcategories. First, the participants described how being in the book studies taught them the importance of being aware of current research in addition to the professional development offered by the county. In the next subcategory, I identified how the book study members continued their learning after the book studies ended. Finally, the participants passed on what they learned in the professional book studies to fellow professionals, the parents of their students, and others in their lives outside the school environment.

Academic learning. The participants found that the book studies provided them with a new understanding of academic thinking. They described their new understanding of the importance of keeping abreast of current research and methods of teaching. Three-

fourths of the participants made similar remarks that identified a change whereby they began thinking in more academic ways.

One participant believed that the book studies taught her how to read research and taught her the importance of continually keeping up with the research. According to Natasha, “It [the professional book studies] helped me learn how to read professional books and interpret them, that it can be interpreted in different ways.” She saw the significance of reading professional research, “You just need to stay relevant and [read] things that you're interested in so you will be ready to understand what's going on.” Crystal went on to extend the same belief,

I probably wouldn't have read these books on my own...because I probably wouldn't have taken the time to have done that so the study gave me an opportunity to go back and read and then apply it in my current teaching practices.

Prieta found that the book studies helped her to think differently, “And so it was very helpful to me and got me to think outside-the-box and learn from authors that I might not have even been aware of.” Crystal also mentioned how the book studies assisted her, “I [took] the opportunity for this type of professional development to help me become more of an expert in my area.” These comments reflect the perspective that learning did not end when the professional book studies ceased.

Other participants described how they wanted to learn more about what they had read. Ava explained that she started paying attention to changes in research, even on television,

It seems after I read this, that whenever things come on that I think has anything to do with education or the medical community, I watch. I'm not sure when I was younger, I would've cared. I think, I think that ... knowing things are changing all the time, makes a huge difference.

For instance, Ginger in her *The Out of Sync Child* essay added, “After rereading, relearning, and reconnecting with sensory processing disorders, I realize, I need more connections for the many questions I have daily, about this pervasive disorder.” This remark, like the others, showed that the participants began looking at the research as a source for additional support in their daily teaching.

Application of learning after the book studies. The data also indicated that the participants began to pursue learning after the conclusion of the book studies and used their learning in a variety of ways both in their professional and private lives. Eleven of the twelve educators made comments that were relevant to this category. This continuation took two forms. First, the members continued reading about the subjects presented in the studies on their own. Secondly, the learning was used to inform others, both educators, family and community members.

The participants changed their thinking toward a focus on what could be learned from current research. This moved some participants to continue their reading. As a result of the book study experience, Prieta reflected on the changes she had made in what she read, “Well, I've always been a reader. But I tend to choose some of these more academics books, written for teachers, to be better teachers, when I would not have chosen those before. I choose some of those now...for myself.” She added, “I spend more time reading and looking at the journals a little more thoroughly and stopping and giving

myself time to sit down and read and think through that information.”, another indication of continued academic learning. Other participants described how they wanted to learn more about what they had read. For instance, Ginger in her *The Out of Sync Child* essay added, “After rereading, relearning, and reconnecting with sensory processing disorders, I realize, I need more connections for the many questions I have daily, about this pervasive disorder.” Ava sums up the participants’ thinking, “I think that knowing...things are changing all the time makes a huge difference ...[You’re] gathering knowledge all the time...it made me enjoy it. That was the big deal! It made me enjoy it.” This remark, like the others, showed that the participants began looking at the research as a source for additional support in their daily teaching.

Finally, participants also explained that the book studies helped them to begin the pursuit of additional reading on specific disabilities. In her interview, Juanita remembered how one of the book studies, *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996) started her on a journey of research into Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD),

Just at that time, I was becoming really more aware of kids on the Autism Spectrum and it really made me think, and conscious and I looked up whole lot more information on how to work with these kids, and how...they view things differently.

As a result of their participation, the book study members became interested in current research and more aware of their options for continuing learning in their discipline.

Sharing learning with others. From the beginning, the participants mentioned how they were sharing what they had learned with their peers in the schools in which they worked. As a result, some of the people they contacted were even convinced to join

the book study groups because of this interaction. In addition, they were also communicating the new ideas they were learning to others- family, friends, and other acquaintances outside of school.

The members talked to a variety of other school personnel and parents about the books they read and what they were learning in the discussions and while implementing the strategies. Meg, a speech therapist, not used to classroom instructional practices, described sharing with a fellow educator in her *Classrooms That Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2003) essay,

As I was reading, I shared the ideas that I liked with a friend, who has been a teaching assistant for many years. Some of these ideas were even new to him. I now have a much better idea about how classrooms work.

She also related the sharing of one of the book's strategies with a first grade teacher in her *Rules in School* (Clark, 2003) essay,

She is having lots of behavior issues with one child in her class and [is] sending the child to the office almost every day. Hopefully, she can convince another 1st grade teacher to help her out and use the chain of command [strategy] instead of sending the child to the assistant principal multiple times per week.

Suzie mentioned that she was going to promote the use of the new ideas she learned with the other special educators with which she worked. She wrote in her *Classrooms That Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2003) essay,

Since we cannot require teachers to read this book, I will use my position as a coach to encourage the use of the strategies as I provide support to teachers. I am

sure most of them will embrace the various thoughts and strategies shared in that text.

Lily also wrote about sharing the strategies in her *Classrooms That Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2003) reflection,

As a school psychologist, I have already used the information in this book with several professionals. The first student is almost a non-reader who moved in from out-of-state and is in the second grade. The school interventionist and I came up with using this child's interest in fishing/hunting and letting him make his own books using pictures of fish.

She also mentioned this in another essay, "One of my speech therapists and I were recently in an IEP meeting and a suggestion from this book was mentioned." These educators utilized the learning that occurred as a result of their participation by sharing the books' ideas with others, recommending new strategies to try out, and using the strategies with their students.

Other members, such as Meg and Lily, provided information about how they used the books with the parents of their students. In her *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996) essay, Meg described, "I feel like I have a new outlook on some of my kids. I have even spoken with a couple of my parents about this book." Lily described how she had already used the information she gained from *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996), "I have already recommended it as reading for at least five families and any teacher and administrator I have had an opportunity to speak with."

Over three years later, Lily again talked about the same book in her interview,

Like I said, [it's] information that I share with parents. I can't tell you how many people. And right now I'm actually thinking, this *Thinking in Pictures* book, I may not have it because I think I might have loaned it out and I'm not sure I've gotten it back. But yes, it has impacted my job because, and I keep going back to that book, just because it had such an impact on me because of the... the view that it gave me into somebody's life that is totally different from me and that perspective then when I am dealing with the family with a child with autism, you know, then, okay maybe they may not think this way. And when they hear their blood rushing through their veins, they may really do that and I've never thought about that.

When asked if she had made changes as a result of the book studies she described the continued use of professional books as one of the most important; however she also added that the book studies lead her to look at using books in another different way. Lily explained,

One of them is the sharing of my professional library and personal professional library. We also, I think because of this book study, have books in my professional library for children. We did a bibliotherapy unit one summer when we worked [in RAD Team]...and I share those books every year. I send out a list of the books that I have and who they might help. So I probably wouldn't have done that because I probably would never thought about it.

Other participants discussed the books with their family members and others outside of the school environment. Prieta, in her *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996) reflective essay, described how she deliberated with her spouse about the book, "I don't often share

the topics of a Sp. Ed. book study with my husband, but Thinking in Pictures has provided us with several back-porch discussions.” Crystal related the way she was able to help a friend from church and how it made her feel in her reflective essay for *The Out-of-Sync Child* (Kranowitz, 1998),

There is a family that goes to my church who has a four-year-old [who has] been diagnosed with being autistic. Often times the mother and I will talk about her son. The other Sunday, when I asked how he was doing, she started telling me how he is beginning to talk and how pleased they were with his progress. She went on to say that he still had a lot of sensory issues. Boy, did I light up like a Christmas tree in December. I got so excited! I began to share with her some information from the book. I told her that I would let her borrow my book. She was so grateful and I felt sooo good. I shared that story to say, although the information in the book may not be something that I can use in my classroom today, however, it is information that can be used to help another student or parent along the way... A few months ago I couldn't have offered that parent in my church anything about sensory disorders. Now, I was able to share helpful information.

