

THE EFFECTS OF USING VARIOUS GROUPING TECHNIQUES
FOR READING INSTRUCTION WITH A CLASS OF DIVERSE STUDENTS

by

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CERTIFICATION OF PROJECT WORK

We, the undersigned, certify that this project entitled THE EFFECTS OF USING VARIOUS GROUPING TECHNIQUES FOR READING INSTRUCTION WITH A CLASS OF DIVERSE STUDENTS by Jennifer L. Cronin, Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science in Education, LITERACY EDUCATION: BIRTH-6, is acceptable in form and content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by this project.


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Abstract

This Master's Thesis Project focused on using various grouping techniques for reading instruction with a class of diverse students. The topic led to a professional development experience which aimed to provide elementary teachers with best practices for grouping students during reading. It was concluded after research that students benefited most from flexible, dynamic grouping formats. The professional development consisted of a two-hour workshop that provided teachers with knowledge of the Daily 5 and Literacy Café programs for grouping students during reading workshop. There was also an ongoing experience that involved constant observations and teacher reflection, along with collaborative mentor group meetings that continue throughout the entire school year.

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Chapter 1

Background

I am a new teacher with a very diverse classroom. My classroom includes students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and gifted students. If I place my students in mixed-ability groups for reading instruction, they may benefit from learning together. However, this may create a stigma for the lower-level readers. If the students are placed in homogeneous groups, they will receive instruction at their reading levels, but is it fair to hold them back from experiencing texts with other levels of readers? The question is how should I place my students in groups for reading?

The purpose of this thesis project, which culminates in a professional development project (see Chapter 4), was to examine the effects of using ability grouping and dynamic grouping techniques for reading instruction with a class of diverse students. The historical significance of this topic is that using ability grouping for literacy instruction has been debated for years. There are many questions as to whether ability grouping leads to a wider achievement gap between higher and lower-level readers. The topic's practical significance lies in Response to Intervention (RTI) which intends to give specialized instruction to struggling students. Performance data is used to place students into ability groups. The success of this instruction determines whether or not students move into the next tier of intervention. Research aims to discover the impacts of these groupings on the diverse students.

I chose this topic because I am certified in special education and I will be receiving a Master's of Science in Education, with later certification as a Reading Specialist. As a teacher, it is my responsibility to instruct my students based upon their individual needs. I want to be aware of the impacts of same and mixed-ability groups and whether or not they are helping or

restricting my students' learning. Also, I would like to be more aware of the best practices for grouping students for reading instruction. Therefore, in order to address these issues, this project contains a professional development experience, which is located in Chapter 4.

The four important terms that are used throughout the project are as follows:

- *Response to Intervention (RTI)*- a “multi-level instructional system for preventing failure that includes screening, progress monitoring, and data-based decision-making for instruction, movement within the system, and disability identification” (National Center for Response to Intervention, 2010)
- *Heterogeneous (mixed-ability) grouping*- placing students of various reading levels together in groups for reading instruction
- *Homogeneous grouping*- placing students of the same reading level in groups for reading instruction
- *Dynamic/Flexible grouping*- changing the groups students are placed in for reading instruction on a regular basis, based on ongoing performance data. These groups may be heterogeneous or homogeneous

Socio-Cultural Theory: A Theoretical Framework

Placing students into groups for reading instruction involves the theoretical stances of Vygotsky and Brofenbrenner. The view of the Socio-Cultural Theory, which has its roots in the work of Brofenbrenner, is that “knowledge is constructed based on social interactions and experience” (as cited in Tracey & Morrow, 2006, p. 105). Social and cultural influences affect the ways students learn and their literacy development. Reading itself is considered a social activity. The school and classroom culture shape students' knowledge, so grouping practices should be well thought out in order to give students the most beneficial experiences possible. The

theory of Social Constructivism, from Vygotsky, deals with social interactions in the classroom. In mentioning this theory, Tracey and Morrow (2006) explain “children’s knowledge, ideas, attitudes, and values develop through interaction with others” (p. 108). This relates to the topic of grouping students for reading instruction because in this theory, learning results from direct interaction with others. Cooperative learning occurs when students are placed in heterogeneous groups to complete instructional activities. According to Marr (1997), “developmental theories of cognitive psychology suggest that as students interact to discuss concepts, problem-solve, and teach one another, they increase their understanding of critical concepts. Their collaboration promotes growth and understanding” (p. 16). Tracey and Morrow (2006) state “children learn the most about language and corresponding sign systems from the people around them with whom they interact” (p. 109). These theories exemplify the reasons why it is so important to choose students’ groups carefully in order for them to learn from one another and maximize their learning experiences.

The current importance of Response to Intervention, reading performance, and meeting state and national standards reflects a need for teachers to differentiate instruction so that all students can succeed. There is an increasing demand for research on grouping techniques for reading instruction in order to meet the needs of diverse students, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities. This is a result of the Reading First Initiative, part of the No Child Left Behind Act, which according to the United States Department of Education (2009), “focuses on putting proven methods of early reading instruction in classrooms. Through Reading First, states and districts receive support to apply scientifically based reading research—and the proven instructional and assessment tools consistent with this research—to ensure that all children learn to read well by the end of third grade” (Reading First section, ¶1). Educators are

interested in the impact of heterogeneous and homogenous groupings on diverse students. Specifically, they are interested in whether the groupings foster or inhibit students' learning and if the groups create a wider achievement gap between higher and lower level readers. Educators may also benefit from researching the opinions and experiences of the readers within the ability groups.

Extensive research was done on the topic of using various grouping techniques for reading instruction. In order to assist educators in making the most effective decisions for instructing using grouping practices, a professional development experience will be described and later conducted. Research-based best practices will be discussed and implemented in classrooms so teachers can differentiate instruction. The questions that guided the literature review and professional development are as follows:

1. What are the contributing factors that determine whether or not and how ability groups are used for reading instruction?
2. What are the effects of using various grouping techniques for reading instruction?
3. According to research, what are the best practices for grouping students for reading instruction?

It is hypothesized that dynamic grouping techniques, which include both heterogeneous and homogeneous ability groups, be used for reading instruction. These techniques will meet the needs of all learners in the classroom.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The research on the multiple impacts of ability grouping for reading instruction includes many aspects of the classroom environment. One aspect that is affected by grouping strategies for reading instruction is student experience and motivation. Students' self-concepts as readers play an important role in reading success. Another area of research related to ability grouping is teacher perceptions and grouping practices. Teachers' decisions about how to group students for instruction will ultimately affect students' learning and levels of success. A third important area is students' performance and assessment results that follow instruction in ability reading groups. The research includes studies across elementary grade levels and populations, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, struggling readers, and gifted readers. The research can be applied in elementary classrooms in which teachers have a diverse group of students. Educators and researchers are constantly trying to find ways to group students for reading instruction so that all students can make progress and be motivated to read. Professional development and adult learning research has also been included to support the final outcome of the project. The literature review is divided into the essential questions discussed in the previous chapter.

Factors that Determine the Use of Ability Grouping for Reading Instruction

Many factors influence whether or not ability groups are used in the classroom. These may include teacher and student perceptions, school and district policy, and the demographics of the students. Student perceptions of being placed into groups for reading influence teachers' decisions because these perceptions determine whether students will be motivated to participate

and guide their classroom behaviors. Teachers may take student preferences into consideration when planning for reading instruction.

Student perceptions. Elbaum, Schumm, and Vaughn (1997) examined many research studies on ability grouping before determining the purpose of their study. They examined students' perceptions in relation to ability grouping for reading instruction. Elbaum et al. (1997) believe that student perceptions can "provide researchers with useful information about the approaches to learning that are most effective for them" (p. 477). The researchers administered a questionnaire to 549 students in the third, fourth, and fifth grades in three large, urban schools. The students were mostly minorities and 23 students were identified as learning disabled. The questionnaire administered contained open-ended and closed-ended questions. The results of this mixed-method study indicate that students preferred mixed-ability grouping the most so they can learn from their peers. They disliked independent work and same-ability grouping for reading instruction. The majority of students believed that same-ability grouping only benefits nonreaders. Although most students preferred mixed-ability grouping, they reported that their teachers used whole class instruction and independent work the most in their classrooms.

Elbaum, Moody, and Schumm (1999) interviewed 55 third grade students in order to determine students' perceptions of grouping formations for reading instruction. The researchers wanted to focus this qualitative study on a small sample size and gain the perspective of students with learning disabilities. Twenty-seven of the students in this study were identified as learning disabled and were all a part of general education classrooms. Five open-ended questions were asked in the interviews in order to determine which grouping format the students liked the most. The results revealed the learning disabled students' concerns about working in reading groups. The students found the noise to be distracting and they thought it was more difficult to gain one-

on-one assistance from the teacher. The students also explained that their levels of anxiety increase when they have to work with advanced classmates. Higher-level students felt hindered by the lower-level readers. Many of the students preferred whole class instruction because they felt that no one reader would be singled out.

Teacher perceptions. Teacher perceptions of grouping for reading instruction influence their practices. Teachers may have been taught to use one method over another or may have preferences for one type of grouping method or style of instruction. These perceptions may also influence the groups the students are placed into. This, in turn, influences their students' success and overall reading performance.

Some research focuses on how often ability grouping is used in the classroom, reflecting current practices and teacher perceptions. Chorzempa and Graham (2006) used random sampling to identify 494 teachers of grades one through three. Only 222 of the teachers agreed to participate in the study. They were almost all female. The researchers created a survey that asked teachers for demographic information of themselves and their students, how they organize and conduct reading group instruction, and how much time they spend instructing the different ability groups. Efficacy for teaching reading was also measured using the Teacher Efficacy Scale. The results indicated mixed responses among teachers. Most teachers indicated using whole group instruction for almost the entire school day. Sixty-eight percent of teachers reported using mixed-ability grouping during the school day. Half of the teachers reported using flexible groupings for one half hour per day. The teachers also had mixed responses in the open-ended questions. Many teachers reported that their schools did not allow them to group students based upon ability, so they instructed the class as a whole. Chorzempa and Graham (2006) explain that their study produced such different results than those of the past because their sample focused on primary

grades only. According to Chorzempa and Graham (2006), “teachers are currently encouraged to use flexible grouping practices to differentiate instruction” (p. 539), so self-reporting may have been a limitation to their study. This study exemplifies the idea that teachers may either base their grouping practices for reading instruction on their preferences or on their district-mandated standards.

Tach and Farkas (2006) aimed to examine what determines reading ability group placement in kindergarten and first grade. The authors believe that instruction and socialization are intertwined. They also explain that teachers of these grades “socialize their students, helping form their behavior and values. And they teach academic knowledge and skills, preparing their students for further instruction in higher grades” (p. 1049). The researchers used the data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study for their study. Predictors of placement were age, gender, ethnicity, social class background, test score performance, and teacher-judged learning-related behaviors. The authors analyzed teachers’ responses to the questions about ability groupings in their classrooms. After results were narrowed, there were 11,769 kindergarten students and 10,747 first grade students in the sample. Reading ability grouping, placement, and achievement were the focus of the study. Achievement will be discussed further in a later section. It was found that 42 percent of kindergarten classrooms and 72 percent of first grade classrooms used ability grouping for reading instruction. The researchers concluded that African American and Hispanic students were placed into lower reading groups than White students. The authors say this could be because the students had less pre-reading activities at home before beginning school. Males received, on average, lower placements than females. Reading ability did play a role in ability placement. According to Tach and Farkas (2006), “with the reading

achievement variables controlled, the ethnicity effects decline substantially” (p. 1060). Teachers’ perceptions of student behavior exerted a strong, significant effect on the results.

