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Insights from Complexity: A Study of the Implementation of a District-Wide Literacy Initiative through the Lens of Complex Systems Theory

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INSIGHTS FROM COMPLEXITY: A STUDY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A
DISTRICT-WIDE LITERACY INITIATIVE THROUGH
THE LENS OF COMPLEX SYSTEMS THEORY

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This work would not be possible without the inspiration of the lineage of women in my family. This work is dedicated to my daughters, Emily Margaret Adams, Sarah Katherine Adams, and Mary Elizabeth "Molly" Adams. My daughters are my heart and soul, and I am so proud of them. They inspire me to reach for the stars.

This work is also dedicated to the long line of educators in my family, beginning with my great-grandmother, Adeline Bacon Iles, her daughter, my grandmother, Mary Violet Iles Hudson and to my mother, Linda Kathleen Davis Hudson, whose patient encouragement steeled me for the years of graduate work required to pursue a doctorate. I am so loved by this warm blanket of women surrounding me. How could anyone fail with so much love and support?

I am also eternally grateful for the guidance and push provided by my spiritual teacher, Sri Ganapathi Sachchidananda Swamiji. When I wanted to give up, he said, "You must finish." I offer this doctorate in service to humanity.

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ABSTRACT

Complexity Theory provides unique insights into the implementation and operations of a district literacy initiative. The successful and unsuccessful structures of the literacy initiative are examined through a complexity lens in order to gain insight into the relationships between elements of a complex system and its processes operating within a "top-down" educational directive and the resulting "bottom-up" resistance.

This qualitative study uses a phenomenological approach to advance complex systems theory. This allows a multi-dimensional exploration of the fundamental attributes of the district initiative, its processes and the relationships within those processes. The literacy initiative in a large urban school district is considered from the experiences of members at every level of the system. Intricate interactions of the participants within the system are explored through the lens of complexity in order to gain an understanding for future implementation of literacy initiatives.

For the purpose of the research, the district, the classroom, the faculty, the students, and their learning are considered by the study to be components of a complex adaptive system, as well as Complex Adaptive Systems in and of themselves. The study of the interconnectedness among these agents illuminates the activities and structures within the system design that facilitate or hinder meaningful change for the system.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Rationale

Complexity theory has its roots in chaos theory, which is an effort to understand and describe a particular behavior of complex systems (namely, chaos) while complexity theory is an effort to explore the behavior of complex adaptive systems from a more *holistic* perspective. Examples of complex adaptive systems (CAS) are "social systems, ecologies, economies, cultures, politics, technologies, traffic, weather" (Dooley, 1997, p. 77). Given the broad applications of complexity theory, it is plausible that it could be applied to any system, including educational systems. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the processes and relationships among members of an educational system using complexity theory to explore the implementation of a school district literacy initiative in a large urban school district.

Background of the Problem

Though intuitive non-linear processes may be subverted in the current data-driven education model, complexity thinking acknowledges that a school district and its parts are a complex adaptive system (CAS) and, therefore, capable of generative behavior and adaptation, both individually for teachers and students, and as a living system. (Davis & Sumara, 2008). There is no need to discount the rational paradigm, and complexity theory puts forward that all other paradigms have a place, as well as other human attributes and other ways of "knowing" (Fleener, 2002, p.104).

> Phenomena such as personal cognition, collective action, educational structures, and cultural knowledge are dynamically similar. *All* are learning systems, where learning is understood as a process through which a unity becomes capable of more flexible, more creative activity that enables the unity to maintain its fit to its ever evolving context." (Davis & Sumara, 2008, p.92)

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Complexity Theory

Complexity theory encourages a "both-and" approach to understanding adaptive systems. Multiple and dynamic interactions and patterns of relationship are the focus of systems science (Fleener, 2002, p. 104). Fleener argued that scholars must become comfortable with uncertainty and with shifting goals. It is this aspect of complexity theory that traditional researchers find most at odds with current professional development for classroom teachers. The focus of the study was to explore the current local trends in changing literacy practices as implemented by one school district and to consider how those trends correspond with complexity theory. Chapter 4 explores complex adaptive systems and complexity theory more thoroughly.

Accountability in Literacy Education.

Though accountability in literacy is about making certain pedagogy at the classroom level is effective so that each student can read on or above grade level, the issue of accountability in literacy also has global implications. The student who reads below level struggles in school and many times drops out; thus the reading deficit makes it difficult for that student to find meaningful work for a life-sustaining and fulfilling career. Ultimately the student is a member of a global community to which every member should have an opportunity to contribute in a way that he or she becomes an agent of his or her learning.

While there are other, more traditional perspectives of accountability in literacy, literacy is more than reading and writing. Some schools of thought strictly adhere to whether classroom practices include the five components of literacy that were identified by the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000): phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, and seek competence in those narrow aspects of literacy development. Literacy is about more than these base components. Literacy is the ability to communicate with family and community,

whether that is a school, neighborhood, and civic or global community. The literacy as competence perspective has pushed practitioners and policy makers to clarify definitions of literacy. It has also led to a heightened awareness of the societal connections between education, the work place, and personal development. It appears that those who define literacy and its practices are the ones who control literacy. This study will examine how external, top-down control of school level and classroom practices interacts with what could otherwise be a dynamic and generative system.

Statement of the Problem

District leaders, like those in the study, hired employees who could be trained in the methods of the district's purchased literacy programs. The advertised job requirement for a Literacy Coach in the school district specifically stated that no experience in reading instruction was required.   Literacy coaches in the district were hired to oversee the implementation of purchased programs and to act as fidelity-enforcers for the district and publisher. These programs ranged from quasi-best-practices-type programs such as *Read180* (Hasselbring, Feldman, & Kinsella, 2004) published by Scholastic and adopted in 2007 to rigidly systematic phonics programs like *Language!* (Green, 2006) published by Sopris-West and adopted in year 2007. In 2007, the school district also adopted and then abandoned in the same year a cross-curricular program by a group of consultants that provided systematic literacy strategies for use across the curriculum (Honig, Diamond, & Gutlohn, 2013). Coaches were trained by the CORE consultants and were expected to train core content faculty at their schools in those strategies, help teachers implement those strategies in lessons, and monitor the use of those strategies by observation and tracking, all without the benefit of experience in reading instruction.

The duties of newly hired coaches were defined by the school district, and they were referred to by district-level administration as "literacy coach." The literacy coach engaged in "walk-throughs" in the reading intervention classes under their direction, which meant walking into the class unannounced to see that the model of the publisher's lesson was being implemented with "fidelity" by the teacher.

The coach was the site-situated tool of both the district and publisher for making sure the program was explicitly followed. This reflected the shift away from teacher-autonomy toward fidelity to a program. The teacher's authority and knowledge in the classroom was no longer valued. Instead, the teacher was a vehicle for delivering a program. The interconnectedness among factors that would illuminate the relationship between the components of the system and the dynamic, generative potential of the system itself are unknown.

I began my employment in this district as a teacher, first in an elementary school and then as a middle school English teacher. I moved to the high school level as a reading specialist, teaching reading classes throughout the day in 2006-2007, the year before the initiative began. During my time as a reading specialist, I created my own curriculum, which I designed to align with the ELA curriculum of the district. As a reading specialist, I was free to tailor the intervention and instruction for each student based upon their individual needs. I saw tremendous growth in my students using scaffolding and a whole language approach.

During my tenure as a literacy coach in this system from 2007 to 2010, I became increasingly frustrated with the apparent dysfunction of the system. The top administrator for the literacy program had no background in literacy, yet she was making decisions for every struggling reader in the district, as well as making multi-million dollar purchases of programs based upon the promise of the sales representatives of the programs. The top administrators

relied upon outside expertise, in the form of pre-packaged programs and a consulting firm for literacy strategies, and the solutions never gained a foothold. The lack of buy-in by teachers and students and the ever-increasing pressure on literacy coaches to make faculties of their schools conform to the program left literacy coaches in a sort of limbo. Literacy coaches felt stuck between the levels in the system. Since the job description for literacy coaches stated that no background in reading was necessary, several coaches had no experience in reading or writing instruction. There were five of us with literacy specialist certification. Over the three years of the initiative, I took it upon myself to discard practices that were not well-received by teachers and create short-cuts to helping students, which often placed me in hot water with the district staff. I questioned the district's methods and made suggestions for more effective literacy instruction. It was during the time I was a part of the district literacy initiative that I began to question why this all seemed so chaotic and ineffective.

Complexity theory offers an answer, a holistic consideration of a system, including that which Bill Doll (2008) calls the *third space,* that place or space wherein lies the relationship between the scientific and the narrative, a place of ambiguity. Doll draws on Bruner's work to demonstrate the need for an acceptance and understanding of the *third space.* The third space is a place that, while bounded, also holds infinite possibilities (Wang, 2004, p. x). Bruner argues that schooling and curricula should be constructed to foster intuitive *grasping* (Bruner, 1977). Bruner also makes the case for a *spiral curriculum*, which supports the non-linear notion of the generative process as recursive. "The spiral curriculum that turns back on itself at higher levels" is how Bruner (1977, p. 13) describes it.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to use complexity theory in an effort to explore and understand a fundamental attribute of human learning and communication: school literacy, its processes and the relationships within those processes. The focus of the study was a literacy initiative of a large urban school district implemented from year to year from the perspective participants at each level of the initiative, as my insights as one of the literacy coaches, a unique position that gave perspective on district level operations as well as school, faculty and classroom level interactions, instructions, and events. Most aspects of the initiative, from planning at the district level to implementation at the classroom level were observed and experienced through the eyes of the literacy coach. Intricate interactions of the participants within the system were explored through the eyes of the participants in order to understand how future implementation of school and district literacy initiatives might be improved.

For the purpose of the research, the district, the classroom, the faculty, the students, and their learning are considered to be components of a complex adaptive system, as well as complex adaptive systems in and of themselves. A study of the interconnectedness among these factors illuminated the relationship between the components of the school literacy system and the dynamic, generative potential of the system itself, and where the generative processes faltered and became paralyzed by the structures put in place by the district or school.

Research Questions

Based on information in previous sections, following are the primary research questions that have driven the methodology of the study.

Research question one (RQ1) How are the stakeholders within a district literacy initiative system interconnected and what do these relationships reveal about the design implementation?

Research question two (RQ2) How did the design and implementation of the literacy initiative

contribute to generative processes within the literacy intervention system?

Research question three (RQ3) How did the design and implementation of the literacy

initiative thwart generative processes within the literacy intervention system?

Significance of the Research

The empirical approach to knowledge and its processes guides decision about instruction

and professional development in policy-making and administration (Lagemann, 2000). The

linear, reductionist model of schooling has seemingly worked toward an education of the masses

for centuries; however, Betts and Bailey (2005) propose that not only is this model failing

students, it also falls short of illuminating the educative processes inherent in the diverse and

complex system that is contemporary schooling (p. 420-21). Based upon the aforementioned

scholarly works, I suggest that as diversity within our schools increases, the rate of apparent

failure of the linear reductionist model will also increase, and that the external constraints on

connectedness may create resistance and limit the generative processes of constructing

knowledge at the level of the learner and her environment (New London Group, 1996).

Theoretical Framework

The Mandelbrot set is used as a geometric model for understanding the physical

manifestation of complexity theory (Brooks, 1978). Figure 1 shows the geometric model that

represents the Mandelbrot set, as well as an inset that is magnified (Mandelbrot, 2004). In the

magnification image, one can see the pattern of special relationships repeated. Every small part is

a replica of the larger design. In the Mandelbrot set, every point on the set is in relationship to

every other point (Mandelbrot, 1979).
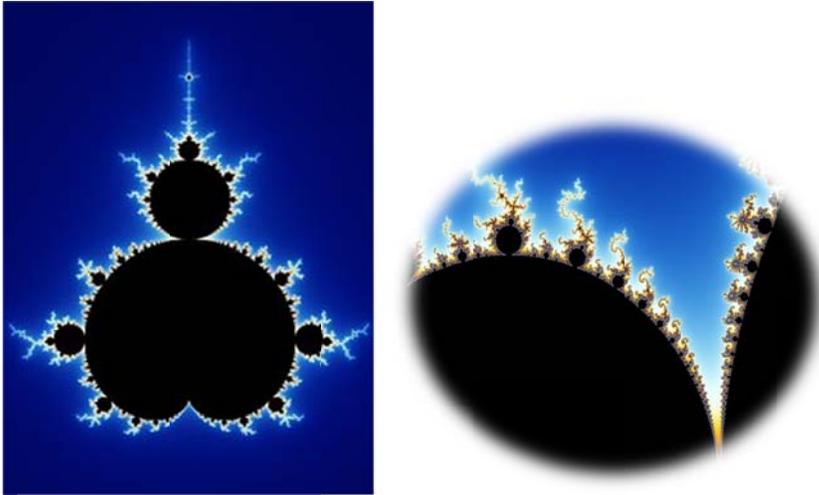
Figure 1. Classic image of the geometric model for the Mandelbrot Set and magnified portion of same image (Mandelbrot, 2004)

When applied to social systems, like schooling, this model considers every individual in the system (set) in a relationship to every other individual beginning with the smallest unit, the individual student, within the context of the classroom, the student and his learning are to be considered as the primary relationship in the system (Fleener, 2002). In order to consider this and all its implications on school literacy processes, the notion of thinking of these processes as separate parts needs to be replaced with a holistic model. John Dewey's insight and warning about divisions is especially appropriate when considering systems theory as it applies to school literacy. "Instead of seeing the educative steadily and as a whole, we see conflicting terms. Child vs. the curriculum. Individual nature vs. social culture. Below all other divisions … lies this opposition" (Dewey, 1900, p. 67). Whitehead (1929) also spoke to the need for keeping the educative process whole, "You may not divide the seamless coat of learning" (p.11). So, heeding the words of both Dewey (1900) and Whitehead (1929), Complex Systems Theory is a most-appropriate lens through which to view a holistic system, as it considers every relationship among elements of the system to contribute to the function of the whole system.

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There is a natural and organic pattern inherent in learning itself and in learning systems, according to Complex Systems Theory, and it is those patterns that need freedom to operate and thrive. *Learning systems* has a two-fold meaning. First, it is a system in which learning is taking place. Second, it is a system that is, itself, learning. By seeing comprehensively we come to experience the belonging together of the phenomena, instead of introducing connections that make them belong together. (Bortoft, 1996, p. 302) The importance of the concept of natural connections, nested relationships, and organic activities of agents within the system that provide the conditions to generate a functional learning system become apparent in later chapters as the study addresses the system under implementation of the district literacy initiative.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CONTEXT

Merging and Emerging Concepts

Why use this Complexity Theory framework? At the center of this work, lies the notion of *freedom*, which defies the idea of limiting paradigms. *Freedom* does not belong to one or another model or paradigm, but is a common thread from pragmatism through critical theory and post-colonial theory and is embodied in the crisis of representation by the delimited ways that *freedom* expresses in individuals and in human systems. This common thread is what draws me to each theory and gives me the freedom to remain outside of the necessary divisions or "boxes" to which traditional academic institutions and requirements would have me conform. If my pedagogical model is grounded in the notion of promoting the practice of freedom, then I, too, require the freedom to explore without limits placed upon my scholarship, if not for the demonstrative outcome of following my own model, then at least for the consistency of embodied practice.

A discussion of the literature of complexity might begin with an attempt to define the term; however, because of the tendency of complexity thinking to collectively draw upon theories of different disciplines and multiple perspectives, it is referred to as a *transdisciplinary* domain. Complexity thinking is called *generative* because of its dynamic, creative potential. Davis states that "many complexivists have argued that a definition is impossible" (Davis, Smith, & Leflore, 2008, p. 4).

The tenets of complexity theory assuage the criticism and present reasoning why a multi-disciplinary approach creates a robust understanding as well as potential for novel concepts about educative processes and relationships. In this chapter, I render the underlying theoretical models within education, learning and knowledge that support the use of complexity thinking in

analyzing educational research as well as a paradigmatic history of literacy education in order to place this study within the context of literacy education. Complexity thinking is transdisciplinary; it aims to embrace, blend and elaborate the insights of any and all domains of human thought. Complexity thinking recognizes deep similarities among the structures and dynamics of multiple phenomena. It is oriented by the recognition that the act of comparing diverse and seemingly un-connected phenomena is both profoundly human and, at times, tremendously productive. Complexity thinking does not rise over, but arises among other discourses. Davis' work strengthens these ideas, telling us that there is a place for inclusive thinking within the academy and choosing one way of understanding over another is unnecessary (Davis, Smith, & Leflore, 2008).

Drawing upon both Freire, and Krishnamurti to think and talk about different research interests, I've found relevance in many paradigms and look at the common thread of freedom, agency, and love that is woven through all of these scholars' writing. All speak to topics of freedom and agency. Freire (1970) uses the term "conscientization" to describe an emergence akin to adaptation to circumstances that require solutions to serious problems in the lives of learners/people (p. 99). Through a process of conscientization and subsequent decodifying and analyzing the structures of oppression, Freire's goal was to liberate humanity. This grand vision of a liberated humanity appears to lend itself to liberation of individual minds within the classroom, within relationships of educative systems. It is akin to the knowledge that ten thousand drops of water can cause the same destruction of the boulder of injustice as one hammer blow. Krishnamurti's (1953a) writings discuss the liberation process at the level of the individual and trust of the individual and his/her innate knowledge to guide the educative process.

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Complexity theory supports my attempt to draw upon different paradigms for consideration of the processes of liberation pedagogies. Complexity theory allows consideration of common themes among different paradigms of liberation pedagogy, like freedom, oppression, and agency. Complexity thinking provides language to discuss systemic liberation grounded in the liberation of the individual and the hope for a shared liberation of and through educational systems. Ultimately, the common threads between complexity thinking and liberatory education become apparent.