In addition, Lily described how she used the book to provide her family members with helpful information,

I have two daughters. One daughter is currently a literacy assistant and working on a degree in elementary education. My other daughter will be beginning college next fall and plans on majoring in special education. They are both getting copies

of this book for Christmas this year. At least, I might be able to influence these two prospective teachers by reading this book.

The sharing of their learning with others outside of the work environment even affected one spouse who was an educator. In the interview, I asked Meg if the book studies changed her thinking. Her reply revealed that the sharing she did also affected her husband, who was a special educator, "I think certainly it did and even my husband's as well. Since he works in special ed. as well,...I would share with him." Suzie on the other hand, related the book to her own child and herself. In her essay on *The Out of Sync Child* (Kranowitz, 1998) she wrote,

I really enjoyed most of this book...I would not have enjoyed the book as much if I had not been able to relate it to my own child. I think back to her need to have her feet wet before putting socks on so they would fit snugly, or dislike of socks seems and shirt tags. I have some sensory "quirks" myself. If one of my shoes seems to be tied tighter than the other one I "need" to fix them.

Even after three years, when asked if she had made changes as a result of the book studies, Lily described the continued use of professional books as one of the most important, as indicated in her comments on page 125.

Data in this category provided evidence that the case study participants implemented the books' strategies and ideas in a variety of settings. The participants shared their learning with different people at work, at home, and even at church. They were able to relate the books to a variety of situations and individuals. As a result, the members became interested in further learning and the application of the strategies outside of their professional lives.

Changes in Thinking

The last category in the Process theme provides insight into the changes the participants felt they made in their thinking and belief systems as a result of the book study experience. The subcategories include several different changes in thinking: about students, people with disabilities, and teaching practice. In addition, this final category involves the participants' beliefs about themselves as learners, teachers and individuals.

Changes in thinking about students. Nine of the 12 participants identified ways in which their thinking had changed about students' abilities and needs. While this subcategory is closely related to two other subcategories in this category, I felt that it deserved its own space. These changes are more generalized than the other two, pertaining to thinking about students as whole persons, with empathy and understanding about students as developing readers and writers, and learners. Natasha's beliefs, for instance, about the importance of looking at students in a more complete light changed after the book study experience. In her interview, she said,

I had lost sight of the fact that I was teaching a person instead of a seventh grader...They're a whole person and you can't, you're not just teaching them how to read and do math, you're teaching them how to grow as a person and that book [*The Essential 55*] reminded me of that again....I had gotten away from that right and that brought me back to, to that, instead of just concentrating on academics.

In fact, this change in perspective about students was already evident in 2010. In her essay on *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996), she said, "There are many places where a lot of the information is highlighted so I can read it again and again, making sure that I can understand each student as an individual..."

Another participant, Stella, explained that she realized that children need to be motivated to learn, “It changed how I looked at what they wrote and what they chose to write, and what they chose to read. And... knowing what people are interested in, influences...what they are willing to read and what they trudge through.” She came to believe there were other ways of evaluating student knowledge than the traditional methods she had used. She explained further,

Knowing that there is more information in the mind than...can sometimes be brought out and that just pencil and paper is not the only way to know what a person has or has not learned, that there are other ways to find out what someone can and cannot do other than just, "Here's the question. Write the answer" or "Tell me what it is" and just sometimes observing is just as important as what they can write down. [I] was able to differentiate things, like you can write it this way, but if you don't see it the same way and you don't write, draw me a picture. Or can you write a skit? Or can you tell me how it makes you feel? Or it's not just a concrete, “I'm going to ask a question, you're going to answer it”...They just don't know how to put it into words on paper. I found that there's a whole lot more information in a child than what they can write down.

Later she added, “They can hear the same things but each child can have a different take and they don't have to think the same way to be right.” Stella reflected that she could now put herself in the shoes of children who are reading to learn something new, “I can visualize myself as a student, as a teacher, as a reader. I could put myself in my student's place. I could see it from their point of view.” In her reflective essay, Ginger also echoed Stella's perspective, “In each chapter, I could identify with them. Presently, this book

study has found me encouraged at the amount of effort and time my students have given to reading this year.” Melody reflected that her difficulty with reading one of the books helped her to empathize with her students reading difficulties, “I can see why reading something you view as boring would frustrate a reader-especially if this is how many of our boys view literature.” Finally, Suzie, the facilitator of *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996), explained how all of her group’s members discussed their regret at not having this knowledge earlier,

The participants thought back to students they have served in the past and could now realize why some behaviors were displayed. We were all a little sad to think there were modifications to the environment we could have made to help the student be more successful, if we had only known! We now know!

Suzie’s reflection provides a unique insight into the book studies from a slightly different point of view. As the facilitator, a system-wide leader, and special educator she saw how the new knowledge was going to change practice.

Changes in thinking about people with disabilities. The book studies provided the teachers constant chances to compare and contrast what they knew about disabilities from their experience and the research and information in the books. While books such *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996) and *The Out-of-Sync Child* (Kranowitz, 1998) directly related to disabilities, others such as *Classrooms That Work* (Cunningham & Allington, 2003) and *The Fluent Reader* (Rasinski, 2003) also led the participants to consider what they knew about their students and classroom instruction. Of 12 participants in the case study, 10 made comments that are relevant to this category.

Participants made general comments about their new sense of expertise and also that people with disabilities have skills that are often overlooked or misunderstood. Stella, for instance, wrote, “The disability does not mean that the person is unable to do or understand. It's just the way they perceive, understand.” She also increased her awareness of her students’ abilities, alongside her students as they tried out the strategies in her classroom, “I have to admit I thought to myself, ‘Those things are where my students struggle’...but, they were able to do more than they thought, (and I thought), they could. They had some success.” Other participants described how their new learning helped them to be less hesitant to work with people with disabilities. Ginger explained how she felt more at ease with teaching students with disabilities of which she had not previously worked, “Well, you just, kind of, know now,... if you [I] get this child, or a child with those tendencies, now I can kind of pick up on those.”

The first subcategory includes the changes in thinking and insights the educators gained from learning about specific disabilities. There were two books, *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996) and *The Out-of-Sync Child* (Kranowitz, 1998), that dealt specifically with disabilities the teachers were just beginning to see at the time. The book mentioned most frequently as having a positive impact was *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996). This nonfiction autobiography would not be a typical choice for a book study because it lacked teaching strategies; however, when presented as a choice, it was chosen by 19 educators, so many that both book study groups read it that semester. It gave the members a chance to understand the disability directly from someone with Asperger’s. Stella and Ginger voiced the general consensus, Stella said, “I came away with much more knowledge of how people with Autism think, feel, and cope with life.”

Ginger explained, “A lot of times I had a specific child in mind. It just empowered me at the time; it empowered me to have more ideas in order to help them.” Melody also described how the reading Temple Grandin's book gave her the chance to reflect and feel more confident with teaching students with ASD,

I would often find myself rereading sections of text in order to try to "see things" she did. I would try to imagine myself as a visual learner and try to make connections as she described...Wow! That was difficult. I think I am just way too verbal to put myself into that spot, but at least I was able to see how I could use the information that she was giving as a way to improve my own teaching style. I still think that working with an autistic student is majorly a trial and error process, but thanks to the numerous student examples that she described throughout her text, I think I have an idea of where to start trying.

Stella wrote about this in her essay,

Thinking in Pictures has given me insight into how some autistic people, such as my student, may think or perceived what they hear, see and interact with on a daily basis. I now see that people with autism may not understand things the way they are intended. The description Temple Grandin gives of how she translated spoken and written words into full-color movies made me wonder if the autistic student in my class may process information in the same way. It is my understanding from her discussion that Temple Grandin, and possibly my student, may repeat or echo what they hear to make sure they hear is interpreted and understood correctly.