Research conducted by Koch, Steelman, Mulkey, and Catsambis (2008) aimed to discover whether or not teachers’ perceptions of students’ genders and behaviors affected the reading ability groups the students were placed into. The authors chose to study kindergartners because, they explain, “64% of kindergartners are grouped within classes for reading. Placement into achievement based groups continues to expand as children advance through grade levels. Early placement may profoundly affect young children’s educational experiences thereafter” (p. 410). The authors used gender and behavior as a basis for their study because girls are stereotyped to excel over boys in reading and boys are “naughtier” than girls. Does this indicate that boys have lower ability and are placed into low ability reading groups? The authors wanted to study whether teachers felt this way when choosing groups. The study completed by Tach and Farkas (2006) provided much of the background and rationale for this study. Participants were given a series of vignettes with students of male, female, and unspecified genders exhibiting either good, average, or bad behaviors. The readers were labeled as good, average, and poor. The participants were asked to place the students into ability reading groups. Results of the study showed that gender did not make a difference in reading group placement, but behavior had a strong impact in ability placement. Students with poor behavior were placed into lower reading groups, despite ability. Students with average ability and good behavior were often placed into high reading groups. These findings are a concern because lower-level students who need instructional support may be placed in groups with students who misbehave, causing distractions and missed opportunities for learning. In contrast, high ability students who misbehave are placed into lower reading groups. They are missing out on important skill instruction.

Wolsey, Lapp, and Dow (2010) conducted a study examining teacher perceptions in relation to grouping practices for literacy tasks. Researchers were interested in finding out the types of tasks students were assigned to complete. Sixty two teachers who taught grades one through six were surveyed to determine how they “report their use of oral reading, reading in groups, reading as homework, and reading silently” (p. 108). Survey questions addressed student demographics and teacher preferences for reading instruction. Teachers’ self-reporting could have been a limitation to the study because their responses may have been biased towards results that seemed favorable to the researchers. The results of the study indicated that primary grade teachers preferred to place students in mixed-ability groups for reading so that higher-level readers can help with challenging texts. Upper elementary teachers usually assigned their students to read with a partner. Whole class, round-robin styles of reading were not favored by any grade level. Wosley, Lapp, and Dow (2010) expressed why this method does not benefit students:

Round-robin reading approaches may have class management benefits manifested as what appears to be on-task behavior, yet the outcome of such reading is that as one student reads while the teacher evaluates that reading, little specific instruction in reading skills is provided. Whole-class oral reading may also place an undue focus on the task of reading aloud (e.g., pronunciation) rather than on reading for comprehension. (p. 113)

This study exemplifies the idea that teacher perceptions influence whether ability groupings are used in the classrooms. Teachers in the study clearly preferred cooperative learning activities to independent work and whole class instruction.

School policy and demographics. School mandated programs may determine whether or not ability groups are used for reading instruction. The demographics of the schools and

students in the schools are also factors in using and placing students into groups. Demographics may include student population and students with disabilities.

Vaughn, Moody, and Schumm (1998) examined the practices of teachers of students with disabilities. This study is important because it explores the demographics of classrooms with diverse learners. The makeup of the classroom determines how ability groups are used and the types of reading tasks students are assigned to. The researchers wanted to know what grouping structures were used in the special education resource room settings, how instruction is differentiated to meet students' needs, and what strategies were used during the resource room instruction. Fourteen special education resource room teachers and eighty-two students participated in the study. During the study, teacher interviews were conducted to "elicit information about teachers' backgrounds and perceptions about grouping during reading instruction, factors that contributed to their decision to use particular reading practices, and their perceptions about effective materials and practices for students with reading problems" (Vaughn et al., 1998, p. 213). Observations were also conducted using the Classroom Climate Scale, which measures teacher and student interactions.

The results of the study indicated that whole group and independent activities were used more often than any other grouping strategy. Teachers frequently used positive feedback and communicated their expectations. In interviews, teachers communicated they used whole group instruction with undifferentiated materials because "it was right to have students on the same level with the same materials and that it keeps students from being stigmatized" (Vaughn et al., 1998, p. 218). The teachers all used a whole language approach because it was school-mandated. According to Vaughn et al. (1998), "of the 41 observations, there is only one record of a comprehension strategy being taught" (p. 220). This study is important because it explains how

the demographics of students affect grouping strategies for reading. The teachers in this study placed students who need the most individualized instruction into whole groups with no differentiated materials. This is the same instruction the students with disabilities would receive in the general education classroom. Vaughn et al. describes the practices of these teachers as “broken promises which deny the intention of IDEA” (p. 222).

Nomi (2010) examined how school characteristics shape first grade reading ability grouping practices. She believes “teachers tend to divide students into smaller instructional groups when classrooms are large and heterogeneous with many low-skill students” (p. 59). It is also said that teachers spend less time with groups as the number of students in the class increases. School contexts affect the use of ability grouping. Nomi (2010) explains “in small schools or schools with homogeneous ability compositions with many high achieving students, teachers or principals may find it unnecessary to use ability grouping” (p. 61). The author used data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS). Three types of schools were defined in the ECLS, which were “ability grouped schools,” “ungrouped schools,” and “mixed schools.” According to Nomi (2010), “the number of schools identified as grouped, ungrouped, and mixed is 451, 142, and 307, respectively” (p. 64). School demographic variables include mean socioeconomic status (SES), the percentage of students from non-English speaking homes, the percentage of Black and Hispanic students, and whether the school is public or private. It was found that ungrouped schools had the most advantageous characteristics, highest literacy skills, highest SES, and lowest percentage of minority students. Schools using ability grouping had more disadvantageous characteristics. Ability grouping was a response to student diversity. This study exemplifies the idea that school demographics influence the use of ability grouping, which

in turn, influences the instruction and achievement of the students. The effects of grouping on these students will be discussed further in the next section of the literature review.

It is clear that student and teacher perceptions, school demographics, and the ability levels of students all influence when and how grouping practices are used for reading instruction. Students have preferences as to how they learn and interact with others, which is a major influence on their performance levels. Also, if teachers have lowered expectations for low-level students, these students may not receive adequate instruction and a stigma may be created for those students. After reviewing the research, the importance of providing equal instruction for all learners is evident. These studies are excellent examples of the influences that students and teachers have on how students are instructed for reading.

Effects of Using Various Grouping Techniques for Reading Instruction

Placing students into groups for reading instruction has effects on students' perceptions of themselves and others. It is thought that grouping creates a stigma for lower-level students and that they do not get the same effective instruction as higher-level students. Grouping techniques may also have an effect on students' achievement and performance levels and on their social status. The following studies examine the techniques used in classrooms and the effects they have on their students. The studies are placed in order by the years in which they were published to show how the research has changed over time.

Eder (1981) studied the differences in learning situations of ability grouping in a first grade classroom. Behavioral differences were analyzed among groups to determine the impact of this factor on student learning. Observations were conducted in one first grade classroom during an entire school year. All reading instruction involved students being placed into ability-based groups. According to Eder (1981), "video-taped lessons, one from each of the four reading

groups, were viewed repeatedly to determine the differences in behavior of the teachers and students across groups as well as their impact upon group interaction” (p. 153). The author believes that attentiveness is affected by and affects ability group placement. Lower reading groups will have more inattentive students and more management issues during reading instruction. The results of the study indicated that lower ability students spent half the reading time not attending to the lesson and more time engaging in inattentive behaviors. The teacher spent much of the lesson managing the students’ behaviors. Students in low ability groups also disrupted one another’s reading turns over twice the amount of times as in the high ability groups. These results indicate lower-ability students were not receiving adequate instruction because they were engaging in inattentive behaviors. Eder (1981) concludes that “the common practice of same-ability grouping should be questioned because it compounds initial learning problems by placing students who have the learning problems in the same groups” (p. 160).

Rowan (1983) investigated the effects of ability grouping on fourth grade students’ achievement levels. Within-class grouping and across-classroom grouping were used in the schools. Rowan (1983) sought to learn “whether both types of ability groups have direct effects on achievement and whether both systems differentiate peer contexts and teacher treatments in a way that reinforces these direct effects” (p. 134). There were 148 students studied. Teacher and student behavior and peer relations were examined. Results showed that students in higher ability groups within classrooms had positive habits but worse conduct than lower ability students because they had more time to create mischief. This finding led the author to conclude that ability groups have “socializing consequences for student behavior” (Rowan, 1983, p. 140). Students in lower ability classrooms were paced more slowly than students in higher ability

classrooms, and, since pacing affects achievement, this form of grouping apparently leads to instruction that reinforces students' initial achievement differences.

Abadzi (1985) examined test scores of 284 high-ability and 383 regular-ability students in eight schools in Texas. The tests examined were the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the effects of ability grouping on achievement and self-esteem in students in grades two through six. Test scores were examined over the span of five years. Abadzi (1985) determined that the achievement gap between ability groups widened for two years, but diminished when the high-ability students' scores decreased. Only lower-level students showed gains as a result of ability grouping. The researcher concluded that the high-level students' scores may have diminished as a result of a decreased achievement motivation "brought on by a sense of invincibility" (p. 39). The researcher calls for flexible grouping alternatives to be used in schools in order to meet the needs of readers at all levels.

Slavin (1987) reviewed research to determine the achievement effects of grouping strategies on elementary students. First, the author examined studies in which students were ability grouped by classes and found that the achievement effects were zero. In this arrangement, students were grouped as high and low ability as an entire class. This format was also not favored because it created a stigma for low-ability students. Another type of grouping format that was researched involved students staying in heterogeneous classes for the day, but regrouping for reading, according to level. Slavin (1987) says this type of grouping "reduces the labeling effects of all day grouping and performance level can be accommodated easily" (p. 113). The review of research also explains that positive effects can be seen in students' achievement if "instructional level and pace are completely adapted to student performance level and students remain in

heterogeneous groupings for other subjects” (Slavin, 1987, p. 113). It was also determined that students with disabilities achieved higher results after they were mainstreamed into regular classrooms rather than being pulled out for reading instruction.

A study completed by Pallas, Entwisle, Alexander, and Stluka (1994) aimed to explain whether the effects of ability grouping on first graders are instructional, institutional, or social. Instructional effects would be the quantity, quality, and pace of instruction. Institutional effects are perceptions of others, regardless of ability level. Social effects are self-concepts and expectations for one’s own performance. The authors analyzed whether or not ability placements influenced these factors. The data used was from the Beginning School Study and included 756 first graders. The authors found that social background was not a strong determinant of reading group placement. According to Pallas et al. (1994), “a higher first-grade reading-group placement is associated with higher reading marks and higher reading-comprehension scores” (p. 39). In regards to students’ self-concepts and expectations for their own performance, the authors concluded, “the results do not support the hypothesis that young children are influenced by the social aspects of their reading-group placement in first grade” (Pallas et al., 1994, p. 40). Self-esteem, performance expectations, and motivation were not influenced by reading group placements. It was also found that group placement has institutional effects. Pallas et al. (1994) determined “both parents and teachers rate children in high reading groups as more competent and likely to do better in the future than those in lower groups” (p. 41). Therefore, the results indicate that the placement of students into homogeneous reading groups only may lead to an achievement gap and unequal learning opportunities.

Moody, Vaughn, Hughes, and Fischer (2000) conducted a follow-up study to the previously mentioned study by Vaughn et al. The authors were concerned that teachers were not

providing individualized instruction to students with learning disabilities nor were they using differentiated materials at their reading levels. Moody et al. (2000) say “small group instruction and homogenous grouping are most effective when instructional materials are varied to meet the needs of students in different groups” (p. 306). This study is a two year follow-up to the previous study and examines the same teachers. The study investigates instructional practices for students with disabilities, the reading outcomes, grouping practices, and teachers’ perspectives on special education. Teacher interviews and observations were used to collect data.

Results showed that the teachers still primarily used whole group instruction for the students, but more homogeneous groups were used than during the original study. Three of the six teachers who participated in the study used differentiated materials. This is more than the previous study. The teachers reported that they taught more phonics instruction than during the previous study, but none of the observations proved this to be true. Teachers also said they used a whole language approach to teach reading, but according to Moody et al., “very few advocates of whole language would consider the instruction we observed whole language” (p. 311). It was found during observations that students spent a lot of time copying words and sentences from the board. As in the previous study, there was little or no comprehension instruction observed. This study shows more differentiated instruction for students with disabilities, but these students are still being placed into whole class groups, which limit their reading potential. They are not getting the individualized instruction they need, which hinders their achievement.