Documentation

Scholarly books, seminal journal articles, and research documents were reviewed through the Louisiana State University Library. Additional databases searched included EBSCO host and Google Scholar. The online databases of Google also provided information for the search of the pertinent literature. Bibliographic and reference listings were accessed from appropriate titles discovered within the review process. Approximately seventy current scholarly articles pertaining to literacy, coaching, complex systems, and professional development were reviewed. Below is an overview of the literature pertaining to my topic, including the historical literature, as well paradigmatic scholarly contributions.

History of the National Literacy Agenda

The perceived "crisis" in literacy began as U.S. Army recruits for World War I were tested for reading skills; many were considered functionally illiterate and unable to handle the required reading for training in the U.S. Army. Thorndike (1917/1971) was a major contributor to the creation of tests for these assessments and continued his work in the emerging field of Educational Psychology. Though Thorndike held a behaviorist understanding of human learning, his most important contribution to reading was his concept of "reading as reasoning" (Thorndike,

1917/1971). Not only was Thorndike (1917/1971) applying what he saw as "science" to the study of education and reading, statistics was becoming a more exact science and was now being applied to the social sciences as well as the hard sciences.

Based upon the research done with eye movements, in the 1920s, silent reading was seen as more efficient than oral reading, so The Silent Readers, as well as other basal readers were published in which children were not allowed to read orally. The Dick & Jane primers were widely used after the 1920s at least through the time I was taught to read in first grade in 1968 (Elson, 1930). The look-and-say method, which teaches children to read whole words rather than breaking the words down into phonetic units, used in these books was the prevailing method of reading instruction in North America for most of the mid-20th century. Depending upon the teacher, phonics instruction may or may not have taken place.

An apparent gap between instruction and skills was observed as standardized tests became more widely used. Lindquist developed the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in 1929. These tests prompted criticism of the instruction of primary grade students and elementary teachers were blamed for the low reading scores and poor writing skills of secondary and college students. Though teaching methods were blamed for the low scores on standardized tests, other conditions not considered were the home environment (reading readiness), available resources, class sizes, and socio-economic background.

Readiness for reading became a topic of concern during the 1930's when newly minted IQ tests revealed that children matured at different rates. The questions then surrounded the timing of the introduction of reading instruction and the general answer was "age 6 ½ " and not before, though others warned against accepting this as a rule. Gates (1932) and Gray (1922) were prominent researchers associated with this readiness movement, as well as the graduated

introduction of vocabulary and matching vocabulary-based texts. The use of vocabulary lists was present in basal readers in the 1930's and the lists increased in size by grade level, with stories containing text that included mostly those vocabulary words and the ones on lists from lower levels. Gates was considered the authority on the words, which should be included in the graduated vocabulary lists and became the senior author of the *Peter and Peggy*, *The Work-Play* books, a reading series by McMillan and Gray became the co-author of the *Dick and Jane* series by Scott Foresman (Gates, 1932; Gray, 1922; Elson, 1930).

By 1937, focus on reading difficulties had moved from the instruction as the cause of the problem to the child as the cause or foundation of the problem, so there was a need for reading intervention at the individual level. The correction of problems at the student level began with reading clinics within schools. Teachers were taught how to remediate reading for individual students. This seems to be the beginning of the reading specialist concept, though "reading specialist" as a profession had not been named. In the early 1950's poor reading was considered to be akin to illness, one that could be fixed with a scientific or medical approach to remediation. Here is the beginning of the medical metaphor that would eventually infuse itself into the work of the NRP in 2000 (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000).

Throughout the 1930's and 1940's, both progressive and educational psychologists purported the effectiveness of the whole-word method for reading instruction. In 1949 the National Society for the Study of Education published a list of standards of a good reading program (Henry, 1949). The standards look remarkably like what would be considered a whole language program today. It was shortly after this that the "progressive" moniker became a dirty word in the accusations tossed about in reading circles and U.S. society at large.

Chall (1967) emphasized the importance of carefully constructed textbooks and the importance of following the wisdom of the book. This was the beginning of publishers and administrators overriding instructional decisions that had been left to the classroom teacher until the 1960's. There is still attention to fidelity to the program in contemporary reading programs implemented in schools across the nation. Concurrent to this trend, publishers suggested this method led to meaningless and shallow language structure, without narrative quality and failed to introduce complex vocabulary to children (Whipple, in Henry, 1949). Whipple criticized this and wrote a chapter in the yearbook of the National Survey of Student Engagement for parents of students to help them understand the process of reading instruction, "Interpreting the Reading Program to the Public" (in Henry, 1949). Parent Teacher Organizations and the general public began voicing their opinions and criticisms of the reading profession as the size of the functionally illiterate population apparently dwindled from one third to one half of adults in the United States.

In 1955, Flesch published *Why Johnny Can't Read*. In this landmark book, Flesch lambasted the proponents of the word method and blamed them for the poor reading scores and low literacy in the U.S. In his book, Flesch instead provided what he considered the correct method of reading instruction – phonics. His book included 74 pages of phonetic lists and 9 charts of block and script letters that parents could use at home to undo what he saw as the damage of the look-and-say methods taught in schools. Flesch (1955) saw this as the only method for students to be able to understand new words they encountered as their reading expanded. Studies in the 1960s generally supported the phonics approach, but the underwriting of many studies by publishing companies makes the results of those studies questionable. This turn in the 50's and 60's prompted publishers of reading textbooks to include both phonics and

word methods in their books. Most presented beginning words that were phonetically spelled, and progressed to more complicated words. This development prompted teachers to begin again teaching phonics directly.

Reading scholars defended more holistic instruction by referring to the outcome of Flesch's (1955) instruction as "word-calling" and the outcome of their methods as "thought-getting." The progressives espoused the need to understand the language to be able to understand information in the alphabetic language even if the parts of the language, letters and words are recognized. Progressives who support holistic language and literacy instruction purport that it is possible to know a word without knowing its meaning. The two camps were incorporated into an officially impartial International Reading Association in 1956.

As a result of public outcry, in the 1960s some reading textbooks and, therefore, teachers began teaching both sight-words and phonics together and it was during this time that school systems sought the help of experts to develop programs. The publishers answered this call with such programs as DISTAR (Direct Instructional System for Teaching and Remediation), which was based upon direct and constant instruction of systematic phonics (Englemann, 1968). Publishers of the programs solicited school boards and school administrators and the reading industry was born. Not only were publishers providing books for schools to assist the teachers in reading, the publishers were now providing the whole reading program.

Schools also began hiring reading specialists or teachers who helped remediate non-readers and students diagnosed with dyslexia. Reading specialists were often used in pull-out programs, meaning students were removed from their regular classroom for remediation in another location. Some reading specialists were responsible for professional development regarding literacy for school site faculty. Because of this need, university education departments

began instruction for reading specialists. The presence of reading specialists outside the regular classrooms allowed teachers to continue with what they found to be effective reading instruction in their individual classrooms, using the materials provided by the school, but free to interpret its use in their individual classrooms.

Harste (1984) conducted studies about young children's reading and writing knowledge before entering school to school, which contributed sociolinguistic insights into literacy learning. Other insights into the sociolinguistic nature of literacy came from Goodman (1986), who through his previous work in 1965 on miscue analysis contributed greatly to understanding the sociolinguistic effects on pronunciation in oral reading, now produced insights on the teaching of reading as *whole language*. Further understanding of how children join a community of literacy as readers came from Smith (1987). The whole language movement was a bottom-up, grass-roots approach to literacy that began during this time.

Clay's Reading Recovery program heralded a shift away from intensive teaching of skills to struggling readers in the 1990s. (Clay, 1993) Reading Recovery supporters saw Reading Recovery as more than an instructional method; it was a philosophy of reading that included the belief that the skills involved in reading were acquired through reading real books, not through direct instruction only. Reading Recovery reading philosophy used pictures, context, and modeling with phonics being taught only as needed in response to children's reading behaviors, as well as miscues, as demonstrated within the context of reading. Motivation was a priority and there was no place for isolated teaching of reading skills. This method was wholly adopted in California in 1987.

Reading Wars

The debate over the best methods to teach reading came to be called the "reading wars" in the late 20th century. Though the reading wars had been part of an ongoing education debate for nearly two hundred years, political and religious factions became part of the debate over systematic skills instruction versus whole language approaches in the 1980s. As political and religious factions stoked parents' fears of substandard instruction in reading, parents became a target market for new commercial programs. The swell in parental concern brought pressure on politicians to implement phonics-based programs in schools, as well as to start charter schools that would institute back-to-basics instruction, including the teaching of explicit, systematic phonics. In the late 1990s, California started a wave of required phonics instruction that created what is now referred to as balanced literacy instruction, meaning that there is a balance between phonics and whole language methods used to teach reading.

Systematic skills instruction was (and is) generally supported by teachers and scholars who have an analytic worldview, while whole language proponents are more likely to have a more holistic worldview. Those with the analytic worldview tend to require guaranteed outcomes, a controlled and predictable way of knowing the world. Those with a holistic worldview are more concerned with individual freedoms and self-expression, as well as a naturalistic approach to education, in general. In the end, there was a general understanding among reading scholars that it is best to fit the method to the child rather than the child to the method.

National Standards

In 1983, under President Ronald Regan, *A Nation at Risk* was published. *A Nation at Risk* was a national report declaring that modern U.S. education was failing by the national and

international measures, was published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The national standards-based education and assessment movement then began with the *Improving America's Schools Act* of 1994 (IASA), which was a reauthorization of the 1965 *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (EASA), a key component of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. Both acts proposed directing federal funding to schools with high poverty and underachieving students. Title I was, and is, the federal funding entity, of EASA. Content and performance standards were parts of an accountability system developed to help identify schools that were not helping students achieve. In 1994, ESEA was rewritten to require States and school districts to connect federal funding programs with state and local reforms.

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), which infused EASA with new powers. NCLB was enacted with the goal of making schools accountable for closing the performance gap and improving student achievement. President Bush believed the source of the achievement gap was low expectations for children of poverty, so NCLB was meant to increase the standard of education for all students. NCLB mandated states to define proficiency in reading and math for grades three through eight, which meant that there were different standards in each state. The goal was set for states to have the majority of their students meeting proficiency in reading and math by 2014 and funding was provided to states and local districts to help students achieve these state goals (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003).

The state accountability to federal mandates was applied to local school districts and, by extension, local schools and classrooms. The mandates at the top levels of this system reached into the daily instruction happening in the classroom through state and district oversight. In order to maintain funding, schools and districts had to prove compliance, which led to tight control over instruction, especially in reading and math.

The impact of instructional approaches is most often evaluated through the use of standardized tests. Through the 1990s and 2000s, large-scale group standardized tests tended to focus on student proficiency in performance standards, regardless of the type of instruction children received. Statewide assessments attempted to measure student progress toward the attainment of goals set by content and performance standards. The tests were used to collect information that would ultimately hold schools and districts accountable for student learning. The abilities and skills measured by the mandated assessments served to privilege certain skills over others, and thus significantly influenced instruction as teachers increasingly were held accountable for their children's performance as defined by these tests. Reliance on measures of children's skills as the only important indicator of a school's and ultimately a school system's quality led many school districts to attempt to regulate and control classroom literacy practices. At the heart of a district's control of classroom literacy practices is the question of who defines literacy and what it means to be literate, which is entwined in standardized testing as both the goal and measure of classroom literacy practices.

Systems and Control

Garan (2002) exposes the agenda of educational reformers that force an emphasis on measuring program effectiveness through standardized testing *Resisting Reading Mandates*. Neither does Garan hold back in her assertion that profit and control are the driving forces behind *testing and accountability*. Garan (2004) presents a clear picture of the profit-incentive for failing and closing schools only to be transformed into profit-making private or charter schools. Garan (2002) explains how profit driven motives lead to the need for tighter control of classroom practices in an attempt to produce quantitative outcomes.

In the complex systems approach to social structures and management, the bottom-up model is a healthy, organic way of allowing the smallest units of the system to generate the direction of the larger system and the top-down model is an externally (administratively, in this case) controlled direction of the system, which does not allow generative systems to thrive at the lower levels. Interesting phenomena happen when the smaller parts of the system are overly constrained, for example, the smaller units begin gaming the system.

Kumashiro (2008) addresses the politics of control by describing how policy-makers and publishers induce fear in society of a failing education system. This public fear underwrites spending in the for-profit standards and testing business, as well as guaranteed for-profit programs meant to offer a prescription for the perceived illness of low reading scores. By regulating what and how teachers teach, policy-makers, through publishers, control knowledge, skills, and perspectives of certain groups.

The hegemonic control is based on the underlying premise that cultural literacy is the goal of schooling, so "the social negotiations of the rules of proper behavior, laws, and social institutions are not conducted among equals because social, economic, and political circumstances (history) have given certain groups license to assert undue influence over the outcomes" (Shannon, 2007, p. viii).

Overview of Complex Systems Theory

Complex systems theory (CST) originates in the theoretical understanding of the biological sciences, specifically evolution. This biological theory evolved into a theory of organizational systems. The study of complex adaptive systems expanded and was eventually applied to social systems and management. Understandably, complex systems theory is now used to comprehend characteristics of educational systems. Contemporary scholar, Kauffman (2008),

whose background is biology and evolution of complex systems, has made key contributions to this field, identifying the central elements of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS). The activity of complex systems theory has as its purpose what is referred to as the "generative process." This generative process is the act of a system evolving to solve its own problems, create its own new way of being, as a result of a certain set of conditions that allow for its creative evolution. Is it a leap to move from biological evolution to educational systems? CS Theorists do not see it as a leap, but instead present methodical connections via the shared elements of both complex systems (Davis & Sumara, 2008). The science of organizational systems considers the generative processes happening within social systems. This science is theoretically applied to economic, management, and educational systems with the basis of application being the general characteristics of complex adaptive systems.

In *Re-creating Heart,* Fleener (2002) articulates the need to change our way of seeing. She asks us to leave behind the *logic of domination* that is control oriented and objective, certain and definitive. Fleener suggests that post-modern logics require us to straddle paradigms, which is exactly what I attempt to do in this study. Therefore, I allow the borders to blur as I fluidly shift from one to another paradigm, in an attempt to follow a thread of logic that is beyond any rigid paradigmatic label. Through examining these issues without paradigmatic boundaries, deep commonalities in complex systems are uncovered.

Systems logic explores the complexity of a system as the interconnectedness and patterns of relationships within the system. The system can only be understood from the perspective of interdependent organizational structure and evolving dynamics.

Some basic premises of Systems theory:

> A universe that is self-organizing.
> A universe that is a vast web of interconnected and reoccurring patterns.

A universe where change is preceded by disequilibrium.
Within chaos there is order.
Within complexity there is simplicity. (Cilliers, 1998; Davis & Sumara, 2008)

The work of Kucer and Silva (2006) addresses the linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and developmental dimensions of literacy. Kucer and Silva do not privilege one dimension over another, but instead consider all four dimensions of literacy as important to the teaching and learning. With practical strategies, Kucer and Silva provide a framework within which the four dimensions can be used in the classroom. Teaching in this way does require a deep understanding of what reading and writing require linguistically, cognitively, socioculturally, and developmentally.

Bloome (2005) sheds light on the analysis of discourse of modern classroom language and literacy from a social linguistic and social interactional perspective. The focus of attention is on actual people acting and reacting to each other, creating and recreating the worlds in which they live. The interactions among teachers and students are subjected to a microethnographic magnifying glass where the ways in which students and teachers use language and other ways of communication tend to construct the events of the classroom. This is done by showing the interactions and power relations in sociocultural analysis, sociolinguistics, positionality, identity, power and meaning making within dialogue among people, as well as the complexity of the situations that they create through their dialogue and cultural actions. Classroom literacy events as cultural action yield the creation of new or recreation of old patterns, as well as the social construction of identity. Essentially, the close analysis of who does what with language to whom, when, where, how, and why is a model for using micro-ethnography to understand the deeper structures at play within classroom communications (language and literacy events) (Bloome, 2005). In this paper, *text* means a pattern of signs and *the text* as a syntactic system set

of verbal signals (Cobb & Kallus, 2011, p. 130).   James refers to reading as a "choosing

activity" (James, 1890).

Like Bloome, Poyner and Stahl (2005) delineate the ongoing criticisms of the NCLB

policies and the National Reading Panel. Their text claims that the version of failing schools that

is being sold to the public has a hidden agenda. Armed with the evidence and arguments in this

book, it would be easier to fight against the literacy programs that have been failing our students.

Teachers are shown in a light that illuminates the stress of performing to make the students

perform, driven by the conservative right. The "What" of "What is gained?" and the "Why" do

they need to do this are answered with a daring attitude and the authors suggest that phonics, and

mandated programs that disempower teachers and students are part of a sinister and malicious

attempt to control the education system, especially children of minority families who make up

large portions of the student population in many public school systems (Poyner & Stahl, 2005).

This attempt to control minority children is especially evident in mandated approaches to

language and literacy instruction that fail to acknowledge the importance of connecting the

language of formal instruction to the home languages of students.

Rickford and Rickford (2000) give credence to the debate for the value of Black

Vernacular English, the dialect of English that has been dismissed as improper English for many

years and yet is the home language of significant numbers of children in American public

schools. There is a thorough discussion of the place that Black Vernacular English has had in

education, literature, community, family and individual African American identities. Rickford

and Rickford present a history lesson of Black English, especially the Ebonics debate that

originated in California and helped spark a shift away from whole language instructional

approaches then in vogue in that state and across the country. The authors show how Spoken

Soul is derived from African roots. In the end, the authors agree that African-Americans must master Standard English for survival in school and success in the business world, but they also show the value of Spoken Soul as an important and soulful linguistic tool among black people.

The Willie Lynch Letter (Malik-Hassan El, 1999) reveals post-colonial ties between the Civil War era and now. The design of social and psychological control over the people who were enslaved is horrific enough, but it is even more horrific when the thinly veiled remnants (some barely remnants at all, but large whole pieces of fabric) are uncovered in modern approaches to educating minority populations. The initial shock of the words and language used by Lynch eventually lead to an academic consideration of text with associations between advice given slave-owners by Lynch to current policies that serve the continual enslavement of the African Americans in our culture (Mallick-Hassan, 1999).