Natasha also reflected on how she looked at her students in a different light as a result of the book study. She wrote,

Of course, I had not dealt with a lot of autistic kids before... I have worked with an autistic kid this year a lot who is very bright but just was struggling with social skills, and so yes, seeing them as a person who can change the world. I mean to look at Temple Grandin change the industries of cattle, you know. Slaughter houses and stuff so yeah kind of work on it with that, that book helped me believe that and this student wants to be a teacher one day. Well, he absolutely can! I definitely see him in a different light after reading that book about Temple Grandin's life. So, that definitely made me see that type of student differently.

Lily also developed a more empathetic insight into her students with autism because of Temple Grandin's book,

For me, and it gave me insight into a person with autism that, because I don't have autism. I don't have, just like I don't have any experience being a minority, you know. So I cannot, cannot put myself in that position, maybe I could through a book, but I've never been a minority anywhere...I don't have autism so I was able to see through her eyes.

As the participants read and discussed the books, the personal connections they made to their own lives also affected their sense of empathy. Prieta provides an example of this,

Having the cattle and knowing the cattle and their...and their quirky personalities and so it made it easier to relate to what this individual had gone through...It made me really think much more deeply about my students who, in the past, who've been autistic and how we structured the lessons for them that were

probably totally meaningless and how I could have done things, presented to them much differently- and, and for all the learning styles that we do not teach to.

Ginger also talked about this empathetic thinking,

Just being able to put myself in their place, how they think, how they perceive the outside world, and how I am supposed to reach out to them and help them perceive the world through their senses...gave me a lot more insight.

It is evident in this subcategory that participants began to look at their students from a different point of view, with a new sense of empathy. This led them to change their perception of how to work with their students, enabling a change in instruction and new modifications to provide them a successful learning experience.

Learning about disabilities for the first time. Other participants were learning about a disability for the first time from both the book and their peers in the book study group. When the participants were unsure of the book's information, more experienced participants often helped fill the gaps in their understanding. Crystal explained that reading about autism gave her a chance to learn about the disability for the first time,

Thinking in Pictures, yeah. You know, not really having to have the opportunity to really deal with many autistic children, you know. So when I read that book it gave me a clearer understanding so when I got that child in my classroom that I would be able to use the knowledge I gained from the book.

She added later about how her new understanding gave her the ability to see her students' challenges in a different light, "So I begin to pick up on things ...because I have that background knowledge that I didn't have before."

Crystal and Suzie also mentioned learning about sensory processing disorders for the first time in their essays. At the end of *The Out-of-Sync Child* (Kranowitz, 1998) book study, Crystal wrote, “I found the book very interesting. I didn't realize the children even had sensory processing problems to the extent that was described in the book.” Suzie reflected on this in her interview, “*The Out of Sync Child* just explained so much. Why a child with autism may run away squealing. He may be in pain from sound that we don't even hear.” Meg also explained this new understanding in her essay on *The Out-of-Sync Child*,

This book made me think of several children that I have had the privilege to serve. There have been a couple [of students] that tap everything within reach. Now I know that they probably have a visual processing problem or they were just trying to figure out where their body was. Another that smells everything. Now I know that his sense of smell may be more reliable than his vision or hearing. [There are] others that become self-injurious at times when they're probably just overstimulated and don't realize what they're doing. They don't know they need deep pressure such as being rolled up in a gym mat, or need a weighted vest, or a swing. I have had a couple that was scared to death of balloons and vacuums. I didn't realize that it may actually cause pain like an explosion in their ears.

By looking through the eyes of their students as they read these books, the case study members were able to glimpse how their students had to interact with their world. This new understanding helped them to become advocates for their students and helped the educators to change how they worked with their students with disabilities. In her interview, Prieta reflected,

I think, given the choice, I may have said, "If that student can be in someone else's classroom, maybe they will learn. Maybe ...I'm not the teacher. But ...I think I could take more students with more learning styles and be able to handle that in the classroom...I think that's what it's helped, if anything, to be able to know that I can handle those students and, that there will be literature out there for, about new situations or new types of students that I have coming in with problems, like eat weird things, that I can find that information.

Juanita felt that the book studies built her expertise to the extent that she could be an advocate for her students. She made the following comment in her interview, "What it REALLY changed was the fact that I was more willing to try and convince other people, concerning these students...instead of 'do the best I can while I have them.'" At the same time, Juanita also found she could help her students become their own advocates,

But this one...gave you how you could create...in the kids, their own self advocacy skills, maybe or sense of agency or whatever. It did give you some thought, where you had to think...They have, they don't have any self-confidence. They don't think they can do anything, and it's sad. But it did, it had also had some ideas on flexibility, things like that in it, I remember. And not only you being flexible in how you work with kids but teaching kids to be flexible at a middle school level. Sometimes that's difficult.

As a result of their participation in the book studies, the participants felt that they had increased their expertise in understanding and teaching students with disabilities. This allowed them to become more empathetic, enabling them to act as advocates for these

students. In addition, they were able to view their students as individuals with abilities that they had not seen before.

Changes in thinking about teaching. Another pattern that I identified from the data indicated a change in thinking about the participants' practice. These changes were not as clearly identified as a particular strategy that would be evident in a classroom observation. Instead, these changes were within these participants' thinking and approaches to teaching. Eleven of the participants provided data for this category. Prieta, in particular, showed a change in her thinking about teaching in several different artifacts. In three of her essays, it was apparent that Prieta was reflecting on changing her teaching based on the books she had read. In the *Thinking in Pictures* (Grandin, 1996) essay, she wrote, "I have tried to assess my classroom structure...and what may contribute to possible success or...failure of my students." In another essay, Prieta added, "It was a relief to be given permission to spend time and reading materials that may not usually be included in the teaching of curriculum standards." Prieta also reflected a new dedication to changing instruction in her *Going with the Flow* essay,

I find myself wanting to put aside other chores, to read about science topics and think through scenarios for structuring future topics of study, and think ahead to possible classes that I might take to learn new techniques for presentation of material and exploratory labs to give my students a desire to learn.

In her interview, she explained how the book studies helped her to think more reflectively,

I don't think I'm a pessimist. And I've always thought my students could rise to higher expectations. I guess what I felt like was: How can I change that student to

make, help that student make more progress? Now I think of ways that I can change myself and my classroom and what I'm doing to help that student to rise. Juanita also changed her thinking about her approach to teaching her students, "It did give you some thought, where you had to think. And not only you being flexible in how you work with kids but teaching kids to be flexible at a middle school level. Sometimes that's difficult."

In her interview, Hannah said,

I think it made me see, you know, all the kids that come in my room, they may have certain disabilities and have similar diagnoses but all of them are individuals and they learn in different ways. I mean, you cannot use one way to teach every child.

Her comment, as well as Natasha and Ava, among others indicated a transformation in beliefs. Natasha also reflected on her need to be reminded of what she knew about best practices, "Well...after 34 years...the pendulum swings you know and you forget part of what you know. You just have to ...relearn things. And these books help[ed] do that...remind you."

Another participant, Ava, felt that her participation gave her a new energy and purpose,

I think it was a willingness to try new things because, you know, when you get out of school, especially when you've been going to school, forever and a day, you've got your master's and you've got your second master's and you're, "Okay," she laughs, "I highly doubt there is anything else out there" and you kind of get stuck. And so, it's like, putting...your makeup on again. You're just looking a little better. You're acting a little bit better. You see through a different pair of

glasses and that's what you need. I think that's what happens with most people.

They talk about, they've been in the business too long and that's because they're, they're fixated in one spot.

Finally, Ginger described how the reading and discussion helped her to think reflectively about her teaching in her *I Read It but I Don't Get It* (Tovani, 2000) essay, "I found myself in this book. Along with the others in the book study, I found myself analyzing my teaching style, past and present." This quote, in particular, is indicative of the reflective nature of the studies.

In thinking about their practice throughout the book study experience, the case study members were able to make changes in their approach to their students. They were able to consider and respond to their students as whole individuals. Finally, they described how they were rejuvenated by the book study experience.