Other research combines student perceptions with teacher perceptions and grouping practices in order to determine the impacts of ability grouping in reading instruction. Schumm, Moody, and Vaughn (2000) conducted two studies on the topic. They cited their research findings from the previously mentioned articles. For this study, they chose to combine aspects of

instruction with perceptions in order to determine the impacts of ability grouping. For their first study, the researchers conducted interviews and observed in the classrooms of 29 third grade teachers in an urban area. Data were collected over the course of one school year. Observations were conducted using the Classroom Climate Scale (CCS), which focused on teacher-student interactions and grouping practices. The first study showed that whole class instruction was the dominant grouping practice in the classrooms. These results did not coincide with the teachers' original self-reported practices. According to Schumm et al. (2000), out of 29 teachers, "only three had permanent, same-ability groups in which differentiated reading materials were used" (p. 481). In the self-reported data, half of the teacher participants said they use mixed-ability grouping. Observations determined that only four teachers did. The results of this study coincide with the results of their previous work in concluding that the participant teachers use mostly whole class instruction (Elbaum, Schumm, & Vaughn, 1997). The teachers reported many reasons behind their practices, including pressure from the district, beliefs that ability groups create a stigma, and that it is easier to instruct the whole class at once.

Schumm, Moody, and Vaughn (2000) also conducted a second study. The purpose of which was to determine the impacts of the teachers' grouping practices for reading instruction on students' "academic progress, social progress, and attitudes about reading" (p. 477). The participants of this study were 147 students from the classrooms in the first study. The students were classified as high-level, average, low-level, or learning disabled. The researchers analyzed students' scores on the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement, the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, and the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey. These tests were administered at the beginning of the school year and at the end. The results of the study indicate that the students' reading achievement increased at all levels, but the scores of the low-level and learning

disabled students had minimal increases. The results of the Self-Concept Scale and the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey were not significant. According to Schumm et al. (2000), as a response to mixed-ability grouping, “academic, social, and attitudes-toward-reading outcomes of students from a range of reading levels do not bode well for this practice” (p. 486). This research is useful to classroom teachers because it shows that practices can move away from “one size fits all” and become more flexible to meet the needs of all students, especially those with learning disabilities.

Vaughn, Thompson, Kouzekanani, Bryant, Dickson, and Blozis (2003) aimed to examine the effects of grouping second grade struggling readers in 1:1, 1:3, and 1:10 formats for reading instruction. The study was conducted because the authors wanted to determine whether or not smaller grouping formats were more beneficial for lower-ability readers because they would be receiving more individualized instruction. Vaughn et al. (2003) say “it is possible that small-group (e.g., 1:3) instruction, rather than 1:1 instruction, particularly for students who are ELL, may provide them with opportunities to learn the models of reading fluency, concepts presented in texts, and vocabulary that enhances understanding from their peers” (p. 302). Ninety students were studied. Students were placed into one of the three grouping formats and received the same 30-minute intervention five times a week. The intervention focused on the five essential elements of reading. Results of the study showed that the 1:1 and 1:3 groups outperformed the 1:10 group significantly on passage comprehension, phoneme segmentation, and fluency. There were no significant results for word attack. Also, more students in the 1:1 and 1:3 groups passed the reading screening at the end of the study, compared to two in the 1:10 group. In summary, the authors determined that “both 1:1 and 1:3 are highly effective intervention group sizes for supplemental reading” (Vaughn et al., 2003, p. 311). Also, all readers made gains despite what

groups they were put into, so grouping for reading instruction may benefit many struggling learners.

Saleh, Lazonder, and De Jong (2005) investigated how grouping formats for instruction affect students' achievement, social interaction, and motivation. Both homogeneous and heterogeneous ability groups were used. The authors conducted the study because they wanted to see how the formats affect students at all achievement levels. The participants were 104 fourth graders. Instruction covered 16 plant biology lessons. Students received whole class instruction at the beginning of each lesson and then worked in groups to complete the tasks assigned to them. Students received individual grades on assignments. A motivational beliefs questionnaire and pre and post-tests measured for the results. Social interaction was also scored using videotaped lessons. In terms of student achievement, the results showed:

Average-ability students from homogeneous groups outperformed their heterogeneously grouped counterparts. This superiority was reversed for low-ability students: they achieved higher scores when learning in mixed-ability groups. Comparisons indicated that heterogeneous groups performed significantly better than homogeneous groups of average and low-ability students. (Saleh et al., 2005, p. 113)

No differences were found for high-ability groups. The results of the social interaction aspect of the study showed that homogeneous groups worked more collaboratively. The only scores that were significant for the motivation aspect of the study were from low-ability students. The students in mixed-ability groups were more motivated than those in homogeneous groups. The researchers call for teachers to use both homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping formats. Mixed-ability groups benefits low-ability students but hold back average-ability students. High-ability students performed well either way.

McCoach, O'Connell, and Levitt (2006) assessed data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study- Kindergarten Cohort in order to determine the relationship between ability grouping and reading scores. The longitudinal study used a sample size of 10,191 kindergarten students across the United States. The study excluded English Language Learners and students with learning disabilities. The original study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics used item-response theory (IRT)-scaled assessments. These measured "(a) printed word recognition, (b) sound identification, (c) word reading, and (d) vocabulary and reading comprehension" (p. 341). McCoach et al. (2006) compared the students' scores from the fall to the spring. The authors found that there was a positive gain in scores for all students, but the scores were positively skewed. The findings were that the use of ability-grouping was positively associated with the mean school gains, but more research will be conducted on school-level variables that may have affected the scores. According to McCoach et al. (2006), "the kindergarten year sets the stage for beginning reading skills and comprehension" (p. 343).

Condon (2008) used data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) to determine the effects of low, middle, and high group placement on reading achievement as compared to non-grouped instruction. In this study, the term "grouping" means homogeneous groups. The author compares using same-ability groups to non-grouped or heterogeneous groups. The ECLS data that the author used sampled 13,625 students who were studied from kindergarten to third grade. Students were tested for letter recognition, beginning and ending sounds, sight words, and comprehension of words in context. The author coded for groups based on teacher responses to grouping practice questions. Students were either in low, middle, or high groups, or were ungrouped. Condon (2008) found that students being placed into a low-ability group had significant negative impacts on reading gains, as compared to non-grouped students.

There was no advantage or disadvantage for students who were placed into middle groups. Being placed into a high-ability group resulted in reading gains, as compared to non-grouped students. Condron (2008) concluded that “when teachers instruct students in homogenous groups on the basis of initially unequal reading skills, this promotes accelerated learning among high-grouped students but decelerated learning among low-grouped students compared to what would have occurred had the students not been grouped” (p. 386). The results of this study show that placing students only in homogeneous groups for instruction does not benefit all students, only some. This study also raises questions regarding the quality of instruction that students in low-ability groups are receiving.

Helf, Cooke, and Flowers (2008) conducted a follow-up study to Vaughn et al. (2003) in which they used an experimental design to compare 1:1 and 1:3 grouping formations. The reading achievement of 54 first grade students was measured after the grouping conditions were implemented. The authors aimed to determine the differences by grouping conditions in “reading gains, efficiency of delivering instruction, behavior of the students, and tutor preferences and perceptions of effectiveness” (Helf et al., 2008, p. 114). Tutors used The Early Reading Tutor as the intervention program and assessed students before and after the intervention using DIBELS. In terms of reading achievement, all students made gains despite their grouping conditions. There was no significant difference between the two. Six out of the nine tutors preferred instructing students in groups of three. The most significant result found was in efficiency. It was concluded that providing instruction to students in small groups was more efficient than providing 1:1 instruction. Helf et al. (2008) explained “the small group format provides a viable approach to increasing the efficiency of instructional delivery and providing supplemental instruction to more students” (p. 121). Since all students made gains in their reading scores, this

study allows teachers to reexamine their grouping practices. Instead of providing 1:1 instruction, it may save time and resources to group students for reading.

Research was conducted which focused on struggling readers because of the stigma ability groupings may create for these students. Poole (2008) conducted a qualitative study in a public school in an urban area of Southern California. The participants of the study were ten students in fifth grade, but the study focused specifically on two students. These two female students were both struggling readers. Small reading groups were mandated in the school. The classroom teacher was against mixed-ability reading groups because she believed that it was pulling her high-level students down. Teacher bias was a limitation of this study, as she sabotaged the results. The researcher, Poole, was a complete observer in the study. Data were collected through audio and video recordings of reading instruction sessions. The results of this study indicated that a stigma does exist in the particular classroom in which the research was done, but the sample size may not reflect the rest of the country. The struggling readers were given less reading time, more peer corrections, and negative comments from the teacher. Their needs were not being met in the groups because their miscues were left uncorrected. The author calls for more research on the impacts of ability grouping on struggling readers. As Poole (2008) states, “the hope is for increased awareness of how these consequences might also occur in other instructional arrangements” (p. 246).

Lleras and Rangel (2009) focused their research on the achievement of African American and Hispanic students in ability grouping for reading instruction. As in the article by McCoach, O’Connell, and Levitt (2006), Lleras and Rangel (2009) used information from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study for their research. The authors chose to focus on African American and Hispanic students because previous researchers attempted to compare all students

simply based on reading level and did not take other factors into consideration. They wanted to know if ability grouping really benefits all students. The researchers used results from the item-based scoring (IBS) assessments from first and third grades, students' ability grouping placement, and class ability in order to determine ability grouping's effects. A sample size of 22,000 children was used in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. The results of the study showed that after being grouped, higher-ability students gained in their scores while lower-ability students' scores decreased. A higher socioeconomic status also indicated higher reading scores. These scores were common among African American and Hispanic students. The results of this study are much different than the study by McCoach et al. (2006) because their research showed a gain for all students. Ability grouping does not benefit all students in kindergarten, according to Lleras and Rangel (2009). A limitation of this study is that it did not examine teacher practices in ability grouping. It simply discussed test scores. This is important for teachers of early grades because it allows one to examine his or her own practices in the classroom. Are all of the students' needs being met? According to Lleras and Rangel (2009), "lower-grouped students lose more than higher-grouped students gain" (p. 298).

As discussed in the previous section, Nomi (2010) researched how school characteristics shape first grade reading ability grouping practices. The researcher also examined how this, in turn, affects students' reading achievement. Data were obtained using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS). The researcher wanted to know if reading achievement differed between students who were grouped by ability and those who were not, if the effects of ability grouping varied by students' initial abilities, and if the effects of ability grouping varied by schools. As previously mentioned, it was found that ungrouped schools had the most advantageous characteristics, highest literacy skills, highest SES, and lowest percentage of

minority students. Schools using ability grouping had more disadvantageous characteristics. In these schools, ability grouping was a response to student diversity. The results of the study show that reading achievement did not differ between students in ability grouped schools and those in ungrouped schools. The effects do vary by schools within the categories, however. Ability grouping increased achievement for students in schools that were less likely to practice ability grouping, which were the schools with high SES and no minority students. In contrast, ability grouping lead to decreased achievement in schools with disadvantageous characteristics. The effects were stronger among low-skilled students. Ability grouping, in this case, was consequential for low ability students. This could be for a number of reasons including reduced teacher expectations, inadequate instruction, or a stigma produced from placing the students into ability groups.

The studies mentioned above reveal the various effects of grouping formats on student learning, achievement, and motivation. Results have shown to be different for students in low and high-ability groups in many cases. Many of the authors call for flexible grouping strategies to be used in the classroom in order to meet the needs of all learners. Best practices for grouping students for reading instruction will be discussed in the next section.

Best Practices for Grouping Students for Reading Instruction

It is important for teachers and administrators to know what the research-based best practices are for grouping students for reading instruction. The review of the literature aims to discover which practices have been most effective in classrooms and which have had the most influential, positive results on their students. As previously stated, it is a priority for educators to provide equal, differentiated instruction to all learners. Grouping techniques should be beneficial to readers of all ability levels. The goal of this review is to bridge the achievement gap that has

been created in many schools and to provide support for teachers who wish to instruct using best practices. The literature, again, is discussed in the order in which it was published.