Delpit describes the "mother tongue" and the soothing sounds coming to the womb from the outside world, and values of the native language to the roots of a community, a culture. This is an obvious dichotomous text to *The Willie Lynch Letter* and showed a bright contrast between the then and now. The way that Dr. Delpit describes the "Mother Tongue" is a compelling emotional and sociocultural argument for continuing to allow this Mother Tongue to have its place within the lives of black students, even while at school (Delpit, 2008).

Hilliard (2002) is equally critical of educational literature that eliminates the voice of black Americans. The Afrocentric perspective supports her assertion that the African American educational philosophy has been the best thing for African students. Delpit and other scholars purport that the progressive education that happened in the all-black schools before integration was actually a better education that the post-desegregation education of African American students (Delpit, 2008; Hilliard, 2002). Finn (1999) makes the point that schools in working-

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class neighborhoods do not generally provide the form of literacy instruction [reading and writing] that prepares working class children for occupations of leadership and power. Finn argues that this is not done intentionally, but rather, is accomplished as part of the societal status quo that is perpetuated by a stratified society. The trend that Finn (1999) addresses is a reality in today's curriculum, as illustrated by the alternative degree tracks for those who do not aspire to attend college, opting instead for occupations in manual labor, retail, and the like.

Elbow (2002) stresses the need to make room for grammar that includes dialect and diversity of expression. The reality for multiple literacies as valid and useful must be held open while encouraging freedom of expression and exploration of individual creative and critical thought. So, in this global perspective of literacy, cultural and linguistic diversity are resources just as surely as our natural land resources (New London Group, 1996). These human resources have the potential to open communication, deepen understanding, inspire tolerance, engage citizenship, and promote peace.

An interesting observation here is that these outcomes appear to be as soft as the pedagogy that yields them. Perhaps when value is placed on these outcomes, the way of inclusion and multiplicity will transform our practice into one that becomes acceptable to each one of us and the whole of us. The increase of views on the nature of literacy has broadened our perception of the nature of literacy in a sociocultural context. While it is true that some of the more extreme analyses of literacy are associated with political activism or extremism, it is also true that analysis and discourse in this area have had a significant impact on the practice of literacy. Bringing an inclusive agenda to literacy pedagogy benefits our ever-changing linguistic landscape and cultural community.

Ideological literacy asks us to view literacy as more than the ability to decipher or encode messages on paper. There is an increasingly evident need to view literacy in the dynamic contexts of politics, social change, development, education, religion, philosophy, confrontation, and even war (New London Group, 1996).

These views of literacy are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they represent points on a continuum between "action" and "system." At one extreme, autonomous literacy is viewed as something isolated from everything else, as a personal skill or characteristic. At the other extreme, it is seen almost as a primal element in the construction of reality. A consequence of these views of literacy has been that specialists in the field have become more aware that literacy, in both theory and practice, is more than a simple technical skill. Studies that looked at the teaching of writing mechanics and grammar in isolation from authentic writing showed that there is only a "negligible or even harmful effect on improving students' writing," but when discussion about word usage and sentence construction accompanies authentic writing, this seems to help students the most (Routman, 1996). By extension, literacy, on its own, does not lead to health, wealth, happiness, and national development. Literacy is but one element in the development of a democratic society.

In order to explore this space of freedom from past paradigms, my focus is on the role that choice, freedom and agency play in liberating struggling students from both academic and social oppression of illiteracy and from the *silence* of powerlessness. As the antithesis to the idea of freedom in a learning system, the *banking* model of education is still a prevalent paradigm in literacy interventions, a solid constant in a business-driven, Cartesian worldview where predictability is central to the needs of the larger system. In this world-view, the learner is seen as a passive system, in which certain switches can be triggered, resulting in predictable

learning outcomes.   The concept of phonics-based instruction as it is used in commercial programs adopted in the era of NCLB is particularly repulsive to those of us who believe that students can define their own reality and guide their own learning, if given the opportunity.

In an effort to remain faithful to the tenants of complexity theory, which promotes delimiting structures as fertile spaces for generative knowledge, I plan to explore these concepts within and between varying paradigms, connecting the threads that lead to Complexity Theory. The need to re-connect the system of learning goes back to the age-old tension between dual and non-dual paradigms that began with Cartesian thought, that tricky notion that a Truth can be known about anything that is knowable. Before this, world-views were more focused upon relationships between things to be known, a dynamic exchange of the parts of the world and the knowledge that dwells within and around that world. With the mechanical age came the illusion of control, linearity, and individuality. The theoretical base of complexity brings us back full circle to uncertainty, relational and non-linear processes and gives credibility, once again, to a holistic understanding of systems of learning.

Specific vocabulary is commonly associated with the two paradigms as they relate to systems. Mechanical: epistemological certainty, cause-effect, language, individual, linear, goal directed, Truth, structure, reality, scientific rationality, objectivity, solution, mind-body dualism, scientific process.   Adaptive: uncertainty, problematic, relational, communication, dynamic process, autonomy, non-linear, recursive, context, emergent, nested, network, organic, multi-realities, multi-perspectives, chaos, subjectivity, being, existence. And metaphors for "dynamic": chaos, hidden order, fractal dimensions, emergence, strange attractors, complexity, relational dynamics, and life.

Connecting inquiry to instruction, then, would give a more cohesive connection for learners. When instruction brings prior knowledge, inquiry, and instruction together into a third space, these components of learning incubate and emerge as new knowledge. I will later explore how school systems employ the concept of schema to understand student learning; however, Bartlett (1932, p. 201) intended a broader understanding of the term "schema" to include "active, developing patterns." In other words, a *dynamic, adaptive system*. Barthes' (1977) conceptualized the intertextual nature of linguistic events, presented as the idea that a reader connects his or her prior experiences and knowledge with linguistic and nonlinguistic texts he or she reads. These intertextual associations "play off one another" (Cobb & Kallus, p. 74). In other words, there is a connectivity, feedback, and interdependence, essential attributes of a complex dynamic system. So the micro application of CAS in pedagogical schema as well as the intertextual associations of linguistic events is apparent.

It is important to consider the broader Complex System of the learner, educator, faculty, and policy systems. Several contemporary scholars like Davis (2003), Irwin (2003) and Luce-Kapler (2003) have proposed other views on learning and education that test the dominant metaphors of the linear perspective, which are founded upon assumptions of realism, universalism and objectivity. Alternately, contemporary metaphors challenge these assumptions at the methodological and epistemological levels by embracing holistic, emergent, plural, ecological and dynamic notions for describing knowledge and experience. In striving for predictable learning outcomes, the standard metaphor for education has been the factory model, which likens education to a linear assembly line, assuring that one learning module builds upon the one before it and so on. This is not only seen in grade-level constraint of content, but also in the pedagogical models enforced by systems: activate prior knowledge, model, and practice,

apply, assess. The theoretical model of complexity intentionally questions linear assumptions about learning and mechanical understanding of the processes of learning that involve a top-down hierarchy. Complexity thinking about education systems considers other viable models of education that rely upon "holistic, ecological and non-linear understandings of learning, curriculum and schools" (Betts & Bailey, 2005, p. 418).

Understanding Complexity

Complexity Theory studies the inherent pattern within a system as it is duplicated throughout the system, as seen in Figure 2, from the "micro to the macro." Following this logic, within a district reading literacy initiative, the micro, the smallest unit and the most basic relationship within the system is the relationship of reader to the text.

Figure 2. Mandelbrot image (Mandelbrot, 1982)

Bartlett (1932) first mentions the concept of schemata as a way to understand the relationships between information and learner. In this text, he refers to schemata as "active, developing patterns." In this sense, learning itself is a dynamic system, a system that adapts and constructs itself in relationship to linguistic events, where the participants within the system are the reader and text within a social context. This dynamic process is "transactional," an interaction between the reader, the text and the world. Cobb and Kallus (2012) describe the

transactional process as a complex, nonlinear, recursive, self-correcting transaction." This

transactional process is the basis, or *micro* of the system under consideration for studying

reading intervention through a lens of complexity. The *macro* includes the iterations of

transactional patterns as they repeat across the broader system, sometimes becoming a pattern

throughout the larger system.

Each part of a fractal has a particular property known as self-similarity, meaning that

every part of the image looks similar, no matter how small or how large. Nature presents fractals

in abundance. Think of tree limbs, flower pedals, leaf patterns, and shells; all have repeated

patterns at the micro and macro level. In the pattern, there are veins of the leaf of a tree, and the

same pattern is present in the branches and limbs of the same tree. Betts and Bailey (2005)

submit that social reality is like a living tree and that fractal geometry is an appropriate metaphor

for understanding education in terms of the nature of knowing and curriculum, as well as the

social constructs around knowing and curriculum. Complexity theory states that the individual

and his environment are connected, and Betts and Bailey (2005) suggest this calls for a return to

a holistic world-view, in which the notion that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts is

embraced by the scholars engaged in the study of living systems.

Extrapolating from this property of connectedness of complex systems the learner and his

environment, both the physical and social environments, are inseparable from his learning

activity, involved in a reciprocal constructing interaction of learning (Merleau-Ponty, 1945,

p.123). This reciprocal interaction for Merleau-Ponty (1945) is "a system of possible actions, a

virtual body with its phenomenal "place" defined by its task and situation" (pp. 249-50).

While complexity theory has its roots in chaos theory, chaos theory seeks to understand

and describe a particular behavior of complex systems (namely, chaos). Complexity Theory

further examines the dynamic and patterned behavior of complex adaptive systems from a more

"holistic" perspective (Dooley, 1997, p.77). Some examples of social Complex Adaptive

Systems are "social systems, ecologies, economies, cultures, politics, technologies, traffic,

weather" (Dooley, 1997, p.77).

Though this system of analysis that eschews structure is used for the study, it is necessary

to know the characteristics of a complex adaptive system as well as demonstrate the overlapping

paradigms that shed light on the aspects of complex adaptive systems. For that purpose, the

necessary qualities for a system to be characterized as complex are:

- Self-organized – Local interactions of a system produce synergy and coordination that eventually expands to include surrounding systems, forming a network of stable interactions.
- Bottom-up emergent – Change and adaptation are generated from the bottom of the organizational structure.
- Short-range relationships – The components of the system, or *agents*, tend to interact locally because of the instability of the overall system.
- Nested structure – Components of complex systems are themselves complex systems, often with repeated structural organization.
- Ambiguously bounded – Complex forms are open in the sense that they continuously exchange matter and energy with their environment (and so judgments about their edges may require certain arbitrary impositions and necessary obliviousness).
- Organizationally closed – Complex forms are closed in the sense that they are inherently stable – that is, their behavioral patterns or internal organizations endure, even while they exchange energy and matter with their dynamic contexts (so judgments about their edges are usually based on perceptible and sufficiently stable coherences).
- Structure determined – A complex unit could change its own structure as it adapts to maintain its viability within dynamic context.
- Historicity - Complex systems embody their histories – they learn – and are better described in terms of Darwinian evolution than Newtonian mechanics.
- Far-from-equilibrium – Complex systems do not operate in balance; indeed, a stable equilibrium implies death for a complex system. (Cilliers, 1998; Davis & Sumara, 2008)

Over my tenure as a literacy coach, I attempted to work within an organic and generative

space with teachers (while rejecting administrative control of our professional development from

the school district) in order to generate more effective faculty learning. This carried over to the

way I approached classroom use of professional learning. For example, teachers requested that I help them investigate the learning modalities represented by students in their classes, so I used a learning modality questionnaire with every student in the school to generate pie charts that showed teachers the breakdown of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners in their classes. Teachers used this information to adjust their instructional planning. Considering the generative potential of this bottom-up approach to learning, the association with complexity emerged.

Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) refer to this natural process of professional learning as "collaborative culture." They contrast this concept of collaborative culture with the administratively controlled model of a *contrived collegiality*. According to Hargreaves and Dawe, the former model fosters evolutionary relationships among teachers as well as promoting creative teaching and learning.

Kaufmann in *Reinventing the Sacred* (2008) explores this evolutionary creative potential. Kaufman sees us as "co-creators" in the emergent complex web of life and yields to the possibilities inherent in co-creators in awe of their joint creation and the very process of that creation. For Kaufman, newly emerged entities having their own properties and causal power have the potential to generate new knowledge, relationships, and possibilities.

DeLaat and Lally (2004) not only look at the complexity of a networked learning community, but also consider the roles of theory and praxis as elements of that complex system. Kaufman explores the unpredictability of evolution from the biosphere to the global economy as an emergent and creative system, and considers the awe with which humans might consider our own creative potential. Complex systems are generative, autonomous, and self-organizing and resist outside interference.

Gaming and stagnation are two of the ways resistance manifests when outside interference threaten the natural processes of a system. Both of these concepts are exemplified by my experience in the district literacy system. The resistance I initially experienced in my work within the school system disappeared when the teachers/learners within the system apparently no longer identified me as an outside force. One I became a part of them by acting independently of the district, teachers accepted me as part of their organic learning system.

Stacey (2001) explores the history and purpose of extending the sphere of control within organizations through control of knowledge and the ultimate importance of relationships within organizations. He discusses that aggression often occurs within a tightly controlled system, but presents an alternative that focuses on the local interactions where there exists complex, generative potential for knowledge creation. Organizational studies in complexity have gained national attention in the important work of Wheatley (2006), in which she illustrates the characteristics of large organizations in terms of complexity thinking. She definitively expresses how meaningful change happens in organizations that understand and utilize their complex, organic nature.

Using complexity thinking as a lens through which to observe organizational learning system seems obvious when the faculty of a school is seen as a complex, adaptive system that, when allowed to remain autonomous, has the potential to become a generative bottom-up emergent system. It will be valuable to consider job-embedded professional development as a way to critique the tight control a school district purports to have over the learning that happens around its literacy initiative and as a way to consider how true job-embedded learning might look from the lens of complexity thinking.

Where Phenomenology Meets Complexity

Some things just make sense, but to closely examine that thing that intuitively seems like a no-brainer gives it weight and purpose, since gut feelings don't carry much weight in the world of policy. In order to do this, I rely upon a methodology that produces data from intangible characteristics of the system. Phenomenology offers access to those intangible elements without diluting the participants' experiences through reduction, since reduction is antithetical to complexity thinking. As a holistically focused theory, complexity theory considers the whole as greater than the sum of its parts, so the approach of broad emergent themes from specific details of experiences aligns with complexity theory. Experiences of participants at each level of the district initiative are examined in a way that allows themes to emerge, in that "Phenomenological research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about phenomenon as described by participants" (Cresswell, 2009, p. 13).

According to Koopmans (2013), "Complexity theories have in common perspectives that challenge linear methodologies and views of causality. In educational research, relatively little has been written explicitly exploring their implications for educational research methodology" (p. 1). If a phenomenological study is to enable "the researcher to balance the open-ended, non-linear sensitivities of complexity thinking" a "both/and logic" (Koopmans, 2013, p.1) should be maintained, remaining compatible also with complexity theory.

Complexity Theory does not seek to address the *Why?* questions; rather, it looks at the *How?* questions. Since Willig (2001) states that phenomenological research "describes and documents the lived experience of participants but it does not attempt to explain it," (p. 52), phenomenology espouses the fundamental tenets of Complexity Theory. Neither theory absorbs the other. One simply provides access to another because of coherent theoretical concepts.

While a manageable number of Super-ordinate themes enable connection to concepts within complexity theory, a small number of Super-ordinate themes also enable representation of the nuances of participant experiences as they apply to Complexity Theory.

Borrowed from psychology, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research methodology that aims to make sense of how the individual made sense of a phenomenon within a certain context. It focuses on the experience of the individual in relation to the phenomenon. IPA presents an persuasive methodology for "formalizing a rigorous description of an approach and ability which is elementary a human one." (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 33). The methodology first made popular in psychology by Smith in the 1990's is a methodology of extracting meaning from interview transcripts that contain subtleties otherwise difficult to obtain (Smith, 1993). IPA provides a double hermeneutic in which the researcher is making sense of the participant making sense of some phenomenon (Smith, 2009). As transcripts supply emergent themes, and those emergent themes offer Sub-ordinate and then Super-ordinate themes, another level of hermeneutics is available to the researcher in that she can now use an outside theoretical perspective to illuminate the phenomenon (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). As Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) state, "IPA can take a entre-ground position here, where interpretative work can be judged to be appropriate so long as it serves to 'draw out' or 'disclose' the meaning of the experience" (p. 36). As Smith (2009) suggests, "For Husserl it was important to move from the individual instances to establish the eidetic structure or essence of experience. … and this may lead to the ability to consider the essential features of particular phenomena" (p. 38). It is this potential for IPA to access the essential features of phenomena that is most useful in bringing the features of the phenomenon into the realm of Complexity Theory.

To consider a topic from a systems perspective, Fleener (2002) says that "system features cannot be studied piecemeal" and that understanding complexity requires that we explore "how systems qua systems operate." (Fleener, 2002, pp. 2-3). Fleener goes on to say, "Understanding schooling and the curriculum from systems, process and meaning perspectives requires adopting dynamical approaches." (p. 3) I believe the IPA approach has provided that dynamical aspect to this study because IPA allows for flexibility at the level of analysis while providing a dynamic structure that grounds the analytic process.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Materials and Methods

Research Design

Complex Systems Theory (CST), a lens through which researchers study and theorize about Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS), encourages an inclusive and holistic approach to understanding systems. I applied this approach to the study of a large school district's literacy initiative. Because of this inclusive approach in CST, paradigms weave and overlap as the limitations and possibilities for implementation of the district literacy initiative were studied. The study of CAS requires an equally holistic approach. The primary interests of this research were to illuminate the attitudes, actions, and interactions of the participants within a literacy intervention in a large urban school district. Potential topics that were revealed included professional development as it was implemented through the literacy initiative, as well as dynamics among and between the levels of agents within the system, i.e. teacher/literacy coach, administration/literacy coach, and student/literacy coach relationship dynamics, including communication, instruction, professional development, and elements of implementation of the district literacy initiative. A major consideration was how this study might grasp data in a way that could eventually allow exploration of themes within the context of Complexity Theory.