Personal Beliefs

The book study data also showed a pattern of internal changes the members made because of their involvement. These changes led to increased competence in the ability to positively influence others, as well as, a willingness to accept others. In addition, some of the participants felt that they were more likely to try something new. Nine of the case study participants were represented in this category. Stella explained that, "I was more accepting of other people's perceptions of things."

She also wrote about a new need to be self-evaluative before she could begin to look at others. In her *New Passages* (Sheehy, 1995) essay she wrote,

I have come from this book study with the understanding that in order to understand where others may be in life I must first know where I am and how I fit

in the scheme of things. You really need to know yourself and your place in the universe to understand where others may be in theirs.

Other participants believed the book studies helped them to become more open to new ideas and willing to change. Prieta, Juanita, and Hannah provide examples of these changes. For instance, Hannah mentioned this in her interview,

Sometimes I think teachers get settled into a routine and it's kind of hard to step out of your little boundaries there. And when you're encouraging, and you're given a chance to share what the results were, then that helped you too...to step out of your little security box and try something.

Prieta reflected how being a part of the book studies opened her up to new ideas. She explained, "And so it was very helpful to me and got me to think outside the box and learn from authors that I might not have even been aware of." She made another reference to this openness in her interview. She said,

Probably what was new was listening to the other teachers and how they used the information and how they made changes in their classrooms and so it gave me a little more oomph a little more energy, I guess- a little more energy about trying new things and not being afraid to, I won't say fail, but just knowing that, that, that every lesson doesn't have to work out exactly how you had planned.

In her interview, Ava also spoke of this,

It got me unstuck...and doing things like that, have given me enough confidence to do other things that were difficult, that I wouldn't have even attempted. So I'm like, "Hey, this wasn't as hard, as I thought it was. And probably I've been holding myself back.

Another insight that occurred was the change in how the participants interacted with others. Juanita in particular, found she had changed in several areas. She described how *New Passages* (Sheehy, 1995) helped her to gain a new understanding of how to cope in stressful situations,

I have learned that the little things that people stress over really do not matter that much in the whole scheme of things. I have also learned that when people are angry with me, will not listen to my side of a situation, etc. It usually is not about me at all but that they have another agenda and it is not worth becoming too upset about it.

She also explained how participating in the discussions helped her in another way. In her interview she explained, “And so, it, actually it helped me be able to discuss things more with people.”

Meg also spoke of different perspectives she gained as a result of participation. For instance, in her *New Passages* (Sheehy, 1995) essay she gave details,

This book did give me a better understanding of menopause, growing older gracefully, and lots of different people's perspectives on life. Before reading this book, I never really thought that much about any of those issues. Maybe I am more of the well-rounded person after reading it. I know this book has motivated me to exercise more and eat better because chances are I will live to be a very old woman.

Juanita gave a possible explanation for why this change in thinking occurred, at least for her. In her interview, she gave her point of view as to why she was ready for this change in thinking,

Juanita: These book studies came, in my life, in the right point in my teaching career.

Interviewer: Why do you think?

Juanita: If I was younger, I might not have done as many. I would have thought I didn't have time, even though I had more time then...or I wouldn't have wanted to waste my time reading the books or I would have thought I knew it all. You know, younger teachers sometimes do think they know it all. And as you go, you learn don't know anything (she laughs).

After participating in the book study groups, the participants described how their thinking changed and transformed them in different ways. They felt more open to try new things, more aware of others, and more comfortable with sharing their ideas with others.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter Four, the data analysis was presented by category and subcategory and organized into themes. The two themes which I created were Process and Product. These themes were an outcome of the evolution of patterns that developed and were consolidated as a result of the analysis.

In the Process theme, there were three main categories. In the first category, the participants described the major elements of the book studies. The second category provided information about their perceptions of their involvement. In addition, the third category revealed how the book studies provided the participants with an atmosphere that allowed for the growth of a learning community.

The Product Theme gave insight into the changes that the book study members made as a result of participation. The categories of this theme relate to three specific

areas. First, the participants described how their instructional practice was changed based on their involvement. Next, the changes in academic thinking were presented. Finally, the participants described how they changed their beliefs about their abilities and willingness to do things differently.

Chapter 5: Reflections

In this chapter, I reflect on what the data whispered to me- how it gave me a new understanding and a new fervor for making sure that the educators with whom I come in contact have quality, meaningful professional development opportunities on their terms, as adult learners. It is here that I answer the two questions that directed this dissertation:

- 1) What are the participants' perceptions of the book study experience as a professional development activity?
- 2) According to the participants' perceptions, how does participation in professional book study impact their long-term learning?

The data analysis was arranged into two major themes: Process and Product. These two themes align themselves with the research questions: the Process Theme answers the former question, while the Product Theme answers the latter. The answers to these questions are explained in the Conclusion section of this chapter.

In the Discussion section, I reflect on what I learned from the process of data analysis and explain how the data align, support, and promote the literature. The Implications section provides an explanation of how this case study gave the participants a chance to use their individual voices within the book studies which then became a shared voice in learning and changing. Next, the Recommendations section is dedicated to using the participants' voices to make suggestions to others who might be interested in implementing professional book studies in their workplaces. Finally, in Continuing Questions, I pose questions that were raised during my research study, and provide possible directions that could become the foundation for future research.

Conclusion

The Process Theme provided information about the book study elements, the participants' perceptions of what occurred in the studies, and the emergence of a learning community. As such, the evidence in this theme provided insight into the first question of the dissertation, the participants' perceptions of the book study experience as a professional development activity. The participants overwhelmingly believed the book study groups provided them with PD that met their needs as both educators and adult learners in more powerful and beneficial ways than traditional PD. They felt they were given the choice to learn about a wide variety of topics directly applicable and meaningful to their practice. The open-ended discussion and the sharing of experiences in a supportive environment helped them to comprehend the text at a much deeper level than if they had only read the books on their own. The participants also explained that the ability to practice new strategies in their workplace and return to the group for support and feedback was another important component. Through this collaborative experience, the case study members described the development of strong relationships which have continued to provide them with an expert support network.

The Product Theme answers the second question of the dissertation: According to the participants' perceptions, how does participation in professional book study impact their long-term learning? The educators in this case study believed this experience impacted three aspects of their learning: instructional practice, academic thinking, and personal beliefs. According to the participants, they changed their educational practices, incorporating new strategies and passing on this knowledge to others. They also found that, as a result of their experience, they were more academically focused, continuing to

look for and read current research in order to inform their practice. In addition, the participants changed their thinking about people with special needs in general and their students, in particular, believing that they had more abilities than they previously perceived. This impacted their practice in influential ways, changing how they interacted with and instructed their students. Their new knowledge of disabilities and empathy toward their students also enabled them to act as expert advocates for their students within the school environment. The participants felt that through this experience they became more open and accepting of others' points of view. Finally, they also reported feeling empowered, energized, and more open to try new ideas.

Discussion

The professional book study data provide support for research in three areas. First, the data indicate that the book studies provide the components of effective professional development. Next, I will describe how professional book studies can enable the development of a knowledge community, as was evident in this case. Finally, I will discuss how the outcomes of participation in book study groups inform the research base on transformative learning theory. There is evidence that some of the case study members may have experienced transformative learning as a result of their participation. In this section, I will relate how this study informs the research in effective professional development, learning communities, and transformative learning.

Effective professional development. This case study shows that these book studies provided elements of effective professional development needed to support inservice teachers. According to Lawler and King (2000), six principles of adult learning should be considered in planning professional development activities. These six

principles align with research on effective professional development resulting in changes in instructional practice leading to increased academic achievement. The outcomes of the professional book study will be discussed in terms of their six principles (Lawler & King, 2000). My research findings support and reinforce these principles.