Jongsma (1991) discusses ways to group children for instruction. The author believes that grouping is “common and beneficial when used appropriately” (p. 610). She gives suggestions that teachers can use in the classroom. The first suggestion calls for the teacher to group students for part of the day in homogeneous reading groups. This will raise students’ attentiveness and give them individualized, teacher-led instruction. This also prepares them for future instruction. Collaborative and cooperative learning activities in mixed-ability groups are encouraged for other reading and content area instruction. The author describes five factors that teachers should be concerned with when planning grouped instruction. The first concern is to place students into groups based on needs and characteristics such as maturity. The second factor is that the quality of instruction should match the students’ abilities and allow them to practice their skills. Third, Jongsma (1991) says “teachers should be knowledgeable about the variety of grouping practices and be able to use each type of grouping in their classes when they believe that a particular grouping arrangement would be helpful to students’ learning” (p. 611). The fourth factor is that teachers should teach students how to interact in their groups to ensure work gets completed. Finally, Jongsma recommends teachers “should not be reluctant to reassign students to groups” (p. 611). In summary, this article clearly calls for flexible grouping strategies to be used in elementary reading instruction for multiple purposes.

Keegan and Shrake (1991) discuss the literature study groups, a form of heterogeneous grouping, which they use in their classrooms. This is an alternative to same-ability grouping that has proven to be successful for them. In the literature study groups, the students choose the novels that they read together. They meet three times a week to discuss what they have read and

their feelings about the text. Open-ended questions are asked by the students and a round-table discussion is performed. Students then respond independently in a log, which takes the form of a letter to the teacher. At the beginning of the school year, before implementing the literature study groups, the teachers model cooperative learning and think alouds so the students have a foundation on which to build their group work. After modeling appropriate behaviors, the teachers assign students to roles in their groups which include notetaker, coordinator, mechanic, and reader. The roles and groups shift throughout the school year. Keegan and Shrake (1991) believe that this practice benefits all levels of learners because “when a more capable reader thinks aloud with a less able one, both students benefit. The stronger student becomes more cognizant of his or her thinking processes while modeling for a partner. The less able reader learns to apply effective reading strategies” (p. 547). The literature groups also allow for students to share and build upon their background knowledge with one another while they enjoy a book.

Flood and Lapp (1992) examined previous literature regarding ability grouping, investigate alternatives to ability grouping, and provide a framework of what flexible grouping patterns look like. The authors have found in the literature that ability grouping produces negative results for students in lower groups because it creates a stigma, they have less exposure to a variety of literature, and they do not engage in higher-level thinking during instruction. Flood and Lapp (1992) say “situations in low groups shape behaviors in negative ways; the amount of teachers’ controlling talk is much higher and their expectations are much lower than they are for high group children” (p. 609). The authors say that flexible grouping techniques are successful when three factors are present. These factors are “choosing the most appropriate basis for grouping, choosing the most effective format, and choosing the most effective materials” (Flood & Lapp, 1992, p. 610). Students are grouped for different purposes and in different

formats, depending on the task the teacher wants them to complete. Examples of purposes for grouping are skill building, interest, building work habits, content, task, social reasons, random, and student choice. These groups may be teacher and/or student led, depending on the task. The groups change on a regular basis and remain flexible. This format allows for students to learn from one another and build upon their skills. Flood and Lapp (1992) conclude that “every instructional episode demands careful attention to matching students’ needs with the most appropriate group experience” (p. 615).

Kreuger and Braun (1999) discuss how a peer tutoring program, called Books and Buddies, worked in their second and third grade classrooms. Many of their students were English Language Learners, so they were looking for a way to enhance their literacy experience and work with other students. Through peer tutoring, the ELLs could practice their social language skills and develop vocabulary to improve their academic language. Books and Buddies was implemented to “provide each child with the opportunity to read and practice English for 30 minutes a day, to train the children in appropriate reading behavior and reading strategies through mini-workshops so that the peer tutoring would be effective, and to develop positive social skills” (Kreuger & Braun, 1999, p. 410). In the program, a grade two student was paired with a grade three student who were at least the same reading level. Grade three students were trained in tutoring strategies before sessions began. Strategies that were used were reading on, sounding out words, looking at the picture, looking for a little word in the big word, and using rhyming words and synonyms as clues. Activities varied on a daily basis. The results of the implementation of the peer tutoring program indicated that, on average, the grade two students made a 1.5 year gain in comprehension and fluency. The grade three students gained, on average, 1.65 years in fluency and comprehension. Students were also motivated to read, gained more

social and academic language skills, and enjoyed reading for pleasure, as indicated by observations. Kreuger and Braun (1999) conclude that “daily peer tutoring is an effective teaching practice in the classroom” (p. 413).

Wilkinson and Townsend (2000) report on how teachers in New Zealand successfully teach reading to students in ability groups. The authors say that ability grouping is viewed more positively there than in the United States. In New Zealand, teachers believe ability grouping is “a way to individualize instruction and monitor progress and a way for children to support each other in reading and be a part of a community of readers” (Wilkinson & Townsend, 2000, p. 461). In their study, the authors aimed to describe how New Zealand teachers group students, the reasons for their decisions, and instructional practices. Four elementary school teachers participated in the study. Researchers used observations and interviews to guide their study. The results of the study showed that teachers grouped students using information from the previous year, their own observations, and formal assessments. Teachers preferred to work with four or five groups with no more than eight students per group. Some teachers used groups of one or two children at times, depending on the skill being taught. Throughout the school year, teachers changed their groups regularly as students’ background and conceptual knowledge changed. Some teachers also combined groups for guided reading. The teachers based their decisions for regrouping on assessment data, which were mostly running records. Results also showed teachers spent the most time with lower-level students. Wilkinson and Townsend (2000) concluded that the ability grouping was successful because “teachers worked with students in individual, paired, whole-class, and other contexts to foster growth in literacy” (p. 470). All learning levels were met.

Vaughn (2001) conducted a literature review to examine research and implications for practice for grouping students with learning disabilities. Since more students with disabilities are being instructed in general education settings, it was important for the researcher to discuss grouping practices that successfully meet these students' needs. First, whole-class instruction research is discussed. Many research findings show that whole-group is the dominant form of reading instruction in many classrooms. Although differentiated materials are not used, teachers find whole-group instruction more feasible. In terms of implications for practice, Vaughn (2001) suggests teachers "involve all students during whole-class instruction by asking questions and then asking students to partner to discuss the answer. This keeps all students engaged" (p. 133). Individual summaries can also help the teacher assess student learning. Research about small group instruction claims that it is the best practice for students with disabilities, in terms of achievement. It was also determined to be more effective than one-to-one instruction. Vaughn (2001) posits "although small group instruction is likely a powerful tool to enhance the reading success of students with LD, it is unlikely to be sufficient for all students" (p. 134). More flexible grouping and activities are needed to meet the needs of all students. Implications for practice are to implement reading groups that are teacher-led, such as guided reading, using flexible grouping to address specific skills when needed, and implement student-led groups to promote cooperative learning. Students with disabilities may benefit from all of these formats, depending on the learning situation.

Vaughn (2001) discussed the benefits of peer tutoring and found "for the most part, the tutors were students without disabilities who demonstrated better reading skills and were able to provide effective instruction" (p. 134). Students with LD prefer to work in pairs, so implications for practice are to enact class-wide peer tutoring, use Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS),

and use Think-Pair-Share to respond to reading. The final grouping strategy discussed is one-on-one instruction. This has been thought to be the most effective strategy to use with students with disabilities because it provides individualized, intensive intervention. Vaughn advises teachers to use their own judgment when providing individualized instruction because lessons are tailored to the students' needs. Vaughn (2001) concludes "as classrooms become more diverse, teachers need to vary their grouping practices during reading instruction. There needs to be a balance across grouping practices, not a sweeping abandonment of smaller grouping practices in favor of whole-class instruction" (p. 136).

Terpstra and Tamura (2008) examine effective social interaction strategies for inclusive classroom settings. This is a part of grouping techniques because it allows for students to enhance their learning through cooperative activities. When students are grouped, "children with disabilities are placed in a setting with typically developing peers who can serve as same-aged models with whom they can interact and learn through a natural behavior modeling format" (p. 405). Students with disabilities typically have lower use of social skills and social response. Once a teacher has determined the students' needs and type of interaction necessary to practice skills, a strategy can be implemented. It is recommended that teachers implement a sensitivity training before grouping students so that differences are addressed. Non-disabled students also benefit from modeling reading behavior because they engage in metacognitive thought processes and practice their appropriate social skills. According to Terpstra and Tamura (2008), peer imitation "is a strategy in which the non-disabled children are taught to be role models in the classroom, but the children with disabilities are also trained to observe and imitate their peers" (p. 408). The students do not know which role they are in, however. The teacher trains the students without labeling students as "disabled" and "non-disabled." If social interaction is going

to be successful in grouping for reading, “specific methods must be implemented in the inclusive classroom to encourage higher levels of social interaction, including environmental arrangements, imitation of peers, teacher prompting, group affection strategies, peer-mediated intervention, and correspondence training in order to foster social skills development and interaction” (p. 406). Teachers must study and observe their students in order to make appropriate group placements for students with and without disabilities.

In sum, the research reviewed has provided insight into the factors that influence grouping techniques in schools, the effects these techniques have on student motivation and achievement, and the best practices for grouping for reading instruction. Student and teacher perceptions and school demographics have a major influence on how groups are formed and used. The use of grouping affects all students in various ways, no matter which group they are placed into. Both homogeneous and heterogeneous groups influence student performance. Due to this fact, teachers are encouraged by all researchers to use flexible grouping techniques so that they can meet the needs of all levels of learners and provide appropriate and equal instructional opportunities.

Chapter 3

Methods

Overview of Methodology

A professional development experience was created (see Chapter 4) in relation to using various grouping strategies in reading instruction. In order to prepare for the professional development and answer the research questions, I consulted various sources. I used library research and online databases such as Education Research Complete, ERIC, and Academic Research Complete. I also found articles on best practices for grouping during reading instruction in *The Reading Teacher* and *Reading Research Quarterly*. The Reading First Initiative issued by the United States Department of Education was a valuable resource. Terms and phrases used to search for relevant materials to the topic and in planning professional development were “grouping for reading instruction,” “ability grouping,” “effects of grouping for reading,” “reading and Response to Intervention,” “flexible grouping”, “best practices for grouping for reading instruction,” “planning and implementing professional development,” and “adult learning theories.” School textbooks were also used in order to prepare to teach educators about best practices. I also searched for articles about adult learning and planning an ongoing professional development. The articles chosen for the literature review met the criteria below:

1. The research examined elementary reading experiences that encompass various grouping formats and involve all levels of readers, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners.
2. Reviewed the impact of student and teacher preferences on grouping techniques and achievement.
3. School demographics and policy for grouping for reading were studied.

4. The research was applicable to best practices and can be incorporated into modern classrooms.

While reviewing the literature, I separated articles into categories (to answer my research questions) and prepared to share my findings with educators. These categories include teacher and student perceptions on ability grouping, impacts on student learning, performance, and social factors, and assessment results before and after various grouping strategies are used. Other articles were coded for best practices. I color-coded articles according to which literature review questions they answered by highlighting. These were analyzed extensively for their validity and applicability to my professional development audience. A professional development experience was created in order to share with teachers the findings from the literature about grouping. This will be beneficial for teachers because it will allow them to learn about and implement best practices in grouping students for reading instruction.

Chapter 4

Professional Development Experience

The final research question in this project aimed to discover the best practices for grouping students for reading instruction. The results of the literature review indicated that most of the authors called for teachers to use flexible grouping techniques. Flexible grouping has been defined as “changing the groups students are placed in for reading instruction on a regular basis, based on ongoing performance data. These groups may be heterogeneous or homogeneous.” A professional development experience was created in order to provide teachers with research-based instructional practices to use when grouping students.