In Complexity Theory, the components of a system, including the informants in the study, are called "agents" because not only are they considered to be participants in their environment, but also they are seen as having the ability to change both the dynamics and adaptation of their system. With adaptation, it must be considered that agents act upon other agents and those relationships are of primary importance in Systems Thinking. The terms "participant" and "agent" are interchangeable in this study. The state literacy plan that informed

the district literacy initiative is considered as an environmental context and not as an agent unless the words of a person representing that entity are available either from an interview or from publically available documents.

Though semi-structured interviews and the resulting analysis was intended to reveal the experiences of agents within the system, perceptions about relationships between participants, and understanding of how the levels of the network interacted with and upon the other levels. I anticipated that this process would yield a robust set of transcripts revealing the complicated interactions among the agents of the intervention system designed to implement the district literacy initiative.

I expected that this process would demonstrate: 1) how agents within a district literacy initiative and their relationships constituted a complex adaptive system and 2) that this complex adaptive system responded to a "top-down" initiative as any CAS would, and thus 3) how the possibilities for successful outcomes for students, teachers, and other members of the system were impacted. Through examination of the system in this way, I hoped to provide insight into how the design and implementation of future initiatives might benefit from the insights of Complexity Theory.

Since phenomenological studies focus on *how* participants perceive the events of the phenomenon in question, the following research questions support the disposition of phenomenology, and drive the analytic methodology of the study.

RQ1: How are the stakeholders within a district literacy intervention system interconnected and what do these relationships reveal about the design implementation?

RQ2: How did the design and implementation of the literacy initiative contribute to generative processes within the literacy intervention system?

RQ3: How did the design and implementation of the literacy initiative thwart generative processes within the literacy intervention system?

I conducted semi-structured interviews, which is recommended as an approach to obtain data for Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1993). Semi-structured interviews provide the necessary flexibility within a data collection instrument. The interview questions were designed to encourage the participant-agent to freely share experiences, as well as retrospective insights from those experiences. The questions are further designed to open dialogue that may provide insight into the relationships and structure of the system of the literacy intervention. Question topics are addressed in the form of open-ended questions, focusing upon the structure of the literacy initiative, the role of the participant-agent within the literacy initiative, relationships within the system that were observed or experienced, and experiences of participant-agent during the literacy initiative. In addition to these topics, questions also included topics about the overall impacts of the literacy initiative on participant-agents, as well as on the overall system. I met with each participant a neutral place of their choosing to nurture the informal nature of the interview and encourage open discussion of the experiences conveyed by each participant. Interview questions are available in Appendix 2.

Participants

The participants in this study are members of the different organizational levels within the school system implementing the literacy initiative. Every level of the system exists in relation to other levels of the system and every agent within those levels carried out the functions of his/her role within the district literacy initiative in relation to other agents in the system.

I used one participant from each level of the system, except where I felt two might be helpful for triangulation or demonstration of the depth and breadth of experience. Participants

who agreed to be interviewed about their experiences during the district literacy intervention for

this study and who made themselves available for interviews are listed in Table 1, along with

their corresponding schools and roles in the system. Names of participants and schools are

pseudonyms I selected to represent individual agents. I selected pseudonyms that reflect the

cultural and hierarchical identities of the participant-agents. Participants each approved the

pseudonyms used for them. School pseudonyms are used to create another layer of

confidentiality, and neither the district nor the state is named in this study. I am confident that

the range of perspectives represented by these participants provided a deeper and more complex

look at the experiences of agents within the system. Because of the revelatory nature of the

study, I chose participants who were no longer affiliated with the schools in the study, and when

I could, I chose participants who were no longer affiliated with the district in the study. Only two

of the participants continue to work in the district.

Table 1
Participants' Context within the District Literacy Initiative.

Level/role in system	Name	Age	Duration	Location
Student	Javid	24	2006-2007	Armstrong High
Student	Cory	21	2008-2010	Plato High
Teacher	Mrs. Thomas	Adult	2008-2010	Plato High
Literacy Coach	Mrs. Young	Adult	2006- 2010	Caldwell High
Literacy Coach	Mrs. Manship	Adult	2006-2007	Overlook Middle and High
School Administrator	Ms. Calloway	Adult	2007- 2010	Plato High
District Administrator	Dr. Anderson	Adult	2007 – 2010	District Leadership

Student participants were enrolled in the same schools during the years that I was a literacy coach.   I took a personal interest in both boys, coaching Javid's soccer team and mentoring Cory after taking him out of the reading intervention class to which he had been assigned so that he would not get suspended for conflicts with the teacher. I have maintained contact as an acquaintance of both young men, a relationship that provided access to these former students for the purposes of this study. The teacher participant is Mrs. Thomas from Plato High, who was an English teacher, as well as English Department Chair. Mrs. Thomas is no longer in the same position, or at the same school. Participants at the Literacy Coach Level are Ms. Young, 2006-2010 and Ms. Manship, 2006-2007. One school administrator is represented: Assistant Principal, Ms. Calloway, from Plato High in years 2007-2010. One participant representing District Administration is the former Director of High Schools and then former Associate Superintendent for Secondary Schools, Dr. Anderson.

Context

As described in Chapter 2, the NCLB Act of 2001 created new standards and goals for states to follow in order to receive federal funding. Tied to Title I Funds, NCLB increased state, district and school accountability and narrowed the definition of research upon which pedagogical choices could be made. This created a need at the state level to provide programs and practices that fit the definition of "scientifically based research," as defined by NCLB. Using this definition, publishers created reading programs that were placed on state lists of approved programs. Two of the intervention programs that were used in the district literacy initiative were on our state list of approved interventions. Also sought after were research-based strategies, which were often provided by large consulting firms and publishers.

In 2006, the school board of my large, southern, urban school board voted to implement a Literacy Initiative that would involve infusing classrooms with research-based literacy strategies, as well as widespread reading interventions. I was part of a district-wide intervention in this large urban school district during three consecutive school years 2007-2008, 2008-2009, and 2009-2010. As a researcher, I became interested in understanding the system and parts of the literacy initiative in which I held a key role. I began taking careful notes and keeping artifacts that might later hold insight; however, as an employee of the school system, I was bound by district rules and procedures. The initiative was closely monitored and strictly managed in my experience. This management and monitoring provided even more record keeping on my part because I was required to account for hourly activities throughout the workday, thus contributing to the wealth of archival data about the initiative available for this study.

Data Sources

The first data source was semi-structured interviews. These were transcribed by me and then placed into a format recommended by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) in order to ease close reading and exploratory commenting beside the text of the transcripts.

In addition to the experiences contained in the interview transcripts of the participants, this study drew upon recollections of my experiences and the artifacts I collected over a period of three years as a Literacy Coach situated in two different large urban schools during the implementation of the district literacy initiative. As a diligent record-keeper, I preserved notes, student work, teacher, administrator and district correspondence, as well as handouts from literacy coaches' meetings. The extensive collection of Literacy Coach Documents and Literacy Coach Correspondence provides corroboration about the reported experiences of participants as

well as the themes that emerged from the participant interviews. The diversity of roles, sites, and artifacts gives a broad perspective into the workings of the district literacy initiative.

Permission and Access

IRB approval was secured from Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board. I have maintained professional relationships and /or contact with the participants over the past several years. I secured written consent of permission for interviews used in the study, as well as assured the anonymity of all participants. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants and schools, including in audio files, transcripts, and telephone records. All files were stored in a secure location. All participants are current or former employees of the district in the study. Interviews took place at sites mutually agreeable to interviewees and the researcher. The two students in the study are now adults, now able to grant informed consent to participate in this research.

Procedures

For the five participants who met with me, I verbally explained the study to them upon meeting and obtained signed consent for participation in the study. Two participants preferred telephone interviews to face-to-face meetings, and I emailed consent forms to those participants, who then printed, signed, scanned and emailed the consent forms back to me. During the first few minutes of the telephone interviews I explained the study to the two telephone interviewees. At the start of the interviews, all participants were given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and were assured anonymity and given a final say about their pseudonyms.

The in-person interviews were recorded with the iPhone recording application and the file was saved and emailed to my personal computer for transcription. I transcribed the interviews verbatim with transcription equipment and the program, GearPlayer4. The telephone interviews were recorded with an application, TapeACall that merges the two callers into a third line on

which the call is recorded and the file saved. Transcription was more tedious with this method because the sound files did not work with my transcription program and equipment.

Transcripts were placed into a formatted table with an empty wide right column for handwritten exploratory commenting, and a left column for recording emergent themes. I worked from student transcripts up through district administrator transcripts using the tactics adapted and adopted form Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), methodically making descriptive notes, then linguistic notes, then conceptual notes in different colored ink, sometimes underlining particularly poignant phrases in the transcript.

During the analysis of transcripts and emergent themes, I sent two transcripts to an experienced qualitative researcher for confirmation that the emergent themes developing from my analysis of the transcripts were correct. The themes produced from my second reader/analyst were identical to the themes I found in my analysis.

Emergent themes from the transcripts were typed on pages with notation from which participant each theme came. Some of the themes had similar or identical wording across participants. I cut the themes into strips and used an envelope system to do the first level of clustered themes. This process yielded twenty-one clusters of themes, or Sub-ordinate themes, so I continued examining the themes for cross-case comparison and consideration of the importance of themes to the study. From a shorter list of eleven Sub-ordinate themes, four Super-ordinate themes emerged.

The fact that so many individual emergent themes had similar or identical wording and/or concepts confirmed for me that the participants themselves provided reliability from their individual reported experiences. None of the participants have maintained contact with each other over the past five years and some had no contact during the years of the initiative.

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Within the analysis of Super-ordinate themes, I searched through Literacy Coach Documents and Literacy Coach Correspondence for evidence that established the soundness of those themes that emerged from reported participant experiences. I provide specific excerpts or examples from the Literacy Coach Documents and Literacy Coach Correspondence to support the examination of Super-ordinate themes and Sub-ordinate themes in the cross-case analysis presented in Chapter 5.

Finally, using the four super-ordinate themes that emerged from cross-case analysis, I applied the concepts of Complexity Theory to develop an understanding of the literacy intervention system through that lens. Complexity Theory, as a field, is too broad to address in its entirety with this study and not every aspect of Complexity Theory can be addressed with the data and analysis herein, so I chose to focus on the purpose of the initiative, which was Change. I examine the concepts of change in Complexity Theory and look at the places where change did or could have occurred in the implementation of the literacy initiative.

Analysis

When I encountered transcript analysis, I had to give consideration to the best analytic methodology for this data. I determined that though Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was designed for phenomenological studies in psychology, it provided clear tactics for examining transcripts and extracting meaning from the participants' experiences through examination of the transcripts (Smith, 1993). It also fit with my study, because IPA suggests limiting the number of participants to four to ten for doctoral and professional studies, which I had already done with seven participants. In IPA, *less is more* is the general guideline for participants (Reid, Flowers, and Larkin, 2005)

Data analysis that allows for discovery is based upon the understanding that qualitative research seeks to understand and interpret as concepts emerge from the data. "Inductive reasoning allows one to explore and discover with an emerging research design rather than to test deductions from theories in a pre-determined design" (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006, p. 91). I allowed participants' experiences to form the emerging themes, relying upon emergent themes to inform and form my next levels of analysis.

The final part of the analysis addresses themes that emerged through first, second and third level analyses. As Super-ordinate themes became apparent, single words that represented the overarching concepts were applied for theoretical application. Thematic analysis generated concepts that relate back to the overall theoretical basis of Complexity Theory, especially to the processes of change in a Complex Adaptive System. The goal was an interpretation of the data that uncovered and explored the complexity of the district intervention system.

In order to remain consistent with the study of a dynamic system, I chose a dynamical analytic process, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), borrowed from the field of psychology. IPA provides a double hermeneutic that allows the researcher to take an active role in the interpretation, as well as a final step in which an outside theoretical perspective is applied. This belongs to the "hermeneutic of suspicion" or "hermeneutic of questioning" described by Ricoeur (1970) when he distinguished between the interpretive perspectives of reconstructing experience of the phenomenon in the participant's own terms and an outside theoretical perspective which attempts to shed light on the phenomenon. In this case, I extend the examination to the hermeneutic of questioining, hoping to shed light on the phenomenon though the theoretical perspective of Complexity Theory.

In the case of IPA, the researcher is making sense of the participant making sense of the some phenomenon, and developing themes from both the participant's sense, as well as the researcher's interpretive reading. Because of the depth provided by the IPA approach, I believe a phenomenological approach will disclose the depth and breadth of the networks that construct the intervention system within this district initiative, providing insight into the perceptions and attitudes of agents within the structure, and then allowing a thorough consideration of the elements that arose from the experiences of participants as elements of a complex system.

In the case of IPA analysis, the participants' experience is the primary interpretation, and the researcher's interpretation is secondary. Because of this, member checking was important (Creswell, 1994). Member checking the analysis involved confirming that my interpretation of participants' experiences revealed through their interviews was reasonable. At the end of each interview and as part of the IRB consent, I offered the participants an opportunity to review my findings from their interview, at which point they provided an email address. Once I completed the descriptive analysis, I emailed each participant an electronic copy of his/her part of the interpretive analysis from Chapter 4, along with an explanation of the IPA process. I asked each participant for corrections, clarifications, or confirmation that my analysis accurately represented his or her experience of the literacy intervention system as expressed through our interview. Six of the seven participants responded by email or text message, indicating their agreement with my representation of their experiences. Ms. Young had one or two clarifications, which I used to adjust my analysis of that part of her interview, but that did not change the emergent themes in the analysis of her interview.

The IPA methodology was adapted from Smith, Flowers, and Larkin's (2009) six steps of IPA methodology. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) emphasize that this form of analysis is not

prescriptive, encouraging exploration and innovation by the analyst in terms of organizing and

developing themes. It is at the point of the abstraction that I adapted the method to remain

consistent with the concept of a complex system, in which small acts impact the whole system.

The flexibility inherent in IPA methodology provides a structure for getting at the major themes

in the experiences of agents in the literacy initiative system, but also allowed the arrangement of

a procedure that would honor the experiences as part of a complex system.

The steps as adapted for this study are:

Step 1. A close line-by-line analysis of reported experiences, derived from semi-structured interview questions.

Step 2. Initial noting, which includes three types of comments: Descriptive, Linguistic, and Conceptual, referred to as "exploratory commenting" by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin. (See Table 2 for explanation of types of exploratory commenting.)

Table 2

Details of IPA Step 2, as presented in Smith, Larkin, and Flowers (2009, p .84)

Process	Focus
Descriptive comments	Describing the content of what the participant has said, the subject of the talk within the transcript (normal text)
Linguistic comments	Exploring the specific use of language by the participant
Conceptual comments	Engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level.

Step 3. Development of emergent themes from the exploratory commenting in Step 2 Themes are generally words or phrases that present the "essence of the piece and contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual." (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009, p. 91)

Step 4. Abstraction. Identifying patterns across emergent themes.

Step 5. Looking for patterns across cases. (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009)

One limitation of IPA methodology is the function of language. (Willig, 2001). A

criticism of IPA is that "language does not constitute the means by which we can express

something we think or feel; rather, language prescribes what we can think and feel" (Willig,

2001, p. 56). The participants used language to describe their experiences, yet language may not describe the entirety of the actual experience.

Triangulation

After exploring the participants' experiences and insights through semi-structured interview questions and the resulting discussion, triangulation involved identifying excerpts and documentation that provided evidence from archival field notes, notes from meetings, written communications, and school, and district policy documents. Further triangulation was provided through member checks and use of a second reader to insure my analysis was on target.

Bracketing of Biases

Any attempt to interpret the data in this study is understandably filtered through my own knowledge and experience, so here I present the prior mental and emotional constructs that might influence the interpretation of the data. In the broadest sense, the lens I used to consider the data, system and relationships within the system is Complexity Theory. The inclusiveness of complexity theory appeals to me, because it allows for exploration of non-linear connections and considerations of otherwise intuitive spaces within the data, spaces that make up so much of my reality as an educator.

What further appealed to me about pursuing a study of this initiative was the possibility of exploring what I was seeing as an employee and agent in the system through a scholarly lens. While I was working in the position of literacy coach in the school system in the study, I was also attending graduate courses in literacy and educational philosophy that created inner dissonance about the practices being implemented in the district initiative. Not only were the strategies presented counter to the literacy pedagogy I was studying in graduate school, but also I found one of the interventions disturbing because I felt it was humiliating for adolescents. The

frustration I experienced and that was expressed at the time by other literacy coaches motivated me to seek answers as to how the implementation of the district initiative contributed to the overall perception that things were not working.

For the most part, while I was working as a literacy coach I was able to suspend my judgment and presuppositions in order to implement the activities as outlined by the district plan. In some instances, I did not go along with the district directives and acted on feedback from teachers in my schools or acted on my own experience as a reading specialist to meet the needs of students that were not being met through the prescribed intervention programs. I removed more than one student from intervention programs when the programs did not seem to be working for those students and developed individualized interventions for those students through their core content teachers. Problems resulted from me acting on my own and not following the district implementation plan. Because of this, I gained personal and professional insights about myself as a literacy coach and about the practices and procedures of the literacy initiative.

The five years since my literacy coach role ended have created enough temporal distance for me to consider the data and relationships from a scholarly perspective. In addition to the time that has passed, my interest in considering the data as part of a complex adaptive system also allows me to set aside bias to a large degree. Though dialogue with participants created enough small fissures in brackets to allow for free expression of the participant-agent, the analysis of data gathered from those interviews was conducted within the brackets. To this end, I maintained a methodical analytical procedure, which focused my attention on the experiences of the participants rather than my own. In matters where my knowledge of the system provides background or context, I include enough details to fill in the gaps.