First, any PD activity should create a climate of respect. The participants of this case study believed that this climate of respect first developed by allowing them to have freedom to voluntarily participate and also to read books that directly related to their needs (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Through the book studies, the teachers learned about a variety of topics of their own choosing, including instructional strategies, behavior management, and specific disabilities. In addition, the relaxed and welcoming atmosphere of the discussions allowed the members to feel safe enough to risk sharing (Le Fevre, 2014). Melody explained this in her interview,

We all wanted to be there, for one thing...[it] wasn't something we were forced to do. It was something we asked really to participate and, and I think that was just a main ingredient right there. Plus we just had a great mix of people and again, it was just a group of people that all volunteered to do this. And so you had people that wanted to be there and that wanted to learn from each other, so there wasn't any negativity. I mean, it was just a very pleasant learning environment.

As the case study members explained, after experiencing the trusting atmosphere in which all ideas were accepted, and participants were encouraged to communicate their comprehension of the text, they felt safe enough to participate completely. Even case study members who were hesitant to speak in groups for fear of ridicule eventually

became actively involved in the book studies. There is an implication in these data that the building of such trust takes time to develop (Wei, et al., 2009).

Another component of the book studies found in the six principles is the opportunity for members to be actively involved (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). In the book studies active participation occurred through the readings, discussions, trying out of strategies and interactive blogs. Melody describes how the book study provided active learning and collaborative participation,

The best part of my experience... was learning actual activities or ways that other people thought of something that I could take back and use for my own kids or like someone else's comments would spark an idea, you know, that I can use later. And I think that to me was the best part of it.

Her comments are indicative of the evidence in the data, that book study groups allow for sharing of knowledge, thus leading to deeper understanding (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).

Lawler and King (2000) also recommend that any learning be built upon participant experiences, acknowledging the importance of the adult learner's extensive knowledge base. During the meetings and blogs, the case study members added their personal reflections and stories to create a more realistic picture of how it meshed with their previous understandings. Hannah expressed her perception of the book studies,

I liked it a lot because it gave me exposure to other people, in a relaxed way. We shared a lot of stories that were, of course, relevant to our reading, but yet, it gave you a different take on everybody else. So you're learning not just from the book but from other people's life experiences in the classroom.

Lily explained how important the learning is- “When I take something [and] incorporate it against the experiences I've had.” According to the participants’ perceptions, this element added to the value of their experience and facilitated the incorporation of the new learning into their workplaces (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Wei, et al., 2009).

The next principle of adult learning that should be applied to PD is the employment of collaborative inquiry within the activities. The case study members described how the book studies provided them with a support network, as well as the safe environment in which to try out new ideas and get feedback from other members. Researchers have recommended that an important component of effective professional development is the chance to implement new strategies or approaches while still receiving support from others (Hunzicker, 2011). In a reflective summary, Melody wrote,

I am grateful that I read this text, have many good ideas to try out my classroom, and that I was able to discuss the various ways to teach kids with different forms of autism with my coworkers. Our special education peer group is a wonderful resource. I took away a lot of good information, and a better feeling about just practicing "trial and error".

Hoover (1996) recommended that professional development should allow educators “to test their understandings and build new ones” (para. 9). The book study groups provided these participants with this opportunity.

The book studies also provided a longer duration of time than traditional PD, giving the educators the time they desperately need in order to try out new ideas (H. Lee, 2005). Natasha explained,

We do so many professional developments and we come across so many new ideas and you're just bombarded with, “Oh, this will work” or “This will work” or “This will work” or “This will work” and so they throw these four different things at you in one year and you don't have time to implement any of it....and in book studies, it's more you take it at your speed.

The ongoing nature of the book study groups gave the members the chance for experimentation in the implementation of new strategies recommended in the research (Wei, et al., 2009).

The fifth principle, according to Lawler and King (2000), is the need for any activity to allow participants to apply their learning to their own practice. The book study participants were constantly considering the text they read and the topics of the discussion in light of how it would fit with their particular situation and their students. Melody described why this element of the professional book studies kept her coming back, “You know, at some point there's going to be ideas brought to the table that you can use immediately back in your own classroom, and that makes a huge difference on whether or not you decide to participate.”

Finally, any PD activity should ultimately, empower the participants (Lawler & King, 2000). Meg wrote about how reading about Temple Grandin enabled her to see her students in a different light, “It has opened my eyes about how their [her students with autism] senses can be so mixed up. I never thought about some of these kids not being able to see and hear at the same time. No wonder they have such difficulties.” As a result of their participation, the members described becoming more empathetic to their

students' special needs, feeling confident enough to share what they had learned with others, and so, become advocates for their students with special needs.

In the interviews, participants compared the book studies to traditional types of PD activities, finding the books studies 1) allowed them greater autonomy in their own learning, 2) provided them with active learning opportunities, and 3) enabled them to practice new strategies and get feedback from others (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000; Garet, et al., 2001; H. Lee, 2005).

In conclusion, the professional book studies provided all six of the adult learning principles recommended for effective PD. In the professional book study groups, the participants became the experts. They provided each other with the benefit of their interpretations of the text in light of previous life experiences. They tried out strategies and returned to the meetings to discuss and collaborate on the outcomes and impacts on their students. Through the use of narrative and the sharing of ideas and strategies, they supported, challenged, and learned from each other. Even after the studies ended, these educators continued to look to their fellow participants as sources of strategies and support.

Emergence of a knowledge community. In researching the patterns found in the data in the Process Theme, I began to wonder if I was seeing the emergence of some type of learning community. As I analyzed the data, I heard the participants talk about how they were able to collaborate, give advice, provide support to each other, as well as challenge each other. They also spoke of the camaraderie of the group and the building of long-term relationships. They explained their feelings of being accepted as valuable members of the group. These elements of the book studies closely relate to both

communities of practice and knowledge communities. I believe that the professional book study groups studied here could be considered a knowledge community because it most closely aligns to the definition of this type of learning group.

In knowledge communities, participants come together based on common interests and goals (Craig, 1995, 2007; Seaman, 2008). In addition, there is a desire to enhance personal knowledge, which was the primary reason the participants gave for coming to the book studies again and again. Natasha summed this feeling up for all the participants, “Well it's definitely, again, where everybody talked and you learn from each other. And then you feel...a part of something. You feel some ownership. You feel...you're in control more than just being told what to do.” Knowledge communities are formed because adult learners have a need to control their own learning (Gravani, 2012; Gregson & Sturko, 2007; Merriam, 2008).

In the professional book studies, the initial reason for the discussions was to assist the participants in considering how they could incorporate the books they read into their practice. The case study members all reflected on how the discussions accomplished this need. The participants explained that other participants helped fill in their knowledge gaps, enabling them to more deeply comprehend the text. Natasha explained this,

I enjoy getting to listen to what other people had to say about them [the books], [their] insights...I read something and somebody else saw it from a different perspective. It helped me learn how to read professional books and interpret them, that it can be interpreted in different ways.

They also reported that they risked sharing their interpretation of the text even when they were not sure of their level of comprehension and within the discussions,

related their own experiences to the others in the group. The participants also reported that they felt challenged to think in different ways even as their ideas were supported and acknowledged. As with the book studies, members of knowledge community rely on narrative, discussing and making sense of new learning in light of their own personal experience (Seaman, 2008).

Those members who were initially reluctant to share, like Stella and Juanita, began to feel safe because they noticed how others' ideas were accepted in a respectful manner. When these members did risk sharing their thinking, they reported that their ideas were applauded and accepted as important. This development of a trustful community took time to develop, with some participants needed more time than others. Changing instruction and pedagogical beliefs is not an easy task when educators feel that they are taking risks, not only with their public persona but with their students' learning (Le Fevre, 2014; Ponticell, 2003). Ava described this, "It's easier to listen to other people have the same problems you're having and they're striving to find an answer, too. And you don't feel so alone." The case study members reported that their participation provided them with a feeling of inclusion rather than the isolation they had reported in their workplace.

These professional book studies provided participants with an experience indicative of a knowledge community. In knowledge communities, such as these book study groups, participants experience sharing and collaboration, a trusting environment where the participants can learn based on common interests, and where they are able to work in teams fighting the feeling of isolation educators often experience (Guskey, 1991; Hunzicker, 2011)..