The audience for the professional development includes teachers who teach in grades one through three. The experience will take place in the school building. One workshop will be held for two hours after school and the remainder of the development will be ongoing with a focus on teacher study/mentor groups, meetings with the literacy coach, and constant reflection by the teachers involved. Mentor group meetings will occur every three weeks, according to grade level.

The main focus of the professional development experience is on grouping techniques for reading instruction. The Daily 5 Program (2006), by Gail Boushey and Joan Moser, is a research-based program that incorporates all grouping formats into instruction. Students work independently, in pairs, in small groups, and as a whole group to learn literacy. The developers of the program believe that flexible grouping techniques benefit all students when implemented properly. Students complete Daily 5 tasks on a daily basis during reading workshop as teachers meet with guided reading groups. Students have a choice on a daily basis as to which aspects of the daily five to choose from. The five activities to choose from are Word Work, Read to Self,

Read with Someone, Listening to Reading, and Writing about Reading. In Read to Self, students are reading independently. Word Work involves students independently working with words from their word sorts. Students work in same or mixed-ability pairs in Read with Someone. Listening to Reading involves listening to a book on tape. Writing about Reading is independently responding to a book in writing. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the professional development project.

Table 4.1

Overview

Event	Time Frame	Explanation
Workshop	Once at the beginning of the school year, after school, for 2 hours	Daily 5 and Literacy Café will be presented, the importance of grouping for reading instruction will be discussed in groups, and the ongoing experience will be planned.
Mentor Group Meetings	Every three weeks, times set up by teacher participants	Grade-level groups meet to share experiences and give support and feedback to one another about grouping.
Teacher Reflection and Observation	Ongoing reflection, teacher observations at least once per month	Teachers reflect upon experiences and practices. Observations will occur at least once per month in another classroom. Feedback and reflection occur after observations are made.
Meeting with Literacy Coach	Once per month	Teachers will meet with literacy coach to discuss practices, successes, and difficulties.

Why Professional Development is Important

Professional development is an essential part of an educator's career. It can lead to personal growth and provide tools for future success in the classroom. According to Penuel, McWilliams, McAuliffe, Benbow, Mably, and Hayden (2008), "there is a growing consensus

that to make real changes, teachers need professional development that is interactive with their teaching practice, allowing for multiple cycles of presentation and assimilation of, and reflection on, knowledge” (p. 417). In this professional development, teachers will have the opportunity to align research-based best practices with their own classroom environments as well as engage in constant professional reflection. This will make the experience personal and relatable to each individual. Jenkins and Yoshimura (2010) describe effective professional development to be “rooted in practice, research-based, collaborative, long-term, aimed at instructional improvement, and aligned with standards and assessment” and “is more effective in changing the classroom practices of teachers when a cohort or collective of teachers from a school, department or grade are involved as a unit” (p. 38). The goal of this workshop and ongoing experience is to provide teachers with hands-on, research-based literacy materials and make them relevant to their own classrooms.

Before the professional development was planned, needs surveys were administered to the elementary teachers. According to Jenkins and Yoshimura (2010), in professional development, “the teacher's capacities, needs, and interests are paramount. Working as a collaborative group, identifying their needs, planning the activities, and participating in implementation and follow up without administrative oversight, is crucial” (p. 42). This survey asked teachers to identify areas of grouping for reading instruction that they felt comfortable using and which formats they would like to learn more about. It also asked which grouping formats they currently use in their classrooms and the reasoning behind their choices. The surveys were analyzed and used in planning the development to best meet the needs of the teachers. In order to plan for the workshop and ongoing development, resource binders were

created for each teacher that includes current research on best practices for grouping for reading, handouts to use to supplement instruction, and reflection and planning sheets.

Workshop Format and Ongoing Experience

The professional development will begin with a workshop, but will then continue as an ongoing experience to maximize its effectiveness. The two hour workshop will be held after school inside the elementary school building. The workshop will include hands-on activities, group discussions, case studies, videos, and research-based materials for teachers to utilize in their classrooms. These various instructional techniques will be used to reach all levels of learners in the workshop. In professional development, “activities must address the multiple learning styles of attendees. A variety of instructional methods is necessary in order for everyone to benefit from the session. Learning should be collaborative and hands-on. People learn better when they work in groups” (Benton & Benton, 2008, p. 27). Teachers will be placed in groups based upon grade level for the workshop so they can share ideas. In a recent study by Kratochwill, Volpiansky, Clements, and Ball (2007), it was determined that successful workshops often incorporate “role-plays, group discussions, case studies, and reviews and demonstration of intervention materials as typical activities to promote active learning. Collaborative problem solving was a prominent element” (p. 626).

One workshop session is not a sufficient amount of time in which to implement an effective development, so teachers will meet in mentor groups and with a consulting teacher on a regular basis. According to Penuel et al. (2008), “Professional development that is of longer duration and time span is more likely to contain the kinds of learning opportunities necessary for teachers to integrate new knowledge into practice” (p. 417). Bergstrom (2008) is in agreement with the previous statement, as she believes “isolated training events and workshops are

insufficient for substantial, school-wide improvement of student skills. Professional development must be on-going and integrate skill development with the critical systems factors in order to effectively increase student outcomes” (p. 27). Teachers will have time to implement strategies learned in the workshop, monitor students’ success, and reflect upon how to change and plan for the future. When teachers are able to discuss successes and difficulties in regards to implementing strategies with others, “researchers have found teachers are more likely to make changes to their practice and to implement curriculum activities more consistently” (Penuel et al., 2008, p. 418).

One of the most important aspects of the development process is the constant reflection by teacher participants. After workshop techniques are introduced into the classroom, teachers will write down their thoughts about the successes and difficulties experienced. They will also ponder ways to change instructional practices so that all students can succeed. According to Nolan, Raban, and Waniganayake (2005), professional development may be successful if teachers “document and plan for their future professional development in a systematic way. Teachers become active in their awareness of who they are as professionals, identify goals, and how they propose to achieve them. Successful teachers are fully engaged in the reflective process” (p. 223). These reflections will be shared at mentor group meetings. Constant reflection and change in practices is the goal of the development experience. Teachers grow as individuals and become aware of their own professional strengths and needs. They also recognize how their practices influence their students. Tips for reflection are provided in Appendix C.

Mentor groups will meet every three weeks during the school year. Mentor groups allow for collaborative learning and incorporate the sociocultural theory of learning into professional development. Teachers will be able to learn from one another and share their ideas to make their

own practices more effective. Each grade level will set their own goals for meetings and will be in charge of their own learning and progress. A literacy coach, or consulting teacher, will meet with the groups on a regular basis also. According to Nolan, Raban, and Waniganayake (2005), “by receiving ongoing feedback, information, and support from mentors, participants find out more about who they are as practitioners. These processes also make participants more likely to question their practice and enhance their capacity to clarify their growth as professionals” (p.226). During the workshop, the groups will meet to create a schedule of meeting times and set goals for the future. If they wish, they can create roles for the group members. The process focuses on self-directed learning. The process is called co-mentoring. According to MacCallum (2007), in co-mentoring, “each participant has knowledge and experience to bring to the relationship, dialogue occurs, and there is a reciprocal benefit” (p. 134). Although the teacher participants will implement the workshop techniques differently in their classrooms, they share common objectives, which are to effectively group and instruct students in reading. Still and Gordon’s (2009) literature review found the following:

Research suggests that professional development should engage and empower teachers to have a stronger voice in directing their own learning. Adults learn best in situations that reflect a constructivist view of learning. Learning involves a transfer of ideas from a person who portrays a significant amount of knowledge on a particular topic to one who may not be as well-versed. However, the transfer of ideas is only part and parcel of this constructivist process that also involves personal reflection on ideas, experiences and points of view. (p. 218)

A component of the development experience that incorporates both the mentor groups and individual teacher reflection is regular observation of others in the act of teaching reading.

The teacher participants will schedule times to observe in one another's classrooms. After observations are made, feedback will be given to the teacher. As teachers meet, they will “engage in a professional dialogue focused on professional practice and the development of new understandings about learning and teaching” (MacCallum, 2007, p. 137). In turn, the observed teacher will reflect upon their practice in their journal. The observer will also reflect about what was learned and how the observation will change their own practices. Progress will be discussed in mentor groups. Tips to guide group meetings as well as observation logs and feedback forms are provided in Appendix C.

Goals and Objectives for the Professional Development

The following are the goals for the two-hour workshop:

- Provide teachers with techniques for grouping students for reading instruction.
- Provide teachers with strategies and best practices to teach reading when students are grouped.
- Place teachers in mentor groups so they can create goals, a schedule, and discuss future meetings.
- Provide resources and handouts for using the Daily 5 and Literacy Café programs.

The following are the goals and objectives for the long-term professional development:

- Teachers will implement strategies from the Daily 5 and Literacy Café programs and monitor student progress.
- Teachers will meet in mentor groups every three weeks and discuss practices, successes, and aspects to be improved upon.

- Teachers will engage in constant observation and personal reflection. They will monitor student, as well as personal, successes and needs, in regards to grouping and teaching reading.

Daily 5 Program and Effective Grouping

The Daily 5 Program (2006) by Gail Boushey and Joan Moser is a research-based program that incorporates all grouping formats into instruction. Students work independently, in pairs, in small groups, and as a whole group to learn literacy. The developers of the program believe that flexible grouping techniques benefit all students when implemented properly. Students complete Daily 5 tasks on a daily basis during reading workshop as teachers meet with guided reading groups. Table 4.2 shows the components of the program and which type of grouping format it addresses.

Table 4.2

Components of Daily 5

Daily 5 Component	Grouping Technique Used
Read to Self	Independent reading
Read with Someone	Mixed and same-ability paired reading
Word Work	Independent work
Listening to Reading	Independent reading
Writing about Reading	Independent work
Guided Reading	Small groups, same-ability
Whole Group Instruction	Whole class, mixed-ability

Before the workshop session, teachers from each grade level will be given information regarding one aspect of the Daily 5 program. They will know little else about the program beforehand. It will be each teacher's job to master the content, materials, and goals of the activity. First grade teachers will be in charge of the Read to Self and Read with Someone activities. Second grade teachers will master Word Work. Third grade teachers will master Writing about Reading and Listening to Reading. A jigsaw activity will occur during the workshop so teachers can learn from one another. As the constructivist theory will be seen in action in the professional development process, it will also be seen in the classrooms as students are grouped for reading instruction. Teachers and students are learning and working together.

Reading and Writing Workshops, Daily 5, and Literacy Café Background

The strategies given to teachers during the workshop will focus on placing students into groups for reading and writing workshops. These will incorporate the *Daily 5* (2006) and *Literacy CAFE* (2009) programs by Gail Boushey and Joan Moser. Research shows that reading and writing workshops foster constructivist and sociocultural learning opportunities. Teachers will learn the background of these programs, how they can be used in the classroom, and be provided with resources to make the programs their own.

There is a strong research base that supports the use of reading and writing workshops. Reading workshop is beneficial to students because it allows for them to become independent and work on individual skills in need of improvement. According to Beard and Antrim (2010), during reading workshop, "the teacher actively works with students to teach them the skills and strategies they need to grow stronger as readers. Readers have time to read just-right books independently every day, select their own appropriate books, take care of books, respect each other's reading time and reading lives, have daily opportunities to talk about their books in

genuine ways, and read for understanding” (p. 24). Writing workshop allows students to “illustrate the connections among thinking, learning, and writing” (Miller & Higgins, 2008, p. 126). Mini-lessons, independent and group writing, and group sharing are all incorporated into writing workshop. According to Graves (1983), writing workshop is an interactive approach to teaching writing in which students learn and practice the importance of rehearsal, drafting/ revising, and editing their own work. In writing workshop, “children select topics of personal interest, write for authentic audiences, and learn conventions and mechanics of writing” (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007, p. 131). The Daily 5 and Literacy CAFE programs are research-based and have been implemented in classrooms for ten years before being published for public use.