My own curiosity about the overall interactions among agents in the system allows me to see myself as simply one part of that complex system. Because my interest to understand the literacy initiative in terms of a complex system overrides my need to be right about what I perceived as poor practices and procedures, the temporal structure of my bracketing continued throughout data collection and analysis in order to allow themes to emerge on their own.

The results of my analyses are presented in Chapter 4 where emergent themes within each participant's perceptions of the literacy initiative are presented, and in Chapter 5 in which results from cross-case analysis are described. These data contribute to examination of the district literacy initiative as a Complex Adaptive System using the lens of Complexity Theory in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 4: FIRST LEVEL ANALYSIS

Within-case Descriptive Analysis

The following themes emerged from multiple readings of transcribed participant interviews. After two readings, I began *exploratory* comments to the side of the transcript. Exploratory comments included *descriptive* comments, with which I sought to describe the content of the participant's description of his or her experience. Underlining or quoting the language used by the participant offered *linguistic* comments. *Conceptual* comments were the way I engaged with the text of the transcript, the descriptive comments, and the linguistic comments in a way that sought to understand the concepts or questions that arose from those three analytical readings of the text. Finally, for this chapter, I reviewed the exploratory comments to see what themes emerged. I present the themes that emerged from individual participant interview transcripts in the following pages in nested order, from student through district administrator roles. Themes are presented in italics under bold headings identifying participants. Chapter 5 abstracts these insights into cross-case themes, at which point, the lens of complexity theory broadens the understanding in a double hermeneutic of the phenomenological experience in Chapter 6.

Student 1

Cory is a student who attended Plato High during the second year of the initiative, 2008-09. He was 16 at the time he participated in the intervention program at Plato High School. All identifying information has been altered in order to protect the participant confidentiality. Cory was a sophomore and one year behind his cohort. As a talented varsity athlete, Cory struggled to keep his grades up to remain eligible to play. Cory was placed into *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004), Stage C for high school level students.

Cory's placement in *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) was based upon an SRI score of 819, which placed him at about a 6th grade reading level, according to the chart provided by Scholastic and used by literacy coaches and the district reading coordinators. Cory is representative of the majority of the students in reading intervention at Plato High during the Literacy Intervention. Plato High serves a high-poverty population in an urban area of a mid-sized city.

When I first noticed Cory, I was visiting the *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) classroom of Mrs. Hoffpauer, in which Cory was a student. Cory held a book upside down in angry protest against the forced participation in the program. In an effort to assuage the tension between Cory and the teacher of the reading intervention class, as the school site literacy coach, I exited him from that intervention. Cory's reading had slowly improved in the reading intervention class, but I felt his disdain for the program worked against his progress. In November of 2008, when I first met with Cory about his request to be removed from the intervention class, I asked him to patiently wait for the December progress monitoring and that if he showed significant progress, I would take him out of the class and conduct an intervention based upon books or other print materials that were interesting for him and also at a level that would help him increase his reading level at the same time. In December, Cory's SRI score was 953 Lexiles, significantly increased from 819. Whether the gains were from Cory trying harder on the test this time or from his time in the intervention program, we do not know, but 953 Lexiles placed Cory close enough to the 9th grade reading level of 1000 Lexiles (beginning of 9th grade), that I was confident moving him out of the program and having him work on his reading by providing high interest, instructional level text and individual support and motivation from me, the literacy coach at Plato High at the time.

I replaced the *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) intervention with high interest print

material chosen by the student, specifically *Sports Illustrated*. The result of this student-directed

literacy practice was above-grade reading level within seven months, and an honor roll within a

year. The student became a self-directed reader, seeking out other materials to read on his own.

Our alternative intervention was based upon the fact that Cory only wanted to read about

football. As I researched sports-themed texts, I came across information that *Sports Illustrated*

was written on a 10th grade level, the goal for Cory. Cory agreed to read the magazines

religiously and check in with me weekly when he picked up the magazines from my office. I

purchased a subscription to *Sports Illustrated* and Cory came by my office weekly to pick up the

issues. I forwarded the magazines to his home address over the summer. When Cory returned in

the fall, I measured his reading using the SRI, the same measurement that had been used to place

him in the program and the mid-term measurement that had been used shortly before I exited him

from the program. When he began, his reading was at a mid-8th grade level and now the

measurement of his reading was 1121 Lexiles, well above his current 11th grade level. This

reading growth occurred over the summer when many students with Cory's background

experience summer reading loss (Krashen & Shin, 2004; McGill-Franzen & Allington, 2003).

Not only did Cory's reading improve, he became motivated to access biographies of athletes that

he read about in *Sports Illustrated.* Cory's transition from a young man who self-reported as

never having finished a book to a student who requested that I help him find long biographies of

his sports heroes is reflected in the insights revealed in his interview for this study.

Because of the mentoring relationship that had been established throughout the

alternative intervention, I continued sending *Sports Illustrated* to Cory when he went to two-year

college, as well as purchased other books that he requested. I believe having Cory's perspective

on his experience in the intervention would be beneficial to this study. Indeed, the themes that emerged provided valuable insight into the experience of a regular education student in a reading intervention in a high school. Cory has completed his two-year Associates Degree and is now attending a four-year college.

I explained the study to Cory at the beginning of the semi-structured interview, outlined in Chapter 3. Because Cory is away at college, the interview was conducted via telephone. The telephone interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcript was analyzed according the procedures outlined in Chapter 3. In this case, themes emerged around the participant's experiences in the reading intervention program that was part of the District Literacy Initiative.

Cory felt anger at being labeled and being placed in the program.

Cory felt that he did not belong in the class and thought he had been placed there because he did not try on the placement test. The placement test was the computer-based Scholastic Reading Inventory. Cory's SRI placement score was 819 Lexiles, well below the 10th grade standard set by Scholastic of 1050. Indeed, according to the chart used by literacy coaches and the district for placement in *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004), Cory was reading on a 6th grade level. He felt he would not have been placed in the intervention class if he had taken his time on the test, "by rushing through the placement test, like I didn't take the test as serious and by me getting placed in that class, I didn't like being in there."

Stigma associated with being in the intervention classes.

Cory felt that the program he was in made him seem separate from the other students and labeled him and other students in the program as "some type of special needs." He felt strongly that other students in the school saw the reading intervention students as different. "The

Read180 (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) class kind of put a mark on us. By being in the class it

signaled we were different." This experience of "being singled out in the class was probably one

of the worst parts of it."

Cory generalized his experience of being embarrassed to being in the class to other

students in intervention programs. "Like especially in in school kids don't want to be different

or recognized as different." Cory is reflective about his experience and is concerned with other

students who feel stigmatized by intervention programs and has a suggestion of how to remove

the stigma while still helping students who need it.

> I think the program is a good program, but I think somewhat you shouldn't be singled
> out, that it should be an afterschool program, like boys and girls club, like helping kids
> that need help in English or reading. Like problems with, then the afterschool program
> would be about math. If their problem was reading, then it would be about reading, but to
> be among other students and not be singled out.

Cory showed dissonance about whether he needed help with reading or not.

Cory refers to himself as a "non-reader" meaning that though he thought he could read,

he did not read, but also states that the reading initiative was to help his reading and help him

"understand what he read." Cory acknowledged a weakness.

> The teachers were trying to help me get better at what I was weak at, like in the English
> department, learning to like read better, to be able to use bigger words and to read on the
> level that I was supposed to be on other than where I was at.

Cory is referring to the Tier I vocabulary strategies happening in the content area classrooms as

part of the Literacy Initiative, so he does have a broad understanding about the different activities

happening as part of the Literacy Initiative. Cory did know he needed help, "At the end of the

day, I did need help with my reading," but his feeling of being labeled and put in the intervention

class was so negative that he seemed to reject the help he was receiving in that class. He was

still identified as a reader in need of raising his reading level when I was helping him, but

because he was no longer going into the classroom where the kids who needed help went, he was able to accept whatever help I gave him.

Cory saw intervention class as based upon reading and understanding what you read.

Cory did not experience reading outside of school, and he saw the purpose for the reading that he did do in school as reading to answer questions. Cory refers to himself as a "non-reader." Contrary to what that means for those of us in literacy intervention, who define a non-reader as a child who cannot read at all, or is below a measurable competency in reading, Cory meant that he did not read unless he had to read, and never at home.

> For me to be a non-reader already and come into a class that was based upon reading and understanding what you read, I didn't too much like that class, but when I got some books that I liked and wanted to dig more into he books, it made that class better for me.

High interest print material made Cory want to read more.

Cory was frustrated in the class because he wanted to read books about sports. He attributed his growth to "… finding things that I was interested in, like books that I liked to read that made me want to read. Like that was one of my biggest helps." Cory's understanding of the process of identifying himself as a reader is revealed by this insight,

> For me to read, it's got to fit my character. I like to read stuff that some type motivates me. Everybody's got their different choices of books. That's what helps a student or person out to start reading, find a book they can relate to or topics they are interested in.

Being removed from the class and given individualized help with finding high interest print material on his level removed the stigma of being identified as a struggling reader.

Cory came to see me weekly and often came when he needed help with homework or a project. Cory didn't mind being the only student walking around with a popular magazine

because it did not label him. "No, I didn't mind because that's a popular book. A lot of kids are interested in *Sports Illustrated*."

Student 2

Javid is a student who attended Armstrong High School during the first year of the initiative, 2007-2008. He was 17 at the time he participated in the intervention program at Armstrong High. At 17, Javid was still considered an over-age sophomore in high school, having failed most of his courses. All identifying information has been altered in order to protect confidentiality. Javid was approached by me to take part in the study because he represented an important group served by the literacy initiative, the large English Second Language population at Armstrong High School, the designated ESL high school for the district. Javid and I met at a coffee shop near his home to record the interview.

In addition to selecting Javid to represent this vital part of the literacy initiative, I had also maintained contact with Javid through other former students. Javid had been a member of my reading intervention class in 2006-07, the year prior to the literacy initiative, so I knew Javid former student, who made progress in my class in a highly individualized program, utilizing one-on-one tutoring, and reading instruction imbedded in whole-class audiobook activities. Javid arrived from war-torn Afghanistan as a youth and was placed into 4th grade. By Javid's account he was non-literate in Farsi when he left Afghanistan because he was never given the opportunity to attend school for more than a few weeks at a time because survival in the early Afghanistan war area required constant migration away from areas where bombing was taking place.

I explained the study to Javid when we met to conduct the semi-structured interview, outlined in Chapter 3. The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcript was analyzed according the procedures outlined in Chapter 3. In this case, themes

emerged around the participant's memory of being part of an all-ESL class of *Language!*

(Greene, 2006) for reading intervention. Though *Language!* (Greene, 2006) was the intervention

chosen by the district for Tier III intervention students, this intervention was the only

intervention offered at Armstrong High. There were three teachers, who each taught three

classes of *Language!* (Greene, 2006). One teacher taught all of classes comprised entirely of

ESL students. Javid was in one of the ESL classes.

Three themes emerged from the transcribed interviews. The themes appeared rather

simple as Javid kept his answers polite and positive. In the weeks immediately following the

interview and transcription process, I felt that Javid's answers had been less than candid, perhaps

stemming from a cultural respect for teachers, or because he perceived the program as being one

that I was in charge of, since he did not fully grasp the scope of the district literacy initiative.

After re-reading and reconsidering the content of the transcript in the context of Javid's

experience as an ESL student, I trust that Javid had been candid about having a positive

experience in the *Language!* (Greene, 2006) class, and attributed that positive experience to his

sense of being part of a large group of students also taking part in the intervention classes.

The student valued being part of the ESL cohort in the reading intervention.

While Javid recounts a positive experience of his year in the *Language!* (Greene, 2006)

class, part of his positive experience is tied to the camaraderie with other ESL students. I

wondered if being part of the ESL cohort displaced the stigma experienced by Cory with the

safety of being part of a large group who all needed help with reading, most who were placed in

the intervention classes as a cohort. The students were tested and placed in the intervention

classes according to their reading scores on a set of tests provided by Cambium Learning for

Language! (Greene, 2006), there was a large majority of ESL students who were very low

readers and non-readers.   There was a special component in *Language!* that supported ESL

students that included picture cards and an allowance for a slower pace. Because of this and the

fact that we had an ESL teacher to teach *Language!* (Greene, 2006), we were able to place all

ESL students into homogeneous classes. "Well, actually, I kinda enjoy it. Everybody was like

around you, like basically, y'all were all learning the same things, so it wasn't really affect [sic]

me. It was all ESL students."

> **The student was grateful to have <u>any</u> help with reading and felt he still needed to learn the sounds of letters.**

Javid (regarding the overall impact of the literacy initiative and intervention) "I think it

helped a lot of people because I don't know if you remember Phoo, but he learned stuff and I

remember him not learning or being able to understand anything. But I think for different people

it helped different things, how they learned and stuff."

Phoo was a completely non-English speaking student who arrived from Vietnam the year

prior to the literacy initiative (Spring of 2007), Javid saw the program as helping Phoo and others

who were struggling in their coursework because of second-language learning issues. Javid saw

his problems as needed to learn the sounds the letters made, which is clear from his emphasis on

the audio ("headphones") emphasis in his interview responses:

Javid: I think it helped me in some ways. Maybe the sound of things I learned.

Mary: You mean connecting the sounds with the letters?

Javid: Yeah, so maybe for example if somebody says something, I don't understand what they say, but I can hear the sound and picture that in my head. Maybe that kinda helped me, but that's about it.

Mary: Do you remember learning the sounds of letters?

Javid: Yeah. The speakers (motioning to his ears – headphones) that and then you had to learn it. I didn't think I NEEDED [speaker emphasis] that, but it helped, you

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know, it helped. The things I learned, I kinda learned and now I can us it and stuff around.

Javid: It was cool. It was different skills of learning how to learn sounds and stuff.

The student saw reading instruction as reading so you could answer questions.

Javid does not recall the specifics of the program aside from the general idea of learning the sounds of the letters and reading to answer questions in the *Language!* (Greene, 2006) book. Javid refers to the *Language!* (Greene, 2006) book as a "big book," which was a large workbook.

Javid: I remember we read a book and it was fun because it was an easy book and we like all read it. Like everyday as when we went to class, we read it. And we had questions to answer. It was one big book, we just had to finish it be a certain time. It was fun.

Mary: Did it make it easier to read on your own?

Javid: It did. It kinda made it easier for you to read. I mean, I remember reading that book exactly because we read it everyday in the class and we had to answer question when we would stop and we would talk about it.

Because Javid had been a former student and the next year I supervised the intervention program at Armstrong High, I was made aware through other students and Javid's teachers that he was missing a lot of school. Javid dropped out of high school later in that same year. I asked him about this.

I didn't finish high school, but I did get a degree online. I took classes and got my degree. Cause I got the point where I didn't want to go to school no more, especially when they changed it. I was one year behind everybody else, and that kinda made me … [Javid shrugged his shoulders and did not finish the sentence.]

Teacher

Mrs. Thomas was an English teacher at Plato High, as well as the English Department Chair. As English Department Chair, she served as a gatekeeper into the classrooms in that department while I was at Plato High. All identifying information has been altered in order to protect confidentiality. I approached Mrs. Thomas for this study because she served in the

capacity of both English teacher and English Department Chair during the two years I served as Literacy Coach at Plato High, 2008-09, and 2009-10 school years. Mrs. Thomas had no connection to Plato High School at the time of the interview. I explained the study to Mrs. Thomas when we met to conduct the semi-structured interview, outlined in Chapter 3. The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcript was analyzed according the procedures outlined in Chapter 3. During analysis of the transcript, themes emerged around the participant's experiences and role in the Literacy Initiative.

Lack of communication (zero) about the structure of the initiative.

Mrs. Thomas felt the communication about the literacy initiative was lacking and reported not knowing there was a literacy initiative coming from the district until years later once she was serving in a district leadership role.

> Mary: Did [the Assistant Principal] ever have a conversation with you about there being an initiative going on and they're sending a literacy coach?

> Mrs. Thomas: Never. Nothing. I am telling you I didn't know there was a plan until 2011.

Since Mrs. Thomas did not know about a district literacy initiative, the structure of the plan was also not evident to her or the teachers under her. "That was stuff that never got filtered down to the teachers, so it was never clear to me as a teacher that there was actually an 'initiative.'" Even during my tenure as literacy coach at Plato High, "Aside from there being a literacy coach, there didn't seem to be much structure at all." Knowledge about the structure was unavailable to key agents within the initiative, for example, Mrs. Thomas, who, as English Department Chair should have been privy to the logistics of implementing the literacy initiative with her teachers.

> Mary: So you think you could have done more had you been aware of the structure?

Mrs. Thomas: Oh, I know I could have. Everybody could have.

Mary: The first year we started, all the coaches went out to all the different schools, and we did a presentation at the first meeting of the year and showed a PowerPoint.

Mrs. Thomas: We didn't have that.

Without knowing the structure of the system, the roles within the structure were also unclear to Mrs. Thomas, "But her [district coordinator] role, it was never really clear what she was doing there in the school."

No direction given about the responsibilities and activities of the initiative.

Plato High had no literacy coach the first year of the District Literacy Initiative and it was not clear that there was an initiative. The connection to the District Literacy Initiative came in the form of materials (handouts) appearing in the teachers' mailboxes. "We were getting forms and getting the VAGO charts and handouts and things like that." VAGO was the district's imitation of the Frayer model, called the Vocabulary Action Graphic Organizer. The materials had been placed there by school administration without explanation. This left Mrs. Thomas without a way to support the teachers in her department in implementing the strategies, since there was no direction about activities that were required by someone in Mrs. Thomas' role in implementing the classroom level activities.

Literacy Coach - Teacher communication nurtured change.

Once I arrived at the school and formed a working relationship with Mrs. Thomas, I was able to share information about the initiative with her and the rest of the faculty that had been absent in their year without a literacy coach. "No, nothing ever got shared any more that was not shared in the beginning. It was never. I think you, as a literacy coach, probably brought more to my attention than anybody else had."