The opportunity for Transformative Learning. Change comes in various forms; however, it is always precipitated by some type of learning (Cranton, 2006). Often difficult to quantify, one of the issues found in research is the lack of information on how individual change occurs (Guskey, 2002). Keeping this in mind, the analysis of the educators' comments appeared to establish a connection to Transformative Learning Theory (TLT). Though there is evidence that significant changes occurred, I am not certain if it would be considered transformative. I do; however, believe that the professional book study groups provided them with an opportunity for what is needed for transformative learning. To that end, I will describe the components of the book studies that relate to TLT.

To begin, it is important to identify that there is clear evidence of reflection in the discussions, reflective summaries and interviews; however, not all reflection, according to Mezirow (2000), leads to transformation of thought (Mezirow, 2000). Both subjective and objective reframing were possible within the book study experience, as the participants described objectively reframing based on what they read and the discussions with others, in light of their own frames of reference. In addition, subjective reframing, the reflection on one's own assumptions, was also evident.

One possible component of the professional book study group that is indicative of a stage of TLT is the knowledge community that developed (Cranton, 1994). It appears that this supportive environment was the definitive element that led the participants to take risks. In transformative learning theory, a support group is needed during the learning process (Mezirow, 2000). According to Mezirow, however, this support should come from those that have already experienced transformative learning. In this case, the

support came from individuals who were also going through the same process of those who act as mentors. In the professional book studies, fellow participants acted as the support and the facilitators acted as mentors for those making transformative changes.

Some of the participants described their openness to trying new strategies because of the supportive environment. Trying out an unknown strategy takes risk and risk is one of the main factors that is identified as a barrier to the implementation of pedagogical change (Guskey, 1991; Le Fevre, 2014). The participants explained that because they were able to practice strategies in their classrooms and come back to get feedback from their peers, this helped them to risk trying out something new. Juanita explained, “That was really the point of ...of most of them...To try things in the classroom and see if it worked with your students or make adaptations with it so it would work.” Being supported by others as they made changes in practice is indicative of the fourth phase while the acquisition of knowledge and skills, leading to a change in actions is described in seventh phase of TLT. As a result of this new learning, some of the participants described feeling guilty about not having known how to help previous students. The second phase of the process described by Mezirow (2000) includes a self-examination with these feelings of guilt or shame.

Other data provides insight into possible evidence that transformative learning may have occurred. First, the participants in the book studies identified that they changed their thinking about the value of research in their field and its application to their own practice. They also wondered why they weren't being exposed to this information in other professional development activities, which indicates a possible connection to a disorienting dilemma. They described how the book studies made them aware of the

importance of keeping abreast of current research and how that could inform their practice. This type of movement toward an academic way of thinking correlates with Mezirow's Phase 11. It appeared to indicate a change indicative of an integration of their new perspective into their life.

The data provided additional insight into the participants' perceptions of change in three areas: academic thinking, continued learning after book studies ended, and the passing on of information to others. Mezirow's TLT phases that most closely match this are steps 10 and 11 (Mezirow, 2000). As they became more confident in their understanding, they shared their learning with others, both in the workplace and outside of it.

The participants also described how they were able to take what they learned and reach out to others. As their expertise grew, they used what they learned to teach other educators about subjects, such as autism, behavior management, and reading comprehension. They explained how they were able to provide support to parents and community members, as well as their own family members. This change seems, to me, an ultimate statement in regards to the level of the participants' learning as a result of the book study experience, that they felt confident enough to teach others. Prieta said the book studies left her feeling "empowered because...I feel like I'm a better teacher and that's what special education is really is all about." In TLT, as a person becomes more confident in the new learning in Phase 10 they integrate the new learning into their life, Phase 11.

The final category in the Products Theme involves the most provocative possibilities of transformative learning outcomes. It describes the ways the book studies

supported the participants in a way that led to permanent changes in personal thinking. These internal changes included increased self-efficacy, in particular their confidence in the belief that they could influence others in positive ways. They also reported a change in the willingness to accept others. In addition, some of the participants felt that they were more likely to try something new, feeling rejuvenated by their experience, providing them with a new outlook and energy toward teaching. These outcomes show possible connections to the last two phases of TLT, the building of new confidence and incorporation of the new learning into their lives.

Mezirow believed that a person could experience up to 11 different phases in the transformation of learning (Mezirow, 1994). While he did not believe that all 11 were necessary for transformative learning to occur, he did believe that three of the stages were required: a disorienting dilemma, critical reflection and evaluation of beliefs, and social discourse. Of these three, it is likely that the book studies established an environment in which critical reflection and evaluation of beliefs could take place as a result of social discourse. The possible evidence of a disorienting dilemma is the one area that is most difficult to identify based on these data. Mezirow described the disorienting dilemma as epochal, occurring in one event, and incremental or cumulative disorientation accumulating over time (Mezirow, 2000). Disorientation in the book study is more likely to have occurred over a longer period of time, although there is no clear data to support either type of disorientation. One book study experience in particular, *Thinking in Pictures*, bears closer inspection because of the depth of changes in thinking reported by the participants. This book study was the mentioned most often when describing how beliefs changed. According to the participants, this book study helped them to understand

persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder and helped them to learn how to support their students with these special needs. Ginger, in her interview explained,

I've learned a lot but Temple Grandin's book helped me solve problems within my classroom. I mean, just seeing how the children, just being able to put myself in their place, how they think, how they perceive the outside world, and how I am supposed to reach out to them and help them perceive the world through their senses. And that gave me a lot more insight.

Ginger's comment is typical of each of the participants', who all mentioned trying to put themselves in the shoes of their students and Temple Grandin. This might come closest to a disorienting dilemma, and so, might be a starting place for follow-up research on TLT within this case.

While there is some indication that transformative learning occurred, it will be impossible to know without further information from the participants themselves. As a constructivist, I believe it is important to ultimately leave it to participants to decide if, and how, they were transformed by their participation. For this reason, I personally believe the proof cannot be found within these pages; I would need additional information from study participants. While this might be a consideration for future research, for now, it is sufficient, in my view, to provide an explanation of places in the data that might lead one to think that transformative learning is possible in this type of knowledge community.

Implications

One of the most powerful tenets of knowledge communities is the very idea- that new learning is both personally and socially constructed (Seaman, 2008). This case study

shows that the participants in these professional book studies had the chance to have an individual voice and shared voice in the discussion groups, and their own professional learning. Adult learners need to have the ability to direct their own learning. Without the buy-in that voice provides, any other professional development activity is, sadly, a waste of time and energy. These are two voices that keep whispering to me, speaking to the needs of educators as adult learners and of the implications for administrators who are in charge of professional development.

Individual voice. In the professional book study groups, individual voice seemed to be the single most important element. Like all adult learners, the educators brought their own experiences, beliefs, and expectations to their readings and to the book study discussions. Individual voice connects with the two-sided nature of the book studies. The participants read the books on their own and then shared their understanding of the text in the discussions. Within the book study groups, each participant had different interpretations of the reading because of their unique understanding. As they read, they interpreted the text in light of this knowledge. These unique backgrounds are important to understand, acknowledge, and celebrate within PD activities.

One of the underlying elements treasured by the participants was choice. Personal choice was built into the studies in several ways. The voluntary nature of participation, the choice of books, and freedom to discuss and implement strategies all combined to provide the learners with freedoms participants claimed were not typically experienced in professional development activities. Research has shown that adult learners need to be able to make their own choices and direct their own learning (Hunzicker, 2011). These educators, in particular, wanted to know that their time would not be wasted, and that the

PD would help them solve problems and become more adept at their jobs, all of which are elements of effective professional development.

There is an old adage that serves as an obvious message for designers of PD: You can lead a horse to water but you can't make them drink. Administrators should allow their staff to have an individual voice in what PD is provided so that it is congruent with their learning needs.