The following background information will be administered to teacher participants before the workshop takes place in order for them to become familiar with the programs. Teachers will read the information and be prepared to participate in the jigsaw activity during the workshop. They will have sufficient information about the Daily 5 and Literacy Café before being introduced to the strategies and how to implement the programs.

The Daily 5 program addresses all dimensions of literacy, which include reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The Daily 5 allows students to become independent readers and writers. Students have a choice on a daily basis as to which aspects of the daily five to choose from. The five activities to choose from are Word Work, Read to Self, Read with Someone, Listening to Reading, and Writing about Reading. At the beginning of the school year, students help the teacher create rules for each choice, including what the students should be doing and what the teacher should be doing. This helps them to have a say in the creation of their individual classroom rules. There is an example of rules located in Appendix B. Reading workshop begins with a mini-lesson to review and introduce skills and strategies. After this, each day during

reading workshop, students choose two of the options from the five to work on during the two sessions. Throughout the course of the week, the teacher keeps track of the students' choices to ensure they complete all of them. While students are completing their tasks, the teacher meets with guided reading groups. During Word Work, students use their weekly word sorts to practice the words, using hands-on, sensory experiences. Materials include markers, stamps, plastic and foam letters, glitter pens, and mirrors to write on. Students have different word sorts, based upon their guided reading groups. They incorporate phonemes that students need to work on. In read to self, students read independently. Students choose a partner in Read with Someone and they choose a book to read together. They stop periodically to discuss the reading. In Listening to Reading, students listen to audio books while following along with the text. Writing about Reading involves students writing about books they are reading during workshop. They can respond to the reading in their own ways or to prompts they have in their reading folders. Between the two daily sessions, students meet back on the carpet to share interesting books or facts they have learned.

The Literacy CAFÉ program is incorporated into reading workshop with the Daily 5. CAFÉ stands for Comprehension, Accuracy, Fluency, and Expand Vocabulary. Students are taught at the beginning of the school year what each of these elements of reading consists of and strategies that they can use to improve these skills. They are given goals throughout the year by the teacher. Each day after students make a choice from the Daily 5 components, they must also tell the teacher their CAFÉ goal and strategy to use. For example, the student must say "Read to Self. My goal is Expand Vocabulary, tune in to interesting words." There is a Literacy CAFÉ menu displayed in each room for students to place their names under their goals. Each student also has a worksheet in their folder related to their goals. For example, for Expand Vocabulary,

tune in to interesting words, the students have a worksheet for them to write interesting words and definitions on. Through the reading workshop, students are very independent in their own learning, as they each have individual goals. Students meet in same-ability guided reading groups so the teacher can hone in on specific skills that are to be addressed, depending on students' needs. The students may have similar CAFÉ goals in these groups. This is why the program meets the needs of all learners.

Writing workshop is a one hour session which begins with a mini-lesson presented to the whole group and then allows students to independently work on their tasks. At the end of the workshop, students share their work. There are often units that the teacher implements in which students work in groups to complete writing tasks. Writing workshop allows students to also choose topics to write about, creating independent learners. Music is played during the workshop to keep students motivated and create a relaxing environment.

Curricular Instruction and Assessment in Grouping in Daily 5

Materials used in reading workshop enable all students to become independent, successful readers because they are individualized and address students' preferences, which keeps them motivated to read and write. In the Daily 5, students use an "IPICK" strategy to find good fit books for themselves. A large classroom library should be present that meets the needs and interests of all students. IPICK stands for I look at a book, Purpose, Interest, Comprehend, and Know all the words. There is a reference sheet for this strategy located in Appendix B. Students choose books carefully based upon their interest level, can comprehend the concept of the book, and can identify most of the words. Again, strategies used for Daily 5 and Literacy CAFÉ are student-specific based upon needs and teacher observation. In same and mixed-ability groups, students are allowed to practice their new reading strategies and use books at various

reading levels. Cooperative learning allows the students to learn from one another. Guided reading books are leveled and all levels of readers are taught how to expand upon their skills. Students are constantly engaged.

The teacher uses mostly informal assessments in the Daily 5 and Literacy Café programs. In reading workshop, Over the Shoulder and Running Records are used almost on a daily basis to assess student progress. Students are also asked to retell during guided reading. When students are in same-ability groups, they may be assessed as a group, also. This helps the teacher to plan for the next guided reading lesson. Observation notes serve as a tool to plan for future instruction. Observations during guided reading also determine the goals that students will have while working on their Daily 5. These are independent goals. Notes may be taken about which students work well together and which should not work together. Leveled readers may be used, which include running record sheets as well as comprehension questions. These determine the same-ability reading groups students are placed into as well as which word sorts they will be given. Writing workshop is assessed using rubrics created by the teacher.

Addressing Diversity in Flexible Groups

The program addresses all forms of grouping configurations. Students work independently, with a partner, and in groups in reading and writing workshops. Mixed and same ability groups are used during reading workshop to ensure that students are learning from one another and are able to practice their skills based on their needs. Materials are used at students' reading levels. Student choice plays a major role in the program so they feel comfortable in many reading situations. This promotes motivation to read and creates self-guiding readers. Guided reading groups address Response to Intervention because the lower-level readers are met with on a daily basis in order to ensure they are getting intensified instruction and they are

building their skills regularly. This aspect of the program is the most important in respect to the professional development experience. The main focus of the development is to place students in groups that foster their learning and that work well for them.

The reading and writing workshops address diversity in many ways. Multicultural literature is incorporated into the classroom library to represent different cultures and preferences. Students are extremely independent in these workshops, so their personal choices are represented on a daily basis in reading. Students are made to feel comfortable in all reading situations. Mini-lessons that are presented to the whole class include graphic organizers and visuals so all learners can understand the content. Instruction is differentiated for each student so they become self-directed readers and writers. This program can be used almost any classroom if the students can self-direct. This allows teachers to re-think the idea that the same materials should be used for all students. In this program, students are motivated because they can choose their own materials and have their own goals to work on.

Two-Hour Workshop

The following is the schedule for the two-hour workshop that will occur from 3:30-5:30 after school:

3:30-3:45: Discuss grouping for reading instruction, reading and writing workshop formats, and grouping techniques to be used

3:45-4:15: Discuss creating rules with students, guided reading, and teachers meet in jigsaw groups to discuss the Daily 5 program

4:15-4:35: Discuss Literacy Café program

4:35- 5:05: Discuss writing workshop, video of programs in action, and questions from teachers

5:05- 5:30: Discuss reflection, teacher resources, mentor groups meet, create future schedule, feedback survey

Before the day of the workshop session, teachers will be given information packets that contain research about reading and writing workshops and grouping for reading instruction. They can read at their convenience. They will also be given resources to master their assigned component of the Daily 5 program. As previously stated, first grade teachers will read about Read to Self and Read with Someone. Second grade teachers will master Word Work. Third grade teachers will be in charge of Writing about Reading and Listening to Reading. They will prepare their own methods of introducing the information to the other grade-level teachers in a jigsaw activity. They will read about materials and implementation of the component of the Daily 5 to model or share for the other teachers.

Background. At the beginning of the workshop, teachers will be informed about the overall professional development. They will engage in the workshop, mentor groups, and personal and professional reflection. Strategies for grouping students will be presented and implemented in the classrooms immediately following the workshop. Teachers will be informed about the importance of using flexible grouping techniques for reading instruction. Students placed in same-ability groups may learn at their own pace, being provided instruction at their reading level. This is why guided reading will be implemented during reading workshop. Whole group instruction does not always work because materials provided may not meet all of the needs of the students, who have diverse abilities. Whole group lessons will be incorporated into the workshop, however, so students can learn new reading strategies and share their thoughts with one another. This is when students learn the choices in the Daily 5 program, how to engage in the workshop, and how to achieve the goals set for them in the literacy café menu. Independent work

allows students of varying ability levels to learn on their own, at their own pace, and with materials at their reading level. Mixed-ability student pairs and groups are also incorporated into reading and writing workshops to give students the opportunity to learn from one another. Higher-ability students can enhance their skills while helping lower-level students with the reading process. It is crucial to student success that all of these formats be used in the classroom and that groups are changed on an ongoing basis. It is also vital that materials are differentiated, as discussed in the literature review. Students must experience texts at all levels in order to master strategies and skills while still feeling comfortable about the reading process. This is why the IPICK strategy is used for students to choose books for themselves. Also, a diverse classroom library helps meet all interest levels of the readers. With all of these aspects of reading workshop combined, students will experience success and motivation to read.

Daily 5 jigsaw activity. As previously mentioned, teachers will be responsible for reading and mastering one aspect of the Daily 5 program to present in a jigsaw activity with other grade-level teachers. They will receive materials from the program's website and reading guide. It will be the responsibility of the teacher participants to decide how to present the information in groups. This may include modeling, simulating a Daily 5 reading workshop, or simply discussing the materials in an informal manner. The following is basic information about each component of the Daily 5 program.

Read to self. In this component of the Daily 5, students choose a book using the IPICK acronym. They should choose a book, identify a purpose for reading, be interested in the content of the book, comprehend the text, and be able to identify most of the words. When students choose Read to Self, they engage in independent reading. While reading, they work on their goals from the café menu. This may include students performing think alouds, using

comprehension strategies for their reading levels, filling out graphic organizers, identifying story elements, working on fluency, or word identification. Students are taught all of these strategies during the mini-lessons at the beginning of reading workshop. This choice allows students to work at their own reading levels and master skills learned.

Read with someone. The Read with Someone choice involves two students reading as a pair, regardless of their reading levels. The teacher may approve or disapprove of a pairing, depending on the observations made of the students in the classroom. While partner reading, the students engage in higher-level thinking in discussions, retell the events in the story, ask questions when comprehension is lost, practice academic language skills, and increase comprehension and fluency. Read with Someone is a mixed-ability grouping format that allows for readers at all levels to learn from one another. It also helps to increase motivation for reading and communication skills.

Word work. In Word Work, teachers are responsible for identifying reading levels and needs of students in terms of word sounds and spelling. Students are given a word sort at the beginning of each week that they will use in this component of the Daily 5. The sorts include different sounds of language. For example, students in one guided reading group may have difficulty with the long and short “a” sounds in words. They would be given a word sort that incorporates words with these sounds. It is their job to determine which sound the word fits into or if it is an “oddball word” that does not fit either category. During the week, in Word Work, students are immersed in the words and phonemes. They use materials such as markers, stamps, foam letters, mirrors, and glitter pens to form the words in their sort. At the end of the week, students glue the sort into a notebook. Word work allows students to build word recognition strategies, increase phonics knowledge, and helps with spelling.

Writing about reading. In this component of the Daily 5, students are given writing prompts to reflect upon the books they are reading in reading workshop. This is an independent activity. Students may write personal reactions to the books, identify story elements and character traits, or write to the main character. This allows for increased comprehension and reflection about the books read. In Writing about Reading, critical thinking is increased, skills in responding to literature are built, and writing skills are improved. All thoughts are recoded in a student journal.

Listening to reading. In Listening to Reading, students independently follow along in a book as it is read to them on tape or CD. Students listen into headphones and may whisper along with the tape. Books are changed on a regular basis so students can experience all types of genres. They are also at many different reading levels. This activity builds fluency and comprehension through repeated readings.

The students choose two of these activities to engage in during each workshop. There is a Daily 5 student choice log located in Appendix B. While they are working, teachers are meeting with homogeneous guided reading groups. In these groups, leveled readers aim to increase comprehension and word recognition, depending on the needs of the students. The format and activities of these sessions are at each teacher's discretion. There is also a sample guided reading lesson located in Appendix B. After the jigsaw activity is complete, teachers will watch a movie from the programs website to see the Daily 5 program in action in a classroom. They will see the mini-lessons before each session, students performing each task, and guided reading. This will give teachers a better understanding of how the workshop looks when implemented. In Appendix B, there is a Daily 5 sample lesson plan so teachers can see what the program looks like in action.