Mrs. Thomas was one of the only teachers at Plato High open to trying the district

literacy strategies with her classes. Because of her role as department chair, this gave me access

to the other English teachers as well. We worked closely together and were able to find

strategies that worked for her classes, discharge those that did not work for her students. Mrs.

Thomas often requested that I sit in her classes to observe and give feedback about places where

literacy instruction could be injected to strengthen her lessons. Through this we began to form a

professional collaboration around improving the literacy and literacy experiences of her students.

> Well, I will say this. I think because I had you, I was more cognizant of the choices I was
> making in terms of literacy, like I started to understand that there was a separation
> between teaching English and teaching literacy, like helping students make connections,
> writing to learn, instead of learning to write. You know, like the little subtle shifts in the
> way I view things. I started to pay more attention to in my planning. I don't think that
> would have happened had there not been a literacy coach there who I knew, kind of
> saying, 'Hey, this is what we're doing.'

One particular strategy, VAGO, presented and enforced by the district was useless.

The district literacy coordinators created a vocabulary strategy based on the Frayer

model. The VAGO strategy, though generally viewed as long, complex and useless to teachers,

was pushed by the district as a strategy that should be put in practice by every teacher, in every

subject area, and used routinely by every student. The strategy involved placing one word in the

middle of the four-square divided page or index card and using each square to do a different

literacy strategy for the same word. If done in its entirety, the VAGO strategy took no less than

twenty minutes, and usually much longer. Mrs. Thomas represented her feelings about the

VAGO, "I thought it was stupid. I have yet to see how it is supposed to work effectively."

> **Literacy was not seen as a separate skill to teach in addition to English content for
> English Language Arts teachers.**
>
> Literacy was always just part of ELA. It was never addressed like it was something
> separate from. We were supposed to teach the kids how to read and write, and that was
> pretty much it. I mean, they would give us the VAGO charts and the Word Knowledge

Charts and all of those things, but it never felt like my role was, like there was an extra step or extra responsibility.

Friction between roles of those within the Literacy Initiative system.

Mrs. Thomas, as Department Chair, fielded complaints from teachers, as well as district

personnel around the literacy coach activities that led to friction between those levels of the

initiative. Mrs. Thomas was a well-respected teacher in the school and district and her classroom

was next door to the *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) classroom. Because of proximity,

reputation and her role as department chair, she was at the eye of the storm, so to speak.

> And district personnel who came in, i.e. Bridgette Gold. I remember defending you to
> her. I don't remember what about, but I remember defending you and she got mad at me.
> Whatever it was, it wasn't anything she should have broached with me anyway.

The English teachers and the *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) teacher also had complaints

about me as a literacy coach and the district-mandated activities I was trying to implement at the

school level. Mrs. Thomas tried to support those district mandates by sharing her successes with

the teachers and serving as a role model for working with the literacy coach.

> I guess a lot of times I wound up being a sounding board more than anything else, with
> people who were disgruntled with the literacy coach and what they didn't understand to
> be a literacy initiative. But because I had your insight, I tried to share that, but because it
> was only coming from me and you, it wasn't like it was something that people put any
> faith in, in terms of legitimacy.

Principal role and attitude makes a difference in the implementation of the initiative.

Mrs. Thomas suggested that the lack of support for the literacy initiative from the

principal was part of the reason the initiative was not embraced by the teachers. Mr. Wayne was

a disciplinarian who left most of the instructional decisions up to Mrs. Calloway, the assistant

principal. "It's with the principals. I never had a conversation about literacy or anything else with

Mr. Wayne. I would have conversations about literacy and instruction with Ms. Calloway, but

she was so overwhelmed by everything." Mrs. Calloway, though, had limited understanding of the plan or structure of the literacy initiative, so as the instructional leader, who would normally have the answers to questions about district mandates for instruction, she could not provide clarity for the faculty members.

> I don't think she [Mrs. Calloway] had a clear understanding of what the literacy initiative was. She was like a workhorse. They let her do all the icky funk they didn't want to do and she did it, but she didn't have her finger on the pulse, so to speak, of what was really happening in the classroom, even though she was over instruction. Instruction wasn't Mr. Wayne's forte anyway.

Impact of initiative: It didn't make anything worse.

When asked about the impact of the initiative, Mrs. Thomas smirked and responded, "Let me put it this way: Our kids still read 2 to 3 grade levels behind. I don't think it's made anything worse, but it hasn't helped. If we had known it was an actual initiative, maybe?"

Literacy Coach 1

Ms. Young was a Literacy Coach during the first two years of the District Literacy Initiative (2006 – 08) at Caldwell High School, a high school serving a high-poverty population of roughly 850 students. All identifying information has been altered in order to protect confidentiality. I approached Ms. Young about this study because she represented a literacy coach who had an English Language Arts background. Our interview was conducted at a local coffee shop that was mutually agreeable to both of us. Ms. Young had no connection to Caldwell High School or the local school district at the time of the interview. I explained the study to Ms. Young when we met to conduct the semi-structured interview, outlined in Chapter 3. The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcript was analyzed according the procedures outlined in Chapter 3. During analysis of the transcript, themes emerged around the participant's experiences and role in the Literacy Initiative.

A rigid, linear structure at the micro and macro levels of the system.

When asked about the design and structure of the district literacy initiative, Ms. Young recalled that the district hired literacy coaches at the middle and high school levels to implement this district plan, and that the roles of those literacy coaches was to "make sure that the programs were implemented appropriately at the school level. And so the responsibilities that I felt I saw were first that we would coordinate placement in *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) and *Language!* (Greene, 2006)."

Ms. Young explained the Tier I literacy activities that were to happen in the schools as "literacy strategies that we were to make sure the teachers were using in their classrooms…" and explained the Tier II and III activities as "strategic intervention and then the intensive intervention for the two reading programs." The training hierarchy was that "literacy coaches were trained through the coordinators."

Punitive enforcement of the responsibilities and activities at all levels of the system.

Ms. Young felt that the role of literacy coaches in schools "felt like it was a little bit more policing than it was making sure we were doing what we were supposed to be doing in the schools." and that eventually the punitive attitude fell upon the literacy coaches who were not functioning as planned. "I started noticing literacy coaches were sort of being maybe targeted a little bit." The punitive manner in which the implementation was being enforced was present in punitive language at the district literacy coaching meetings and Ms. Young recalled, "so much focus on there being horrible teachers that even the district doesn't respect the profession." "They would say, "If the teachers don't like their job, they can always go be a greeter at Wal-Mart." The threat of teachers losing their jobs for non-compliance was openly discussed. Teachers, school, saw literacy Coaches and district administrators as the agents of the punitive

district enforcement. "You'd often be pulled away from that support position and put into a position where you were told "You need to watch this teacher, because this is what's going on in this classroom."

Communication failures.

Ms. Young saw the communication between the district and the schools, the administrators at the school as lacking in quantity and quality, or clarity, "I don't think that that was made clear between them." She thought the district had a clear picture of how they wanted the literacy initiative to look, "but you have a problem communicating it to other people."

Tension between school administration and district administration about roles and responsibilities of the Literacy Coach.

The responsibilities of the literacy coaches in schools were defined by the district administration. This was communicated to the literacy coaches, repeatedly; however, we were given the responsibility of communicating this to our individual school administrators. Lacking authority to enforce our own roles in the schools, and sometimes lacking the ability to communicate these responsibilities, and the limitations of our activities in the schools, principals and assistant principals assigned responsibilities to literacy coaches at their will, without regard for the district guidelines.

> You'd go back to the district meetings and they'd have their list of responsibilities that you were supposed to do that you couldn't really do because you couldn't say to your principal, "Well, I'm not gonna do that because that's not what they told me to do.

Ms. Young was frustrated with the tension between the district and principal about the expectations for her role as literacy coach, "You're not in an administrative position, but I don't think maybe the communication between the district and the schools, the administrators at the school, I don't think that that was made clear between them." The lack of communication resulted in being "caught in the middle between being a liaison and being supportive and then

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filling in wherever the administrators needed you doing whatever they needed you to do to help them with their responsibilities." Our roles were constantly in flux depending upon the perceptions of the other members of the system. "You are in a sort of like an administrative position, even though we were constantly told we were there to support the teachers over and over and over." These mixed messages created confusion within the role of the literacy coaches "because it was clear to me that the district had an idea that they wanted us to be support, but then they also wanted us to make sure the teachers were doing what they were supposed to do"

Literacy Coaches' roles were prescribed and tightly controlled.

In the beginning the literacy coaches attended meetings at the district offices every other Friday, with the clear instructions about the reporting of our activities within the schools as well as the intervention and teachers' literacy activities within the schools. "This is what you need to do this week when you go back and this is the data that you need to bring back."

Director of Reading (district administration) as dictator.

Dr. Martinette was "pretty much a dictator." She left little room for being flexible in the role of literacy coach. Her attitude was, "Do what I say. The way I say it."

Rigid leadership structure had fractures at school level.

Ms. Young's principal at Caldwell High ignored complaints by district literacy staff about Ms. Young's non-compliance. "He would just not pay her any attention." Once he told Ms. Young, "They don't know what you do. They don't know what your day is like. So for them to come for an hour and be like, 'Well, you need to be doing this, this, and this.' He didn't really have a whole lot of patience for that."

Literacy coach was flexible against the wishes of the district prescribed directives.

Ms. Young often negotiated with teachers who wanted to do their own thing instead of the strategies required by the district. She worked with those teachers and told them, "Well, show me. If you show me and it's good … there's more than one way to do something, so." I asked if Ms. Young got pushback from the district when she allowed teachers to "do their own thing." "Yeah. Yeah. And it was always about test scores. 'Well, if they were doing it so right, then why don't the test scores show it?'"

Teachers saw Literacy Initiative activities as more work for them.

One activity of the literacy coaches in schools was to re-deliver professional development in the form of teaching faculty at the schools how to use new literacy strategies selected by the district. The next part of that activity was to plan and co-teach lessons using the new strategy with the teachers. The following stage of the strategy implementation was to observe the teachers using the strategies in their lessons. To observe the teachers, literacy coaches reviewed lesson plans for the presence of literacy strategies and went to the rooms to observe that the strategies were being implemented according to district guidelines. The teachers view this as "giving them more work to do." and were generally insulted by the idea that they did not know how to teach their content and did not need "you adding to it." Ms. Young noticed the teachers began to ask questions like "What's the purpose of this?" The teachers felt like the enforcement of strategies was less than respectful to them as professionals.

Kids not buying into the intervention programs.

One of the problems literacy coaches faced at the school level with the intervention part of the literacy initiative was that "the kids were not really buying into *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) and [in] the second year *Language!* (Greene, 2006)." Students openly rebelled by

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skipping intervention classes, disrupting those class periods, or refusing to participate. This created difficulty for the intervention teachers, as well as the literacy coaches, who were usually the first line of discipline within those classes. Literacy coaches were responsible for helping the interventionists motivate their students and finding ways to help their programs move forward smoothly to show student reading growth.

The lack of buy-in created ongoing discipline problems in the intervention classes, especially at early in the year. Ms. Young "went in and, effectively because we had behavior problems, I would go in and work with, especially in the beginning of the year when the kids were being initially placed in the courses." Ms. Young reported that students often would say, "I'm not staying in here. My mom's gonna come get me out." And often the parents would sign a Refusal of Services form in order to take the student out of the intervention program. Parents of students in the intervention programs were required to meet with a literacy coach before signing the Refusal of Services form, at which time the literacy coach explained the student's need for help with reading and that this program was supposed to bring the student's reading up to grade level. Parents of intervention students wanted their children out of the programs because of stigma associated with reading intervention classes. "Some parents would be like, 'I still don't want them. This is high school.'"

As compliance decreased, control increased.

The more people at the school level rebelled or did not comply with district directives, the more control was exerted by district level administration. "Bridgette came to observe or something and maybe I was team teaching with a teacher … we were not doing THAT strategy the way that they [the district] said it was supposed to be done."

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No commitment to implementation over time.

Ms. Young spoke about the lack of follow-through with this and other programs in the district, "I think they give up too easily. They start something and the next year they want to see like numbers jump from here to there."

VAGO – poor strategy

The VAGO strategy was generally a failure at Ms. Young's school, also. Though the strategy was ill received across the district at every school, the district continued to force teachers to implement the VAGO strategy. At one point the teachers were expected to turn in student samples of VAGO strategies weekly to prove they had been using it in their classes. "VAGO was too much. That was way too much. We only had 55-minute class times. You could spend the whole class doing one word, literally."

Forced professional development and forced collaboration.

Professional development was controlled, as well as collaboration. Literacy coaches were given CD's with videos or PowerPoint's to use for professional development for faculty, as well as for use in departmental meetings. In addition, the meetings for collaboration were forced, "it's always about data or if we do plan together, it's kind of like we're forced. We don't just naturally come together."

Literacy coaches were the enforcers of the literacy initiative.

The district viewed literacy coaches as enforcers of district control in the schools and not as experienced teachers who could act in the role of mentors "even though we were supposedly the best at what teaching was, I still don't think we were looked at in terms of, I don't think we were looked at that way." Literacy coaches were to enact a plan designed to be uniformly implemented across the district. "We were looked at in terms of this is an initiative we need to

implement and we need these people to do it" and "not really respected for being able to think and respecting that we knew how to work with teachers." Additionally, District administration did not trust literacy coaches to redeliver vision of the district literacy initiative. Literacy coaches delivered a presentation at some of the schools in the district early in the rollout of the initiative "that was scripted. I think they even gave us the Power Points. We couldn't even make out own Power Points." Ms. Young seemed particularly insulted by this, "You really don't want me to present someone else's PowerPoint?" She felt the expectation to perform as puppets for the district alienated us from the process of coaching teachers. " 'You want us to do WHAT?' In front of a faculty that we were, no way, like these people didn't know us, they were. I didn't like that. I hated that. I really hated that."

Literacy Coach 2

Mrs. Manship was a Literacy Coach at Overlook High School, as well as Overlook Middle School when that literacy coach became ill, during the first year of the District Literacy Initiative (2007-2008). Both schools served a high-poverty population in an urban area. All identifying information has been altered in order to protect confidentiality. Ms. Manship was approached by me about this study because she represented a literacy coach who came to the Literacy Coach position from a science and math background (as opposed to an ELA background, like the majority of the literacy coaches), as well as having served as Literacy Coach at two schools, each a middle school and a high school. Our interview was conducted at a local restaurant that was suggested by Ms. Manship. Ms. Manship had no connection to Overlook Middle or High Schools at the time of the interview. I explained the study to Ms. Manship when we met to conduct the semi-structured interview, outlined in Chapter 3. The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcript was analyzed according

the procedures outlined in Chapter 3. During analysis of the transcript, themes emerged around the participant's experiences and role in the Literacy Initiative.

District owned Literacy Initiative.

The perception of Ms. Manship was that the district initiated this top-down initiative and the district had sole ownership of the implementation and all activities associated with the implementation, that very little school level input was sought and the site-level implementation was inflexible. Ms. Manship repeatedly referred to the literacy coaches as being expected to "implement the district's literacy initiative." Ms. Manship had a rough start to her tenure as a literacy coach. There was conflict about her responsibilities at the school level, so the district reading director "ended up sending out this email going off about what principals should and shouldn't be doing." Even principals were subject to the prescriptive nature of the initiative.

Highly structured and prescriptive.

Ms. Manship explained the general structure of the initiative as "dividing students up into three tiers, based upon reading comprehension levels." with "Dr. Gold and Gloria Fontenot, I feel like because they were a level ahead of us, but somewhere between us and Dr. Martinette."

Dr. Gold and Ms. Fontenot were district literacy coordinators, directly under Dr. Martinette and over the literacy coaches. The district coordinators conducted most of the literacy coach training.

Defined roles were rigid.

The responsibilities of the literacy coaches in schools were clearly defined by the district literacy director, understood by Ms. Manship as being "a select group of middle and high school literacy coaches, that would work at the site level to implement." In the district literacy coach meetings, Ms. Manship remembered "Our supervisor, Dr. Martinette, who was the person over

the initiative telling us what we WERE and WERE NOT." Literacy coaches were not to allow the principals at our schools to use us for their own purposes. "In her description of explaining our role at the school, she explicitly stated that we were NOT to be substitute teachers and we were NOT to be this, this, and that."

Conflict about roles/responsibilities/supervisor.

Ms. Manship's principal expected her to fill other roles in her school and perform other responsibilities, not defined by the district plan. "I had an issue with what I was told by Dr. Martinette who was over the initiative and what my principal expected me to do." Ms. Manship explained, "My email was at the bottom, so the whole district knew what principal she was referring to." After the particularly public conflict in which the email was sent to every principal in the district clarifying the expectations of literacy coaches' responsibilities in schools, "it hit me, even though she was so say 'my supervisor,' my principal was really my supervisor, because if my principal is not happy then my life is miserable."

Lack of authority hindered implementation.

Part of the problem with the role of literacy coach, as planned by this district, was the message that we were to serve as support to teachers along with the message that we were to make teachers comply with the district activities; "however, because we didn't have any administrative rights in a school, we're not writing teachers up, we're not doing evaluations, it was really up to the teacher whether or not they wanted to implement and try what we had."

Disruption yielded tighter control.

As the literacy initiative progressed and students, teachers, and literacy coaches failed to comply, literacy coaches were expected to report to the district literacy meetings with charts and records of implementation of the program in their schools. This was done both through data

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from the intervention programs and reports on the numbers of teachers implementing which strategies how often. Literacy coaches were asked to push teachers, "You had to get them [teachers] to implement, so that it can be shown that you are doing your job at the school site."

Punitive enforcement.

Principals were scolded by the director for not strictly following the district literacy plan, either by utilizing their literacy coach for other tasks , by not filling intervention classes as requested, or not enforcing that the literacy strategies be used in the classrooms. "She ended up sending out this email going off about what principals should and shouldn't be doing."