Shared voice. Changing instruction and pedagogical beliefs is not an easy task when educators perceive that they are taking risks, not only with their public persona but with their students' learning (Le Fevre, 2014; Ponticell, 2003). A shared voice was allowed to be heard in the narratives and discussions within the meetings and interactive blogs. In the book studies, the facilitators consciously took a back seat rather than be the director of the meetings. The respectful atmosphere was allowed to develop because of the way the facilitators enabled the participants to freely communicate within the discussions. Even the requirements of the reflective summary and blog were made less stressful by the support given to the members by their peers. The participants described the facilitator's role as supportive and responsive to each individual's needs. For instance, when group needed support with learning how to use the blog, the facilitator taught them how to access it during a regularly scheduled meeting.

Within the discussions, the participants also described their appreciation of the use of story in the book study discussions. Through the sharing of their experiences, their stories brought the book's information to life and added a realistic and personal interpretation. This helped the book study members to comprehend the books' messages on a deeper level. When the participants returned and shared the implementation of the

strategies, they again used stories to describe their experiences as well. This helped other members to understand how the strategies might also work in their own classrooms.

Research on narrative learning helps to explain how this sense of story provides support for learning (Kooy, 2006a; Rossiter, 2002). Rossiter (2002) explained that story enables listeners to better envision how new learning can be put into action.

The need for shared voices has implications for any who are attempting to support adult learners in acquiring new knowledge. Adult learners need to be able to share their thinking in terms of their previous experiences, and they do this through narrative. Open discussions led by the participants themselves provided learners with the opportunity to give voice to ideas. When planning PD activities, teachers should be given the opportunity to have ample time to discuss their ideas in a relaxed setting where the sharing of stories is encouraged as a method of making meaning.

In the knowledge community that formed through the professional book stories, the participants found a shared voice. The trusting atmosphere helped the members to feel both supported and safe enough to risk being challenged to think differently by the ideas presented in the books and from their peers. The development of this trust and the long-term relationships the members spoke of as providing a network of support after the book studies ended, took time to develop. These strong bonds cannot be mandated or administered; they can only be given the chance to develop by allowing members to share their individual and shared voices.

Summary

In conclusion, the data analysis in the previous chapter shows us the important work that can be done in professional development. This is not easily planned or

implemented. The dissertation data show that for these educators, successful professional development should incorporate both individual and shared voice. First, individual voice must be allowed in autonomy in on what terms their learning takes place.

- 1) choice and the ability to share their own experiences (individual voice), and
- 2) a social environment in which to safely discuss new learning and embraces the use of story and active learning opportunities (shared voice)

Both of these elements are indicative of the components of a knowledge community. The professional book studies that were involved in this case study provide a glimpse into the participants' perception of how a knowledge community can develop.

In the end, the first research question, "What are the participants' perceptions of the book study experience as a professional development activity?" is answered in light of the research on the elements of effective PD. This PD activity provided the participants with a safe and constructive environment that allowed them to learn and discover through collaboration and experimentation within a mutual support network. They were able to find new mentors and friends, strategies and practices, and insights into themselves and others.

Recommendations from the Participants

I believe it is also important to add the voices of the participants to the recommendations section of this chapter. In the interviews, the case study members provided insight to anyone considering implementation of book studies in their systems or schools. The participants recommended that anyone considering using professional book studies in their system allow those who are participating to have voice (as a group) in most of the elements of the studies. This includes:

- the choice of topics,
- the ability to vote on the book they eventually read,
- the timing and location, including length of meetings and days of the week,
- voluntary participation and the ability to miss one meeting without penalty, and
- possible expansion of the blog so it is used throughout the study and continue to have blogs in lieu of a meeting.

First, it is very important that the studies be voluntary. As addressed previously, this aligns with the needs of adult learners. Ava was adamant that the book studies should not be mandatory, “No, no, no because then you have people that are there that are going to really pollute your idea. And they're going to be negative or their body language is going to scream.” Juanita said, “I would not make it mandatory because when people think they have to do something, then they're not as eager to do it.” In fact, she mentioned that she had been involved in a book study at her school which was not voluntary. “It was a mandatory one by the principal... and they did the discussion on an in-service day... there was a lot of whining and complaining at first.” This led her to identify another important consideration for potential book studies-timing.

Timing of the studies is another consideration. In the pilot study, I noticed that the timing of studies was important. When I observed the educators in that study, I noticed that their minds and conversations were often hijacked by the immediate concerns of IEP meetings, and state mandated testing. Juanita put it this way, “First of all, you need to give people sufficient amount of time to read a book, especially when it's in the spring of

the year...when there's everything to do. So that's why it's about timing.” Prieta added, “Some of my choices were also based on when those sessions were offered. Because of my personal children's schedules, I had to juggle my children's [and] family schedule with the professional after-school schedule.” This issue should be alleviated if the potential participants have a voice or are independently able to choose the days and times of the meetings.

In addition, educators should have a voice in the topics. At the very least, the ultimate choice of the book to be read should be left up to the group. The participants recommended that administrators consider how much time is involved outside of meetings to read the book before making decisions on their own. Hannah provided this advice, “So being aware of the current issues, the needs of your particular area, but still giving...participants [the] opportunity to choose.” She added, “Make a list of current readings that are relevant to those issues, and from that list, give the participants an opportunity to choose.” Stella felt that administrators should, “Ask for suggestions on topics. Ask if there are certainly authors that they like to read, if there are certain...things that they would like to know more about and would be open to discuss.” In short, administrators should include potential participants in the topics and choice of books.

The participants also had advice about how the length and types of books might add to or detract from the studies. Stella explained that it is important to think about the book, “How it's laid out- If it's dry, if it's [an] easy read, or something that's going to [be] more of a struggle to [read].” Anyone considering joining a book study group would like to be informed as to the length, difficulty, and time involved in the reading the book and this should be considered when choosing a book. These seemingly insignificant factors

might impact their decision to join the study; however, being transparent about them helps the participants to make informed choices. In addition, this level of clarity will increase the chances of participants returning to future studies.

As adults with outside responsibilities such as children, the mandatory attendance at all meetings, sometimes proved to be very difficult. Prieta voiced this concern earlier and Juanita mentioned, “That was another thing that was hard. Sometimes a person might have to miss a meeting. You know, you can't help if you get sick or have a sick child or whatever. And there was no excuse for it.” The case study members recommended that participants be allowed to miss a meeting if there was a major excuse, such as the sickness of a child. They also recommended that if continual participation in the blog was a requirement, this would help a person who had to miss a meeting to stay involved during that week. It was clear that the participants did not want to have excuses for missing but be able to have some flexibility for when emergencies of life interfered.

Finally, the case study members felt that the choice of facilitator and the way this person leads the meetings is an element that could significantly impact a book study's success or failure.

Ava believed that administrators should choose a person who is well-read and good with people,

Find the most experienced literacy person in the district, and go to that person.

Why reinvent the wheel? ...Not only will they have the most experience but they'll also have their own web system of who is good at what, to send you to. So you really have all that wealth of knowledge, without having to earn it yourself.

Suzie recommended that the facilitator try to keep the discussion on topic and moving without allowing the participants to get far off topic. She also explained that it was important to try to involve those who aren't talking while not allowing others to dominate the discussion. Personally, I felt my job as facilitator was a balancing act, particularly within the discussions. First, I needed to be a catalyst for the other participants, helping them to open up by thoughtful questioning without dominating the discussion. I found myself having to dig into my repertoire to ask thought-provoking questions and sometimes playing the Devil's Advocate. Next, I had to be helpful and receptive to their needs as learners and busy adults. Finally, I needed to be tolerant of different points of view without showing favoritism toward one person or the other for fear of stifling someone's feelings of being supported. While these ideas seem obvious, it is not as easy as it seems when you are actually in the role of facilitator.

Continuing Questions

As I read the data and wrote Chapter 4, I realized that although the participants held many different positions within the department, most of them were similar in at least three ways. First, many were close in age, had worked in education for long periods of time, and were all women. I wondered how these similarities impacted their perceptions. I also believe that future research can delve more deeply into these variables.

First, I realized that many of the participants were relatively close to the same age. Eight of the participants had six years difference in their ages and were in their late 50's at the time of the book studies. The other four, Meg, Melody, Stella, and Suzie were younger, in their late 30's, but still within five years of each other. Basically, there were two groups- the older eight members and the younger four participants. I wondered how

these age similarities influenced their perceptions. Is this the type of professional development experience that educators at these particular age brackets need? Does age have anything to do with it at all? Or was there some other similarity within the group that should be researched more closely?