Literacy Café. During the workshop, teachers will be given handouts to explore and discuss the Literacy Café. The program is used together with the Daily 5 and is incorporated into each activity of reading workshop. The presenter of the workshop will informally discuss the aspects of the café menu and each component of the acronym CAFÉ. Teachers will be able to visually follow along using their handouts and a menu at the front of the workshop room. As previously discussed, CAFÉ stands for Comprehension, Accuracy, Fluency, and Expanding vocabulary. These are the goals that students will be given to strive for during the school year. Students are taught at the beginning of the school year what each of these elements of reading consists of and strategies that they can use to improve these skills. They are given goals throughout the year by the teacher. Each day after students make a choice, they must also tell the teacher their CAFÉ goal and strategy to use. For example, the student must say “Read with Someone. My goal is Comprehension, back up and reread.” There is a Literacy CAFÉ menu displayed in each room for students to place their names under their goals. Each student also has a worksheet in their folder related to their goals. For example, for Expand Vocabulary, tune in to interesting words, the students have a worksheet for them to write interesting words and definitions on. Through the reading workshop, students are very independent in their own learning, as they each have individual goals.

Teachers will be informed that they must use their own discretion when setting goals for their students. The goals are dependent on students’ reading habits and levels. For example, lower level readers may need to work on accuracy of words, so their goals would be to blend sounds, check pictures for clues, or go back and reread. Higher level students may be given the goal of comprehension or expanding vocabulary in which they would retell, connect to the text, tune into interesting words, or summarize the text. Although students are being placed into

flexible grouping formats, they are constantly working on their own Café goals to make them more effective readers. During this time of the workshop, teachers will have the opportunity to ask questions about setting goals for their students. Copies of the café menu, along with the strategies for students to use, are located in Appendix B.

Writing Workshop. The purpose of using flexible grouping techniques in writing workshop is to allow students to interact with one another in order to improve their writing skills. Teachers may incorporate any type of projects they like into the workshop. Writing workshop always begins with a whole class mini-lesson. These focus on a writing strategy or type of writing, which always includes modeling. For example, in a poetry unit, teachers may want to explain what poetry is, read the class a poem, create one as an individual, and then create one as a whole group. Then, students are given a task to perform individually, or in groups. Groups should be changed on a regular basis to allow for students of all ability levels to interact with one another. During writing workshop, music is played at a low volume to create a warm, comfortable environment.

An example of a writing workshop unit will be presented at the professional development workshop. The theme of the unit is the food pyramid. The first day of the unit will consist of a lesson about the food pyramid. Students will learn about the foods and servings that they are supposed to have from each food group. They will see a large food pyramid and get to ask questions about it. In order to place students into mixed-ability groups, teachers will ask students to choose a food group they would like to research. Once students are in groups, they will research their food groups using books, internet pages, and the food pyramid. Graphic organizers will be used to fill in important facts they wish to remember. The objective of the unit is for students to create a poster that represents their food group. Facts from their research will be

written on their posters. Students will also draw foods from the group on the poster and make it creative. The posters will be presented to the class. This unit allows for students to write in a creative way, motivate them to do research, and work together to create a unique product.

Teachers can ask students to write stories together, or as individuals. Writing workshop can be modified in many engaging ways.

Students with Disabilities and ELLs

When placing students in groups, it is important to consider the needs of all students, including students with disabilities and English Language Learners. The reading and writing workshop formats as well as the two programs described in the experience meet the needs of all learners. In the Daily 5, many types and levels of books are used. The importance of differentiating materials cannot be stressed enough. Also, in many of the strategies presented to students, graphic organizers and other visual aids are used so students can see what the strategies look like if they cannot understand it given to them verbally. Modeling plays a major role in instructing students. Materials used in the workshops are hands-on, allowing students to experience literature using their senses. This helps them internalize information. There is a Spanish Language café menu available from the program's website if teachers would like to incorporate that into their classrooms. English Language Learners and students with disabilities meet individually with the teacher or in small guided reading groups to ensure that they are getting the proper instruction that meets their needs. Again, the programs are designed to meet the needs of all learners and allow them to become independent and practice their skills.

Ongoing Experience

At the end of the workshop, the presenter will discuss the ongoing experience that will take place. First, teachers will be given journals to record their personal reflections in. It is the

most crucial part of the development that teachers are reflecting about the observations they make, the successes of implementing various grouping formats, and aspects of grouping that can be improved upon. They may also record what they like and dislike about the program and strategies taught in the Daily 5 lessons. With this, they can brainstorm ways to change the program to make it their own. The teachers will also be observing other teachers. First, they will observe the same grade-level teachers. As time goes on, they may observe teachers in other grade levels as they implement the strategies. The observations must be recorded on an observation notes sheet, provided in Appendix C. Also, they should reflect upon the experience in their journals. They should ask themselves what they learned in the observation, give feedback to the other teachers, and reflect upon how the observation allowed them to learn more about their own practices.

Teachers will be placed in their grade-level mentor groups at the end of the workshop. In these groups, they will create a schedule of meeting times where they can share ideas and reflect upon the implementation of the programs in their classrooms. They will also set goals and expectations for the meetings. For example, they may delegate roles for the members or choose to have informal discussion sessions. This will be at the teachers' discretions. During the meetings, they will also discuss the observations they make in one another's classroom and serve as a support system to one another. It will be up to the teachers when and where these meetings will take place. They must occur every three weeks, however. At least once a month, the groups will also meet with me, the presenter and literacy coach to share ideas as well and gain feedback on how to make the experience better. I will answer any questions and provide resources for teachers to use as time goes on.

During this time of the workshop, teachers will also be given tips on how to divide students into groups. These will be based on classroom observations and student behaviors. Groups must be changed on a regular basis to ensure that students of all levels are being given a chance to work together. Progress monitoring will also be a major aspect of group formations. Guided reading groups may change as students experience greater success in reading. The impacts that the programs have on student learning can be assessed using leveled readers, teacher observations, running records, comprehension questions, and any other forms of assessments the teachers wish to use. Detailed records of student progress should be kept to use for reflective purposes and to evaluate the success the professional development has in the classrooms. At the end of the workshop, teachers will be given the opportunity to ask questions and will fill out a feedback survey to evaluate the workshop.

How to Evaluate the Success of the Professional Development

In order to evaluate the success of the professional development, teacher reflections will be read throughout the school year by the literacy coach. Teachers should be reflective about their own practices as well as about the practices of those observed. Notes taken during mentor group meetings will also be studied by the literacy coach to make sure teachers are being supportive and reflective as a group. The literacy coach will meet with each mentor group to discuss practices, give feedback, and provide resources for future instruction. Student assessments will also be analyzed to ensure they are making adequate progress during the implementation of the programs. Teachers should also implement their own progress monitoring tools, which will also be analyzed for student success. This data will be used to plan for future instruction and determine whether the information presented at the workshop and throughout the ongoing experience has been beneficial. The feedback survey, located in Appendix A, will also

serve as a tool to evaluate the success of the development. Teachers' views will always be taken into consideration because this is, in fact, their own professional development.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Overview and Significance

The goal of this professional development was to answer the very important research question: What are the best practices for grouping students for reading instruction? It is commonly expressed by researchers that using only one type of ability group leads to an achievement gap among students of various reading levels. Also, they call for dynamic, flexible grouping techniques to be implemented so that differentiated instruction occurs for all levels of readers. This includes using differentiated materials for students with disabilities and English Language Learners. The programs used for the professional development, the Daily 5 and Literacy Café, incorporate flexible grouping techniques and independent work to allow students to work on their own and together to practice and enhance their skills.

In order to plan the professional development, research on adult learning was reviewed so teachers would benefit from the experience. Also, research on professional development concluded that an ongoing experience would be most effective and allow time for teachers to implement what they learn at a workshop. The development in this project is one full school year and includes a workshop, mentor groups, and constant teacher reflection in terms of grouping for reading. Grade-level teachers serve as a support system to one another. The articles discussed in the literature review also helped shape the development experience. The contributing factors as to whether or not, and how, ability groups are used for instruction were taken into consideration when planning. Teachers are given suggestions about how to group students and what to do when students are in those groups. Students will help in the process of implementing the Daily 5 and Café, so their perceptions of grouping may be positive. The effects of ability grouping and

other grouping techniques also lead to the professional development experience. In order to close the achievement gap between low and high-level readers, different grouping formats were used. Constant student progress monitoring will determine the effectiveness of the programs. The final research question, which asked what the best practices for grouping for reading instruction include, served as the basis for the professional development. Flexible groups were determined to be the most beneficial and effective technique to use, so the programs sought to put that format into action. The goal of the experience was to align current research with individual classrooms, which have a diverse student population, in hopes that all will succeed and advance in reading.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis project was to examine the effects of using ability grouping and dynamic grouping techniques for reading instruction with a class of diverse students and to implement a professional development that would help to put best practices into action. Social learning theories infer that placing students into groups encourages cooperative learning and allows for students to practice skills. After researching the questions formulated for the purpose of this project, it was determined that the factors that determine how and when ability groups are used are student preferences, teacher perceptions, and school policy and demographics. Student perceptions include their motivation to participate in groups and their self-concepts as readers. Learning and knowledge increases as motivation increases. Teacher decisions also influence how grouping is used for reading. Their perceptions of students, expectations, and preferences for instruction methods influence how students are grouped. The third factor that determines how students are grouped is school policy and demographics. The diverse student population affects the use of groups for reading instruction. This includes students with disabilities, English

Language Learners, and high and lower-level readers. The professional development experience aimed to shape student and teacher perceptions by creating a positive, motivating environment in which students help to create their program and classroom rules.

The second research question asked about the effects of ability grouping. Results showed that grouping formats affect student perceptions of themselves as readers, their grades and performance levels, and their social status as readers. Using only one type of grouping technique can create an achievement gap and a stigma for lower-level readers. The Daily 5 program used in the professional development eliminates the gap because students of all levels work independently and together while using materials at their reading levels. The diverse student population is catered to in many different grouping formats.

The final question also helped to shape the development experience. The best practices for grouping students for reading instruction were researched. Most of the authors called for flexible, dynamic grouping techniques to be used, incorporating differentiated materials. Students experience this in the Daily 5 program as they meet in heterogeneous and homogeneous groups. They are also exposed to books at all reading and interest levels. The program promotes the Social Constructivist and Socio-Cultural learning theories by allowing students to build knowledge through social interaction. Since reading is a social activity, diverse learners are encouraged to engage in cooperative learning to promote reading growth and understanding.

Limitations

The professional development project was designed to be implemented in an elementary school setting. The success of the project is determined by the workshop feedback survey, teacher reflection, student success, and teacher observations. A clear limitation of the professional development experience is that it will not be implemented in a school in the near

future, so its effectiveness cannot be measured at this time. The goal of the experience was to provide teachers with effective techniques for grouping students for reading. The Daily 5 and Literacy Café are research-based programs that incorporate all forms of grouping while also allowing students to become independent learners. These programs were selected to be implemented in the development because they have been successful in many classrooms and can be altered to cater to diverse learners. It may be considered a limitation, however, that only these programs are used for grouping students. Other programs may be just as effective in incorporating best practices for grouping students. They were not taken into consideration when planning this specific experience.

Suggestions for Future Research

The articles examined in this literature review centered on many aspects related to grouping for reading instruction, including the factors that determine how and when ability groups are used, effects of grouping practices on students, and best practices for grouping. Although there is a broad range of research on the topic, it is recommended that continued research be conducted. Future research may focus more on flexible grouping techniques for reading instruction. In many of the articles reviewed, the focus was either on same-ability groups or mixed-ability groups. There was almost never a focus on flexible groups in the classroom. It would be beneficial for educators to read studies conducted in today's classrooms in which flexible grouping techniques, as in the professional development experience, are used. At the end of many of the articles, it was recommended that teachers use flexible groups as best practice, but no studies confirmed this. Also, for future research, the time span for the studies should be long-term. In many of the studies, researchers conducted a small amount of observations in a short amount of time. This may not give an accurate depiction of the effects of implementing the

grouping formats. It is recommended that researchers conduct studies that are long-term and involve a great number of observations or student progress monitoring. This will give a more precise result of using flexible groups for reading instruction. Conducting long-term research on flexible grouping techniques will help educators to learn how their practices can be changed and how various formats affect their students' success in reading.