Ms. Manship received pressure both from the district administration and from their school administration and felt fear over possibly losing her job. "She had to send out a correction email, trying to fix it and make sure my job wouldn't be in danger with my principal," Literacy coaches were under pressure to show "that you are doing your job at the school site." Both the district administrators and the school administrators were "ultimately the people that are going to determine whether or not I keep my job." Ms. Manship felt that the teachers felt literacy coaches were trying to "enforce something on you and punish you in some way if you don't do It."." Compliance at the school level "depended on the principal and how seriously they took the position whether or not they would call the teachers in or write them up …" In some cases, teachers were afraid of the literacy coach reporting to the principal because "just telling the principal, no one wants that to happen." Ms. Manship feels like this is "definitely how a lot of principals run their schools is, 'Do this or expect to lose your job or expect to be written up.'"

Lack of transparency.

Ms. Manship felt that the lack of transparency hindered communication between the administration and coaches. She stated that lack of communication about the decision-making

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that went into the details of the Literacy Initiative, which interventions and strategies would be used, implied a lack of trust for the Literacy Coaches. The Literacy Coaches were not privy to the decision-making – only to the implantation of decisions made above us. "I had issues with just who decided what programs we were going to use. How did we end up with *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) from Scholastic … *Language!* (Greene, 2006)?"

Data was a problem.

Ms. Manship reported that she did not see any tracking of baseline data and testing data to truly see if the initiative was working or not. She felt that she could tell it was working in some areas "just looking at the overall number of Basics, Masteries, and Above in some different areas where I knew the teachers had worked a lot." The school scores were increasing in some cases and students in intervention programs were being tracked, but "even that was difficult. I mean, they were looking at intervention data, but we were not able to see if it was fully successful or not."

Big ideas of district.

Ms. Manship was concerned about the fact that the district "had these really BIG IDEAS [participant emphasis] of how it would be rolled out." and felt the district expectations that "We would get in the schools and all teachers in all content areas at all grade levels would be implementing this initiative." was unrealistic.

Limited buy-in.

There was limited buy in among faculty in Ms. Manship's school. She attributed this to teachers feeling like it was "something extra" for them to do in their already demanding jobs.   In the two schools at which Ms. Manship served as literacy coach, only "the 9th grade academy jumped on board, but … roughly 10 out of 60 people [at the high school]."

Lack of communication.

Ms. Manship felt that communication between the district and literacy coaches flowed in one direction, "We were always being talked AT [participant emphasis]" and felt that "even though we were coaches, we didn't have any real voice." Her experience of the literacy meetings was that "You come to the meeting, you do what they tell you to do and that's it." Literacy coaches were reluctant to give our honest opinions about some of the activities of the initiative, "It's not like we were gonna say, 'VAGO is the dumbest thing we've ever heard of. Scratch that and let's move on.'"

Meetings were tightly controlled.

Ms. Manship felt that the district wanted to push the information in, have us return to our schools to implement, and then return to the next meeting to report on the implementation compliance. And that the opportunities for literacy coaches to work together or communicate were limited to those activities. In addition to being talked "at", literacy coaches were required to "present something back to Dr. Martinette or some of her upper team." Ms. Manship said, "There wasn't enough opportunity for us to build real relationships with each other [literacy coaches]." Literacy coaches were not given opportunities to talk about issues, or given time to really "check in with each other and support each other through the process"

"You come to the meeting, you do what they tell you to do and that's it." Often in meetings, "we were all in there trying to do those stupid strategies." Ms. Manship expressed that the literacy coaching experience could have been more successful "if they had helped us to build a better community with each other outside of those meetings. If they had used more of the meeting time to let us – if you claim we have expertise – let us use it."

Director was a distant dictator.

The district literacy director had a reputation as being demanding and unfeeling. "I think in terms of Dr. Martinette, she was distant and so, I don't feel like I had much of a relationship with her as matter of fact even in knowing that at the time that I was a literacy coach."

Stigma associated with intervention programs.

Ms. Manship passionately expressed her compassion for the students who "felt so belittled" and "embarrassed by having to be a part of that program." Her main point of contention was with the *Language!* program "with students, … at the high school level, with *Language!* (Greene, 2006) and how they did phonics." She felt some of the strategies used in *Language!* (Greene, 2006) like "the students are doing the hand motions …, it felt so elementary, even for these students." The students in the *Language!* (Greene, 2006) classes were the students identified as Tier III RTI students "who had been labeled as having such difficulty, that were multiple years behind with their reading." She expressed, "The program itself already positioned them in a place that tears down any sense of self-efficacy … or self-esteem just about themselves," because "teenagers want to be seen as young adults," but "in these intervention programs, they are seen as different or lesser by their peers"

In addition to or as a result of being "angry or embarrassed most of the time, Ms. Manship reported behavior problems in the reading intervention classes. It seemed to Ms. Manship that the intervention students came into the program with "attitudes", "so it was a little more difficult to build good relationships them [intervention students]."

Teacher – Literacy Coach relationship was difficult.

The resistance by teachers to working with the literacy coach "limited my ability to build relationships with students." because, except for the few teachers who were cooperating with the

activities of the initiative, "there were not a lot of opportunities for me to do things in a lot of classes." Ms. Manship felt she had to "work with what you've got." She believed classroom teachers did not see her as someone "here trying to help," but were instead worried about getting "their hand popped or get a write up if they don't do something" or that "someone is just trying to get them fired or just throw more work on them." There was a general "expectation that anyone who's telling you something that you should do or change … in your classroom, as trying to … enforce something on you and punish you in some way." "Teacher fear and mistrust [of district] makes the job of being a literacy coach rather difficult." Though literacy coaches met with "So that's a lot of pressure to be under because I can't control what every individual teacher does or what every student does."

Culture of mistrust.

Along with the fear of punitive actions was a general "culture of mistrust in our district." Teachers hold back from participating in district-directed activities because there is "an expectation that anyone who's telling you something that you should do or change … in your classroom, as trying to … enforce something on you and punish you in some way." "They are looking to get their hand popped or get a write up if they don't do something or they are just thinking that someone is just trying to get them fired or just throw more work on them." Ms. Manship was careful to point out "that culture existed before that intervention started in the district and it is still there in the district now," and was not a direct result of the literacy initiative or the associated activities.

Literacy Coaches – agents of district.

The literacy coaches were seen as part of the external forces keeping teachers from just being able to do their jobs, or at the very least, making their jobs harder. The coaches were seen

as extensions of the district and the district's initiative preventing teachers from doing what they felt needed to be done in their classrooms without interference. "Dr. Martinette selected some of the coaches to introduce the initiative to the district." The coaches were used to introduce the initiative to the schools through in-service presentations at the beginning of school. The context for this was that the presentation was one of many mandatory presentations teachers had to attend on the first day of the year for teachers.

Fear – threat.

The culture of mistrust created fear in teachers. Teachers were wary about the strategies literacy coaches were presenting and believed those strategies were "not something they felt would be beneficial." "I think that there's a fear in terms of their [teachers'] willingness to trust us to help them," that it made it hard to get them to go along with the program. They seemed to have "fears of trying something new and trusting our intentions." One of the more disturbing concepts that came out of the question about the roles and relationships in the literacy initiative was expressed by Ms. Manship, "I think there is such fear of people being messed over that it hinders any type of initiative from having a really good chance of thriving." The idea of teachers being "scared" was not limited to the fear of punishment, write-ups or scolding, it was also that "teachers are being held responsible for it." That is, responsible for the outcome of their teaching and responsible for the education of the students in their classes.

More work for teachers.

Teachers are "overwhelmed in terms of all the things they are asked to do and each year it's something more." The mandatory implementation of strategies by classroom teachers, enforced by literacy coaches, and at times school administration felt "like something extra" or like the purpose was to "just throw more work on them."

Attitude of principal.

Ms. Manship placed a great deal of the success of implementation in the schools with the role of the principal. "I think it depended on the principal and how seriously they took the position whether or not they would call the teachers in or write them up or whatever …" She seemed torn between believing that enforcement of the classroom implementation would have made a difference in the success of the literacy coaches' goals and disdain for the punitive approach of what she perceived as many principals. "I feel like definitely how a lot of principals run their schools is, 'Do this or expect to lose your job or expect to be written up.'"

Scripted presentation in first year.

The presentation of the district literacy initiative was done as an in-service presentation on the first day of school for the teachers in 2007. The district prepared a PowerPoint presentation with scripted notes for literacy coaches to follow. Literacy coaches were paired and sent to a number of schools on that day, with presentations scheduled at different times of the day at different schools. The literacy coaches practiced the presentation and made notes on the handouts about which literacy coach would present which material. Ms. Manship told about how she and her partner-presenter "witnessed first-hand how different schools welcomed or did not welcome it." Ms. Manship felt the teachers viewed the presentation as "something they had to sit through."

In her experience of the rollout presentation, Ms. Manship recalled magnet schools showing "zero interest." "They [magnet schools] were just rude and arrogant when we were there presenting." There were a couple of schools that showed "some level of interest … in the first year when we rolled out the initiative."

VAGO as example of district disconnect with classroom.

The VAGO strategy, Vocabulary Action Graphic Organizer was "recreating the wheel." "Vocabulary Action Graphic Organizer – Why not just say we're gonna use the Frayer model?" Teachers resisted the VAGO strategy because of it was complicated, prescriptive, and "And we're gonna make it a 45 minute activity for one word." Teachers complained about the strategy, "It takes a whole class period to do one word!" In spite of the overwhelming resistance by classroom teachers, Ms. Manship remembers "them [district administrators] just pushing and pushing VAGO." At this point in the interview, Ms. Manship mocked the district literacy coordinators, "'pull out the VAGO. We can do a VAGO on that word.'" She openly expressed her displeasure about the impracticality of the VAGO strategy, "No science teacher on earth or in hell is gonna spend that much time on a vocabulary word." Yet, literacy coaches were required to come up with examples for use of VAGO in every subject area. "Okay, it doesn't fit for this, maybe they need to come up with an example and a non-example." And when literacy coaches expressed the difficulty of making the VAGO fit the purpose of vocabulary for every subject area, "Oh crap, it doesn't fit for that. Okay now they need a picture." Ms. Manship referred to the VAGO implementation process as "a headache trying to make it work in every different class and every different content area." She was still angry about the VAGO implementation and felt that this showed ineptitude on the part of the district literacy staff, "They were just pulling things out of their ass." Ms. Manship's disdain was accompanied by frustration that the literacy coaches had no say in whether or not to implement this strategy, though we could see it was not working, "No, we were all in there trying to do those stupid strategies."

Impact – Waste of time and money.

When asked about the impact of the initiative, Ms. Manship did not mince words, "It was a horrible, disgusting waste of money." She felt that it was a "waste of a bunch of peoples' time." and that not enough time in preparation, planning and implementation was given to see if any initiative could work, it was just "just more crap that they were half-cocked rolling out."

Mistakes with implementing and planning.

Ms. Manship shared what she felt could have been done better to make a literacy initiative work in this district, "We could have stuck with what was already researched." She felt that "if they had helped us to build a better community with each other outside of those meetings," there might have been more collaboration, which would lead to adapting the activities to fit the experiences we were having in the schools. "If they had used more of the meeting time to let us – if you claim we have expertise – let us use it." Ms. Manship expressed her frustration at being told what to do and how to do it without input from literacy coaches who were the ones experiencing the implementation in the school sites, "Let us bring something to the table and not talk AT us, you know weekly about what you feel like we have to be doing." Ms. Manship felt the district had not given the initiative a fair chance and had not been *No* reflection and adapting to feedback as the implementation took place. "If something is not work, what can we change to make it work? Do we need more coaches? Do we need more training?"

Literacy Coaches phased out.

In the second and third years of the literacy initiative, literacy coaches at some schools were phased out. "They had earmarked Title I money for literacy and some schools started getting rid of their literacy coaches by writing them out of their School Improvement Plan and saying they didn't have the funding."

Disappointment

After she expressed her outrage about the hierarchical and rigid implementation of the district literacy initiative, Ms. Manship became more personally reflective and revealed that the initiative "was such a disappointment. I left after one year to pursue something else." She was disillusioned by the mechanical way the initiative was implemented. "The Literacy Initiative was a huge, horrible shock for me. By nature, I would love to see the world … everyone's nice and sweet and people CARE [participant emphasis]. It wasn't what I thought it would be."

Ms. Manship left the role of literacy coach after one year because she "didn't feel a sense of fulfillment … in terms of just doing a job that I enjoyed and felt like I was making some type of major impact." In the end, Ms. Manship saw her time as a literacy coach as a learning experience "about the politics of how they do things in the district" and "about being able to see something start up in a very large district and see it die." The experience of working in the literacy initiative "didn't have a very positive impact other than making me feel like I learned more of what NOT [participant's emphasis] to do."

School Administrator

Mrs. Calloway was the Assistant Principal of Instruction at Plato High School during all 3 years of the Literacy Coaching years of the District Literacy Initiative. Plato served a high-poverty population in an urban area. All identifying information has been altered in order to protect confidentiality. Mrs. Calloway was approached by me about this study because she represented a school level administrator who experienced the roll-out of the District Literacy Initiative without a literacy coach in the first year, with me as a literacy coach in the second and third years, and watched the district phase the literacy initiative out in years three, four, and five. Our interview was conducted at the home of Mrs. Calloway. Mrs. Calloway had no connection

to Plato High or the district at the time of the interview. I explained the study to Mrs. Calloway when we met to conduct the semi-structured interview, outlined in Chapter 3. The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcript was analyzed according the procedures outlined in Chapter 3. During analysis of the transcript, themes emerged around the participant's experiences and role in the Literacy Initiative.

No communication about literacy initiative.

Not only was information about the literacy initiative design and structure not communicated to this assistant principal, she also felt that there was no real communication or interaction with other literacy coaches or school administration from other schools in the initiative. She felt powerless to promote literacy in her school because there was no professional development, communication, or explanation about the initiative design and intervention programs. She felt that the programs were thrown at the schools as dictates. "They throw it at you and say, 'This is what we're going to do.'" Ms. Calloway was, "just told that we would be getting a literacy coach." Mrs. Calloway felt she was at a disadvantage in her role because of the lack of communication. "I felt powerless to do anything to promote literacy, to be creative, to support, to recruit." She was frustrated because she had to ask questions to get needed information. "…then you are fumbling, trying to. I had to put these courses in the master schedule. Somebody has to tell me if it's a three hour course, or a five hour course. Does it meet every day?" Her knowledge of the initiative came mostly from me, once I was transferred to Plato High as their literacy coach. "My knowledge of the initiative … what I learned, I would say, was from you explaining it." When she heard that the district was sending a literacy coach (me) to Plato High, Ms. Calloway asked for more information about the literacy initiative,

because "No one is telling me anything about this initiative, but says, 'Now you have to do It.'. Somebody needs to tell me something about this program."

Top-down structure.

Ms. Calloway stated, "in reality there was limited input at the school level, in the overall design." and experienced interference in that "whatever control and input we had over the program because the district, I thought was micromanaging too much of what went on in the particular school buildings." Even after the initiative in the form of *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) arrived at her school in the first year, Ms. Calloway was unaware that was part of the district's literacy initiative. Once I arrived as a literacy coach and she learned more about the district's plan, Ms. Calloway "got more involved in the day to day operation of the program," but never understood "the overall global picture of a literacy initiative."

It was clearly understood by Ms. Calloway that the district literacy coordinators were the "underlings" of the literacy director and that her role was really to "monitor the literacy coach." Ms. Calloway's understood that buy-in at the school level began with the principal. "If the top administrator [at a school – the principal] is not buying into or concerned about the initiative to promote it, and not support the literacy coach, force teachers to do something about it, to have all this work like a well-oiled machine, then it breaks down."

No support from Principal.

Ms. Calloway revealed that the principal of Plato High "didn't really care about" the literacy initiative." From the beginning, Mr. Wayne made it clear, "He's just not going to have anything to do with it [implementation of initiative]." The literacy coach "did not have Wayne's [the principal's] backing" and when Ms. Calloway approached Mr. Wayne with anything about the implementation of the initiative at Plato High, his response was, "Don't bring that to me."

"He didn't want to hear anything about the initiative." The attitude of the principal left Ms. Calloway in the position of working with the district staff and literacy coach on implementation of the initiative.

Mandates = dictates from literacy director.

The dictates and mandates not only were directed at the literacy coaches and teachers, Ms. Calloway's interview revealed what can only be described as bitterness about district interference in the running of her school. "They were dictating to me, as an administrator, what I should and should not be doing." Dr. Martinette's attitude of "'my way or the highway'" created friction between the district staff and Ms. Calloway, who felt the director was "overbearing." "I did not like the way she micromanaged." The problems that arose from district mandates for Ms. Calloway were focused around district expectations for the literacy coach, "They had a certain set of rules and policies they wanted literacy coaches to follow." and around the intervention classes that had to be incorporated into the school space and schedule. "We were just given that program, TOLD we would be teaching *Read180* (Hasselbring et al., 2004)." *Language!* class was an absolute disaster, again a MANDATE. Plato High WILL have *Language!* (Greene, 2006)."

Ms. Calloway fielded complaints from district staff about the literacy coach at Plato High. District staff complained that the literacy coach was "doing her own thing as opposed to this is what the district says you ARE [participant emphasis] to do." Ms. Calloway was open to the literacy coach working with flexibility, "especially when you are there and you know the needs that are present." and felt that the district was "limiting creativity and spontaneity" because "a lot of brainstorming and ideas come out of spontaneity and those ideas come from the ability to do and be free to carry out a job."

Ms. Calloway also felt her role was subverted by non-communication and dictates of the system. "My role should have been a prominent one, in that as an assistant principal of instruction and reading initiatives come under instruction." Mrs. Calloway further explained, "I took issue with that [not being consulted about the structure and design of the literacy initiative]." She felt the structure, as implemented by the district, limited her role as the instructional leader of Plato High. "I wanted to become an assistant principal to make a difference and didn't realize when I got in this position, my influence was limited by the philosophies and ideologies of those above me."

Friction between school and district.