Next, I began wondering about other similarities? How closely aligned were their years of experience and how might that influence their perceptions? The years of experience were a bit more widespread, ranging from four to 32 years. With the exception of Meg (4 years) and Melody (10 years), all of the case study participants had worked in education for at least 17 years at the time of the last book studies. Half of the participants had worked in education for 26 years or more. How might the participants' years of experience provide insight into their perceptions?

In addition, while there were a variety of job responsibilities, all of the participants were special educators. How did the peculiarities of their jobs add to their experience? Is this form of professional development, then, particularly meaningful for special educators in particular?

Finally, probably the most important similarity is that all of the participants of the book studies were women. In fact, no men signed up for any of the book studies or even showed any interest through the four years I was a facilitator and system-wide employee. While there are all-male and mixed gender book study groups in the research, women dominate them (Kooy, 2006a; O'Connor, 1996). What does this say about how women learn? Within the education field, women far outnumber men. How should this information inform professional development? If women learn this way, why don't we teach them this way?

What did the makeup of the group have to do with their perceptions about their successful experience? In addition, what does this mean for the importance of providing educators at this stage in their career with professional development that includes these elements? These are directions for possible future research. If the study was repeated would there be similar outcomes, even if the ages and years of experience were markedly different?

A Final Note-

I have worked in a wide variety of educational settings- from a wilderness program to residential treatment facility to public schools. Everywhere, I have worked with dedicated professionals who come to jobs every day striving to be better for one reason only: to help. I do not believe it is beyond the realm of our ability to provide them with the support they need. It is not too much to think that we must treat them as the adult learners they are, and to give them what they so desperately ask for: the time, autonomy, and assistance to find the answers to their questions. This is not something that will come through a government mandate or that could be executed as a 'program'. It is my fervent wish that the administrators who have the power to do so will provide the real professional development adult learners deserve.

In the end, the participants of this case study speak volumes about what can happen when they are trusted as professionals and allowed to take control of their own professional development. Educators need the chance to meet and discuss big ideas and little ones, in an informal atmosphere where trust, mutual respect, and long-term relationships are allowed to develop. In this environment, story should be encouraged and celebrated, and steps should be taken to ensure there are no hidden power structures that

become barriers to change, knowing that this is the way to enable risk-taking and transformation. As this case study shows educators who were allowed to experience these conditions made changes in instructional practice, academic thinking, and their beliefs about their students and themselves. This research suggests that these conditions can ultimately also lead to the emergence of a knowledge community. For this to occur, however, educators must have time, as much time as it takes, to allow these complex communities to develop. Allowing educators to speak volumes about their thinking can lead to change. It is time to listen to their voices.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Topic Domain # 1

Use of book study as a professional development practice

Leadoff Question:

How would you describe the organization and expectations for participation in the professional book studies?

Covert categories

- Perceptions of the organization of book studies
- Perceptions of the guidelines/requirements for participation
- Perception of member roles
- Perception of meeting selection

Possible follow-up questions:

- What was the nature of your oral and written participation?
- How were meeting dates and times decided?
- How were books selected?
- What was your role in the book study group?
- How did you meet the requirements of participation?
- How did professional book studies compare to other methods of PD you have experienced?

Topic Domain # 2

The effect of group discussion experience on comprehension of the text

Leadoff Question: Discussions

How did the group discussion affect your understanding of what you read?

Covert categories

Book study group participation- benefits/issues

How the discussion affects your opinion of the authors' message

Flow and direction of the group discussion/ topic selection

Discussion etiquette, including impact of interruptions, discussion dominance

Role of the facilitator

Possible follow-up questions:

- What examples can you give to explain how the group discussion changed your understanding of the text?
- How did other members' impact your experience?

Topic Domain # 3

Perceptions of successful book studies

Leadoff Question:

What are some of the essential components you would say were necessary for a successful professional book study experience?

Covert categories

Impediments to success of professional book studies

Components of successful book studies

Possible follow-up questions :

- What did (or might possibly) interfere with your experience?
- How did the book selection meet or impede your experience?
- How did being able to discuss what you have read impact your comprehension?
- What would you recommend to improve the professional book study experience?

- What elements, either from within the group or outside of the group, affected your participation?

Topic Domain # 4

Transformative learning as a possible outcome of participation

Lead-off question:

How did participation influence your understanding of your teaching practice?

Covert categories

Transformative learning process

Long-term impact on teacher beliefs/learning/attitudes

Possible follow-up questions

- How did participation change your perceptions about your students and/or your teaching?
- What changes did you make as a result of your participation?

Table 4. Continued.

| Book Study | Date | Artifact Type | PARTICIPANT IDENTIFICATION | | | | | | | | | | | TOTAL | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|------------------|----------------------------|-----|-----|--------|--------|---------|--------|------|-------|--------|--------|-------|---------|
| | | | Nafasha | Ava | Meg | Melody | Hannah | Juanita | Prieta | Lily | Suzie | Ginger | Stella | | Crystal |
| <i>Classrooms That Work</i> | Fall, 2010 | Reflective Essay | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | 11 |
| | | Blog Entries | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | 10 |
| <i>Rules in School</i> | Spring, 2011 | Reflective Essay | X | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | 11 |
| | | Blog Entries | X | | X | | X | X | X | X | | | X | | 7 |
| Totals | | | 7 | 5 | 9 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 96 |

Appendix D: Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Professional Book Studies: A Method of Professional Development for Adult Learners

INTRODUCTION

You have been invited to participate in an interview which is for the purpose of research on professional book studies. You have been chosen because of your continuing participation in professional book studies occurring from 2008 to 2011.

The purpose of this research is to allow the researcher to learn more about the perceptions of educators who repeatedly chose to participate in professional book studies/book clubs as a form of professional development.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANT'S ROLE IN RESEARCH

Interviews

As a participant, you will take part in an interview and allow the researcher to analyze your comments from that interview. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and will be audiotaped. This interview will take place in a location and at a time that is at your discretion.

Artifacts

In addition, the researcher will also use your written reflective summaries and blog entries while participating in the professional book studies during the time period indicated above.

Analysis

The researcher will analyze all data to identify patterns that provide information on what occurs in professional book studies, why participants chose to attend over a period of several years, and how this involvement affects teacher learning. You will also be given the chance to review the transcripts and data analysis and be allowed to make changes in your statements before the research is completed.

RISKS

The risks involved with the participants in this study are minimal. Inadvertent release of the surveys, observation forms, or notes may be a risk; however, confidentiality is ensured by giving participants codes and pseudonyms.

_____ Participant's initials

All original interview recordings, notes, transcripts and artifacts (blog entries and reflective essays) will be stored in a locked location in the principal investigators' home

or office. The principal investigator will be the only one with a key. Therefore, confidentiality is ensured and risks are minimal.

BENEFITS

Participants in the study will contribute to the body of knowledge regarding professional book studies as a method of professional development. The desired outcome is to provide practical information to the larger educational community to inform decision making about effective professional development.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All data will be kept confidential will be kept anonymous in any publication except when given your written permission.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Betty Blanton at (865) 765-0927. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you

withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. **I have received a copy of this form.** I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

VITA

Elizabeth (Betty) Smith Blanton was born in Miami, Florida in 1953 to Elmer N. and Patricia M. Smith. She is the oldest of four daughters and three brothers. She attended Hollywood Hills High School in Hollywood, FL then went onto Stetson University where she earned a Bachelor's of Arts degree in Art Education in 1975. After moving to Tennessee, she earned a Master's degree from Tennessee Technological University in Elementary Education in 1997. She had taught in a variety of alternative settings including a wilderness program, state school for the deaf, and a residential treatment facility for emotionally and behaviorally disturbed children and youth. After teaching in special education for 18 years, Betty is a Secondary Instructional Coach in Knox County Schools. She has taught classes at University of Tennessee in Reading Education.