After researching contributing factors, effects of, and best practices for grouping students for reading instruction, it can be concluded that flexible grouping techniques are most effective. My classroom of diverse students will benefit most from participating in same and mixed-ability groups, independent work, and whole class instruction. I will also use differentiated materials that cater to all reading and interest levels. The Daily 5 program will help my students become motivated, independent readers. I will also engage in constant reflection about how my practices in grouping students affect their performance. The most important knowledge gained from this project is that the cooperative learning situation “encourages students to care about one another regardless of differences in race, ability, or disability. Also, as a result of the collaboration and collective effort, students' self-esteem, socialization skills, and interpersonal skills are enhanced” (Marr, 1997, p. 13). Grouping practices will be well thought-out in order to give my students the most beneficial experiences possible.

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Appendix A: Workshop**Workshop Feedback Survey**

Please fill out the following survey and return it to the presenter. Your participation is greatly appreciated!

1) strongly disagree 2) disagree 3) neutral 4) agree 5) strongly agree					
1. The workshop was well organized.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The presentation helped me to better understand grouping for reading instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The strategies presented are relevant to my teaching practices.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The handouts provided are helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
5. There were sufficient visual aids and examples to support the programs to be used.	1	2	3	4	5
6. The presentation was clear and concise.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I am likely to use the data and strategies presented in my classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The presentation met my expectations.	1	2	3	4	5

9. What was the most helpful part of the workshop?

10. How could the workshop have been better?

Please feel free to add additional comments below.

Professional Development Workshop Agenda

September 10, 2012

3:30-5:30

- ❖ 3:30- 3:45- Discuss grouping for reading instruction, reading and writing workshop formats, grouping techniques
- ❖ 3:45-4:15- Discuss creating rules, guided reading, jigsaw activity to discuss Daily 5
- ❖ 4:15-4:35- Discuss Literacy Café program
- ❖ 4:35-5:05- Discuss writing workshop, video, questions
- ❖ 5:05-5:30- Discuss reflection, resources, mentor groups meet, create future schedule, feedback survey
- ❖ Questions?

Appendix B: Daily 5 and Literacy Café Resources**Differentiated Instructional Strategy/Lesson Plan**

1. Whole group focus lesson 1- Comprehension: Inference
 - a. Model an example of an inference about everyday life. Write sentences on the chart paper that would lead students to make an inference. Have students make an inference with their carpet buddy.
 - b. Use the cover of a book to help students make inferences and discuss as a class.
 - c. Read a page of a book and model how to make an inference using the text. Explain how you reached your inference. Then, read another page from the book and ask students to make inferences and explain their reasoning. Use a graphic organizer to represent students' thoughts. Explain to students that they can use this strategy when reading to self, reading with someone, or listening to reading.
2. Student independent work- choose one of the daily five to complete; teacher meets with guided reading groups
3. Whole group focus lesson 2- Comprehension- Back up and reread
 - a. Ask students what they do when they do not understand what they read. Explain that another strategy to use is to back up and reread for understanding. Model a reread strategy and explain that students can do this during independent or partner reading.
4. Student independent work- choose from one of the daily five to complete; teacher meets with guided reading groups

If reading time allows:

5. Whole group focus lesson 3- Word Work- Spelling patterns
 - a. Choose a spelling pattern to discuss with the whole group. Model a word sort and thought process that go into sorting the words correctly. Explain how students can use the spelling patterns and sounds in their word sorts to complete them.
6. Student independent work- choose one of the daily five to complete; teacher meets with guided reading groups
7. Share the daily work of the class on the carpet- students share books, review strategies

The Literacy Café Menu of Strategies

Comprehension

I understand what I read

Strategies

Check for Understanding

Back up and Reread

Monitor and Fix Up

Retell the story

Use prior knowledge to connect with text

Make a picture or mental image

Ask questions throughout the reading process

Predict what will happen, use text to confirm

Infer and support with evidence

Use text features (titles, headings, captions, graphic features)

Summarize text, include sequence of main events

Use main idea and supporting details to determine importance

Determine and analyze author's purpose and support with text

Recognize literary elements (genre, plot, character, setting, problem/resolution)

Recognize and explain cause and effect relationships

Accuracy

I can read the words

Strategies

Cross Checking... Do the pictures and/or words look right? Does it sound right? Does it make sense?

Use the picture... Do the words and pictures match?

Use beginning sounds and ending sounds

Blend sounds, stretch and read

Flip the sounds

Chunk letters and sounds together

Skip the word then come back

Trade a word/guess a word that makes sense

Fluency

I can read accurately, with expression and understand what I read

Strategies

Voracious Reading

Read appropriate level text that are a “Good Fit”

Reread text

Practice common sight words and high frequency words

Adjust and apply different reading rates to match text

Use punctuation to enhance phrasing and prosody (end marks, commas etc)

Expand**Vocabulary**

I know, find and use interesting words

Strategies

Voracious Reading

Tune in to interesting words and use new vocabulary in my speaking and writing

Use pictures, illustrations and diagrams

Use word parts to determine meaning of words (prefixes, suffixes, origins, abbreviations)

Use prior knowledge and context to predict and confirm meaning

Ask someone to define the word for you

Use dictionaries, thesauruses and glossaries as tools

Boushey, G. & Moser, J. (2009). *The café book: Engaging all students in daily literacy assessment and instruction*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

I PICK “GOOD FIT BOOKS”

- **I** look at a book
- **P**urpose
- **I**nterest
- **C**omprehend
- **K**now all the words

Daily 5 Student Choices

Student Name	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					
11.					
12.					
13.					
14.					
15.					

RS= Read to Self RW= Read with Someone WW= Word Work

LR= Listening to Reading WR= Writing about Reading

Example Guided Reading Calendar

Session	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green
2	Green	Green	Red	Blue	Red

Yellow= lower-level group (meets 4 days a week)

Green= meets 3 days a week

Red= meets 2 days a week

Blue= highest-level group (meets once a week)

Sample Guided Reading Lesson

Grade Level: 2

Concept/Topic: Mini-lesson: What character traits and emotions does Andrew have in the book Fly Away Home?

Yellow: What are some contractions that are found while reading? What do they mean? What is the problem that Lars and Hugo face in the book The Little Polar Bear and the Brave Little Hare?

Blue: What are some new learnings and wonderings that come up when reading the book Insect Lives? What are the rules for a conversation?

Rationale: Mini-Lesson: Students are beginning to learn about different character traits and emotions that are encountered while reading. They must be able to identify these traits in order to understand what the character is going through. They will eventually be able to respond to the literature by writing about the character's traits and emotions. By analyzing these traits, students will be able to relate to the character and make connections to the literature.

Yellow: This reading group is beginning to learn about contractions and why they are used. They are also working on reading for meaning. A re-reading is done so that students can find things in the book that they did not see in the first reading.

Blue: This is the highest-level reading group. They must read their book and be able to express their new learnings and wonderings through a formal conversation. This is done because the students read for meaning and have advanced comprehension. Conversations help the students to express their thinking about literature in a collaborative, engaging manner.

Objectives: *At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:*

- Mini Lesson: Identify emotions and traits of a character in a book by having a discussion and creating a character trait web as a class.
- Yellow: Identify contractions in literature by writing them down while reading. Create a

description of the setting in a book by making a list based on picture clues.

- Blue: Identify new learnings and wonderings in literature while reading. Have a conversation about literature by discussing new learnings and wonderings and responding to others' ideas.

Materials:

Mini-Lesson: Chart paper
Markers

Yellow: Sticky notes
The book Little Polar Bear and the Brave Little Hare

Blue: The book Insect Lives

Mini-Lesson (15 minutes): Let's talk about the book Fly Away Home. What was the problem in the story? What did Andrew and his father do during the day at the airport? What kinds of emotions did Andrew go through in the book? Why do you think he felt that way?

- Make a character traits web of Andrew's emotions and traits. Tell students that they will be writing about one of the traits in tomorrow's lesson. If students do not mention the following emotions and traits, make sure to include them in the web:

- Lonely
- Scared
- Hopeful
- Sad
- Happy
- Careful
- Friendly
- Loving
- Supportive

Yellow (~20 minutes):

- Tell students to re-read the beginning of the book. Tell them that while they are reading, they should mark pages that they can find contractions on with a sticky note. While they are doing this, take a running reading record of one of the students in the group.
- Once students have finished re-reading the beginning of the book, discuss the contractions that they found. Make a list of them and discuss what two words they are broken down into.
- Tell students to read on to page thirty. When they finished, discuss what happened in the book. Make a list of setting traits using picture clues. Tell students that pictures can tell them a lot about a book.
- Let students know that they will figure out what happens in the book tomorrow.

Blue (~20 minutes):

- Discuss rules for a conversation with students. Make sure they understand that they need to follow all rules when they begin their conversation.
- Ask students to begin their conversation. One student should share a new learning or wondering. Another student should respond to that comment. The students continue their conversation without interrupting one another. They should take turns sharing new ideas and responses.

When the conversation slows down, ask students what they need to work on for the next group meeting. Tell students that they need to read six more pages for their next meeting. They will need to use their sticky notes to mark pages on which they have a new learning or wondering. They can also mark where they have made a connection.

Example of Rules to Create with Students

Read with Someone

What I will be doing	What the teacher will be doing
Read quietly	Meeting with reading groups
Sit in one spot	Walking around to observe students
Talk quietly with my partner	Working with individual students
Read the whole time	Keeping track of time
Get started right away	Making sure all students are on-task
Ask my partner for help if I need it	
Reread the book if I finish early	
Hold the book together	
Check for understanding when my partner is reading	

Appendix C: Tips for Ongoing Experience**Tips for Self-Reflection- Items to Consider**

- Describe your implementation of the strategies from the programs. How do you feel the information was relayed to students? Do you think they understand the concepts and strategies?
- How can instruction be changed to be more beneficial to students? What would you keep the same? Why?
- What are the successes and needs that arose from the day/week of workshops?
- When observing in another's classroom, what would you say are positive aspects of the programs' implementation? What feedback could you give the teacher?
- How can you change your own practice after observing in another classroom?
- How has the program impacted your students' learning?
- What are your future plans for implementing the Daily 5 and Literacy Café programs?
- Overall, how do you feel about reading and writing workshops? Why? How can you make it better or what would you like to keep the same?

Feel free to add your own thoughts to the reflection. This is for your own personal growth! Please share your thoughts at your mentor meetings and with the literacy coach.

Tips to Guide Mentor/Study Group Meetings

- Share experiences of the past three weeks. What went well and what did not go well?
- Give one another feedback and suggestions on how to improve upon areas that did not go well.
- Discuss observations made in classrooms. What did you learn from them?
- Share stories of personal reflection.
- Ask questions about specific aspects of the program that may be confusing. For example, ask “How do I instruct students to become more independent in using comprehension strategies during independent reading?”
- Share research you have found on grouping for reading instruction.
- Discuss student progress and how this can be maintained or increased.
- Share overall thoughts about the programs and their implementation in the classrooms.
- Discuss the plans for the next meeting. Should teachers come prepared with something specific to share?

Observation Form

Teacher:

Teacher Observed/Grade Level:

Date:

Mini-Lesson

- What were the strategies taught/ used during the mini-lesson?
- Did modeling occur during the mini-lesson? How did this contribute to student learning and understanding of the concept?
- Did students understand the concept being presented? Based on observation, do you believe students can now use the strategy independently? Why or why not?
- Overall comments about mini-lesson:
- Things to remember:

Daily 5 Work/Guided Reading Groups

- Were students engaged and on-task during the workshop? Write some observations made.
- How did the teacher monitor student behavior during the workshop? Did the teacher meet with guided reading groups? Discuss guided reading group lesson.
- Notes on the Daily 5/Reading workshop:
- Overall comments:
- Feedback/Suggestions for teacher:
- Personal reflection: How can I incorporate what I have learned into my classroom?