The friction between the school and district was demonstrated in a testy relationship between Ms. Calloway and Dr. Martinette, the District Literacy Director, "We clashed on a number of levels." Ms. Calloway confessed that part of the problem was with "the person who held the Director's job, Dr. Martinette, or whatever her title was over the literacy program, I had issues with her."

Friction between literacy coach/district and literacy coach/teachers.

Ms. Calloway described an ongoing role as the "middle man as issues arose between the literacy coach and the district office." The biggest issue brought to Ms. Calloway by the district staff was "the literacy coach was not following … district procedure or district policy." Much of the communication from the district was about, "her [literacy coach] bucking the system would be what they complained about." The communication about the literacy coach from the district came was, "It was kind of like, 'You need to reign her in.'"

Literacy coach role lacked authority, autonomy and power.

Ms. Calloway understood that the role of literacy coach put someone in an "awkward position" because "They didn't have the authority, but … supposed to do something about it [non-compliance by teachers]." There were "issues between the supervisory position [of the literacy coach] and the teacher" because "There's going to be friction between coaches and teachers." Ms. Calloway found herself "in the position of having to support the literacy coach with the teachers."

Tighter control when mandates were not strictly followed.

As the literacy coach continued "doing her own thing", "the district wanted more monitoring of the literacy coach." and were critical of Ms. Calloway because "[the district] didn't' feel like I was doing adequate monitoring of the literacy coach." Ms. Calloway was asked to closely monitor the literacy coach to be certain she was maintaining compliance with district mandates.

Teacher compliance.

Often, as teachers refused to comply with the district mandates for implementing certain literacy strategies in their instruction, Ms. Calloway had to step in. "Concerns were brought to me then I had to go back and make corrections at the teacher level." She understood the literacy coach's problems in "dealing with teachers, which also can be problematic, because "Teachers are resistant to anyone who wants to show them a better way to do it as they feel very comfortable that they know what they are doing." As an assistant principal for nearly two decades, Ms. Calloway had observed that, "Teachers are very territorial." Ms. Calloway saw the teachers' attitude toward the district initiative and literacy coach as, "I don't want you fooling with MY kids." and "I don't want you giving me more work to do."

Student stigma and labeling.

Ms. Calloway had to deal with behavior issues in the intervention classrooms, as well as the complaints about students from the interventionists. She understood the behavior problems as stemming from the stigma of being in the intervention class. "Kids are resistant to initiatives and programs that label them or put them in categories" Students were embarrassed to be part of the intervention class and "The kids didn't want to be seen going into the classroom." This impacted the students' participation in the class because "they come to you already feeling less than their peers." Students felt they were in a Special Education class and were worried their peers also thought they were in Special Education. "That class [*Language!* (Greene, 2006)], even more so than *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004), was looked at as a Special Ed class."

Student motivation.

Ms. Calloway reported "a lot of discipline problems [in the intervention classes]." There were problems between the *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) teacher, Ms. Hoffpauer and her students, in the form of nagging and negative feedback. "She just didn't build the bond." Later in the initiative, Ms. Calloway learned that the "[*Read180* (, et al., 2004) teacher] had not been a successful *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) teacher where she had been prior to coming to us, and most of it stemmed from her relationship with the students." She felt the intervention classroom environment was "more adversarial than nurturing."

In the fourth year of the program, *Language*! (Greene, 2006) was forcibly added to Plato High. Ms. Calloway's experience as that the program was a failure. The result of that intervention program, in Ms. Calloway's words, "The *Language!* class was an absolute disaster. The kids just didn't participate [in the *Language!* (Greene, 2006) class activities]. They didn't want to go to class. It was always kind of an adversarial thing between the teacher and the kids."

Phasing out of Literacy Initiative.

The district cut the literacy coach position at Plato High for the fourth year of the intervention, though the School Improvement Team had put that position in the School Improvement Plan. The Associate Superintendent of High Schools cut the literacy coach position from the school plan at the district level, though the district insisted the intervention programs continue. "There were still resources the district provided for the teachers, in the forms of books and written materials, but I found that to be somewhat limited."

Ms. Calloway explained, "the impression I got is that this program was not going to be as popular or continue as what they had envisioned, so they were already starting to cut back." Budget cuts eventually removed the reading intervention programs from Plato High. "Really, what was the purpose of putting this in for three or four years and now we don't have the budget?"

Impact – better off with no initiative.

Mrs. Caldwell suggested that the entire initiative had been a "Band-Aid" approach to a much bigger problem and the district was "too quick to jump on the bandwagon" for an initiative without following through. She suggested that in order for something to work, it needs "longevity" along with the "proper people in there promoting and sustaining it."
She felt the initiative was implemented too quickly with a sense of urgency, without time for proper planning and implementation. Mrs. Caldwell believed the initiative was unsuccessful overall, with perhaps some individual success with individual students. "It was more problematic from an administrative point of view than anything else." There were scheduling and logistical issues like classroom space, interpersonal relationships, "putting out fires" between the "powers that were involved in that initiative." She did not feel there was the support at the

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school level for it to be successful. Mrs. Caldwell stated that it would have been better if the initiative was never introduced because of the lack of support at the school level and lack of promotion, "how these programs are implemented are set up for failure." Mrs. Caldwell does not think this district knows how to use and benefit from an initiative and repeated that the quick approach sabotaged the program from the beginning.

Learning style inventory.

Mrs. Caldwell stated she "loved the learning styles inventory" that I introduced at the request of one teacher, which spread school-wide. That was not part of the literacy initiative, but something that came from the literacy coach's informal conversations with teachers about what they needed from her in terms of instructional support.

District Administrator

Dr. Anderson was a district administrator during the literacy initiative. The district served a high-poverty population in an urban area with roughly 43,000 students. All identifying information has been altered in order to protect confidentiality. I approached Dr. Anderson about this study because she represented a district level administrator involved in the design and implementation of the District Literacy Initiative from its early planning through the years when it was phased out. She was then a principal at my school, while I served in another official capacity, having been phased out of the literacy coaching position at Plato High, while still overseeing the placement and progress monitoring of the left-over *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) program. Our interview was conducted by telephone, as Dr. Anderson now lives in another city. Dr. Anderson had no connection to Caldwell High or the district at the time of the interview. I explained the study to Dr. Anderson via email and again when we spoke by telephone conduct the semi-structured interview, outlined in Chapter 3. Her consent form was

printed, signed, scanned, and returned for my records. The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcript was analyzed according the procedures outlined in Chapter 3. During analysis of the transcript, themes emerged around the participant's experiences and role in the Literacy Initiative.

A highly structured, and controlled plan.

During the initial three years of the literacy initiative, Dr. Anderson served in two district level positions. The first year, she was Special Assistant to the Superintendent. After the first year, she was promoted to Associate Superintendent of Secondary Schools. Dr. Anderson was able to provide insight about the early stages of planning for the literacy initiative, its structure and hierarchy. She stated that the district began with the state curriculum framework that had been published, in which the RTI tiers were presented along with activities and interventions for each tier. The protocol for district and school literacy coaches was presented in that state literacy plan. Dr. Anderson stated that the district curriculum director brought in "master teachers to develop model lessons to expand on that curriculum framework." When it came to the teaching of reading, "that's when we really started getting into the RTI." Dr. Anderson described a highly structured, and controlled plan. She described this structured plan as "a real cultural shift."
Dr. Anderson saw that "cultural shift" as moving from a past in which

> Kids that were taken out of the core and given extra help generally stayed there all year, but now we were saying that no, we expect them to get this instruction. We expect this instruction to move them and we expect your groups now to be flexible.

She recalls teachers "struggling" with this notion of their classes changing at any point in the year to accommodate students who were moving in and out of interventions and Tiers I, II, and III. The district leadership "expected" this to happen, meaning it was a directive.

Fidelity.

In the decisions about which intervention programs would be purchased, they had been told, "If you implement this specific program well, then you will see these outcomes." So much of the planning revolved around creating a system that would implement and monitor the reading intervention programs for fidelity, as well as implement and monitor the district initiative as planned.In the first year of the program, Dr. Anderson was somewhat involved with the budgets and looking at the financial aspects of "How are we going to fund this initiative? And can we maintain it?" to "actually having to monitor the implementation and execution of the initiative." In describing how her roles changed in the system once she became the Associate Superintendent of Secondary Schools, she saw herself as in charge of the "monitoring and execution" of the literacy plan for the district. She revealed that the district level leaders discovered a gap in the skill set of teachers.

Later, in her role as principal, district leaders kept coming to Dr. Anderson about the *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) teacher at her school. The teacher, according to district literacy coordinators and the district literacy director, was not "implementing this with fidelity." The *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) program at Caldwell High was not being done the way it was "designed to be done" so they warned her she would not see the "results you are supposed to get." Contrary to district warnings and complaints, her students "outscored" other kids in the district. The district personnel were unhappy that "the results at this school did not reflect that lack of fidelity was a bad thing."

Hierarchy created cognizant distance.

Dr. Anderson had a "closer relationship with Dr. Martinette" (the district Director of Literacy) and "the district level curriculum persons, those persons who were in the design." That

relationship consisted on being on the Executive Leadership Team where there were discussions about "What are we going to do? How are we going to do it? How are we going to measure it? What gains do we expect to see?" "We did not, though, get so involved in what was going to be done. That was left to the literacy team."

In a statement that contradicted what she expressed about her distance from the classroom plans, "The closer to the classroom you got, the less of an impact my position had on what happened there," Dr. Anderson described herself as liking to be "in classrooms to monitor, to observe what is going on." She described wanting to share "best practices" across the district and provide "support if I saw a teacher was struggling with something…" As an aside, "best practices" had become a set of prescribed literacy strategies, which were enforced across the district, so any best practices should have been seen in every classroom across the district if the district plan was followed with fidelity.

Dr. Anderson seemed to want to connect teachers who were struggling with teachers who were not struggling. Dr. Anderson felt that she could serve as a "liaison" by connecting teachers and sending support from the district. "If I saw a real need, I said, 'Dr. Martinette, I was at Overlook Middle and saw this teacher and she really needs some support. Can you send somebody?" Dr. Anderson saw this part of her role as "seeing the implementation" in classrooms helped connect her role in the initiative to the student/classroom level. "Actually having the conversation with district leaders and then being able to go into the classrooms to really see it made it concrete for me." Seeing the programs and strategies in action in the classroom meant, "It was no longer an abstract concept for me." She described this process as, "Not just seeing it from the fifty-thousand foot level, as you would if you are a district leader."

Gap in the skill set of teachers.

Going into the classrooms as a district administrator also made Dr. Anderson "more keenly aware of gaps in the skill sets of some of our teachers." and she felt responsible for "for trying to provide them with supports." Dr. Anderson described going into a classroom at Overlook Middle School in which an "inexperienced" teacher was and teaching a *Language!* (Greene, 2006) intervention class. "The students appeared to be over-aged" as they came into the classroom and Dr. Anderson was disappointed that the students were not enthusiastic about what they might learn in class that day. "They were not exactly the most motivated" students but the teacher did have the board "prepped with the agenda" and "implemented the *Language!* (Greene, 2006) lesson" for that day." Dr. Anderson reported that this teacher was one who implemented with fidelity, but also shared with her the challenges of teaching students who were so many years behind.

I'm glad we did SOMETHING.

When asked about the overall impact of the initiative, Dr. Anderson said, "I think we had modest gains in most places. If you are asking me what is better to have done nothing at all as compared to what we did, I'm glad we did what we did." She felt that at least we had put something in place at the secondary level that could possibly work for students whose teachers are not taught how to teach reading.

Flexibility.

In the end, Dr. Anderson reflected on what she had learned from the district literacy initiative. She still believes the "layered approach is necessary for literacy instruction," but now sees there is "No one best way that our schools need to be," but that having "fail-safes" in place in case a particular literacy strategy does not work, being ready with another one and another

until we "get the result we are looking for." "We've got to be smart enough to be flexible to do what is best for kids."

Summary

Several common themes have emerged from exploring the interview transcripts of the participants of the district literacy initiative. Chapter 5 considers the connections between participants' emergent themes and explores the cross-case themes with triangulated support from literacy coach documentation in the form of notes, plans and reports and literacy coach correspondence exchanged during the first three years of the literacy initiative.

CHAPTER 5: SECOND LEVEL ANALYSIS

Process and Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to show the abstraction of themes across cases and to present evidence from sources that support the themes that emerged from the participants' reported experiences. The data sources used to corroborate participants' themes are literacy coach documents from 2007-2010, literacy coach correspondence from 2007-2010, literacy coach meeting notes from 2007-2010, as well as my own hand-written notes on calendars and agendas. These data sources are authentic and have been archived since my tenure as a literacy coach in this district. Each superordinate theme is supported with evidence from the data sources, as well as reiterating data from the interview transcripts which supports the abstraction of each Super-ordinate theme.

Abstraction: Sub-ordinate Themes and Super-ordinate Themes

By exploring the themes of individual participants that emerged through descriptive analysis as described in Chapter 4, I began to consider themes as they connected or contrasted across cases. Each participant provided a unique description of his or her experience at some level of the district literacy initiative. Through careful cross case analysis, five themes surfaced that expressed the nature of the relationships within and among the levels of this literacy intervention system and which showed how those interactions impacted the implementation and success of the literacy initiative. The four Super-ordinate themes that emerged from the cross case analysis are: Communication, Control, Disruption, and Motivation.

Table 5 shows the Super-ordinate themes and related Sub-ordinate themes. As I depict Super-ordinate themes and the Sub-ordinate themes contained within, I use literacy coaching documents and literacy coaching correspondence from the years 2007 – 2010 to support Sub-

ordinate themes, which contribute to the Super-ordinate themes. Details of each Super-ordinate

theme (Super-ordinate theme, Sub-ordinate themes and Emergent themes) are presented as a

table for each Super-ordinate theme. Insights from this cross-case analysis are condensed in this

chapter in preparation for applying the lens of complexity theory to broaden understanding of

this literacy initiative as a complex system in Chapter 6.

Table 3

Super-ordinate Themes with Related Sub-ordinate Themes

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate themes
Communication	Lack of communication
	Directives
Control	Roles
	Fear
	Tighter control w/non-compliance
	Rigid linear structure
Disruption	Friction
	Lack of authority of Literacy Coach
	Flexibility
Motivation	Labeling - stigma
	Buy-in

Super-ordinate Theme 1: Communication

Most of the participants talked about a lack of communication and how this impacted

their ability to implement the district initiative. Most participants felt frustrated by the lack of

communication and thought the lack of communication had a negative impact on implementation

of the initiative. The participants reported that they experienced communication from the district

as directives that came down from the upper levels of the hierarchy. Participants reported that

they did not feel like the communication coming from the literacy coaches and schools was

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heard by the district. Table 4 reflects the sub-ordinate themes related to communication, as

illustrated by supportive themes that emerged from individual participants.

Table 4
Sub-ordinate Themes and Emergent Themes of Communication

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate themes	Individual emergent themes	Participant
Communication	Lack of communication	Lack of transparency	T
		Zero communication about the structure of initiative.	T
			LC1
		Communication failures	LC2
		Big ideas of the district not communicated	LC2
		Lack of communication	LC2
		Lack of transparency	LC2
			SA
		No communication about literacy initiative	
	Directives	Forced professional development and collaboration.	LC1
		Scripted presentation in first year	LC2
		Meetings were tightly controlled	LC2
		Communications from literacy director	SA

DA- District Administrator, SA- School Administrator, LC- Literacy Coach, T- Teacher, S-Student

Lack of communication.

The teacher, Mrs. Thomas, felt that there had been "zero" communication about the

instructional strategies disseminated by the district in the beginning of the initiative, and that this

lack of communication negatively impacted the early implementation of the initiative. She felt

that if she and other teachers had known more about the plan and structure of the initiative, they

might have understood their roles and been more willing to participate. Mrs. Thomas felt the

district's neglect of informing teachers about the plan, structure, and purpose of the intervention made it difficult for the literacy coach to provide support for those teachers.

Ms. Young spoke about how failures in communication affected her role at the school level, with district staff having one set of expectations of her duties and role in the school and her principal having another set of expectations. Ms. Manship had similar problems as Mrs. Young, and made the decision to fill her principal's expectations rather than the district's expectations, because "my principal was really my supervisor, because if my principal is not happy then my life is miserable." Ms. Manship felt the "big ideas" of the district were never broadcast to the district or filtered down through levels of the system in order to provide an understanding of the scope and goals of the intervention for everyone in the system.

Mrs. Calloway was openly frustrated about the lack of communication and felt her role as Assistant Principal of Instruction was undermined by the lack of transparency about the plan and the role of her school in the plan. "I felt powerless to do anything to promote literacy, to be creative, to support, to recruit."

As I referred back to my notes and emails, it was evident that literacy coaches were responsible for much of the communication between the district and the school leadership. Since the school leaders were supervisors of literacy coaches, the communication seemed to carry less importance than if it had come directly from the district. The required communication included district mandates, for which literacy coaches were held responsible, yet those mandates were often difficult to convey to busy school leaders who may not have understood the urgency of the program in the absence of direct communication from the district. This is evident in an email I wrote to the principal in my role as a literacy coach, dated September 4, 2009,

> I really really need to meet with you about that '60 Day Plan' that I've been telling you
> about since before school started. I hate bugging you about it, but they are giving us a

deadline of Tuesday at 3 p.m. to turn it in with our 'principal's' signature. I asked if it could be the API, but they said, 'No, only the principal.' So I can either come back to school today after the coaches' meeting, or perhaps we can find time Tuesday. Let's make an appointment so we don't miss each other on this. Dr. Martinette wants to look at them when we turn them in.

It is clear from this urgent email that the communication between the district and the school administration was happening through the literacy coach. I believe one of the reasons Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Calloway in particular felt like they were in the dark about some of the activities was because Plato High did not have a literacy coach in the first year. The principal of Plato High rejected the idea of a literacy coach in the first year, but was forced to accept my placement at his school in the second year, following decreased test scores and a lack of reading growth in the reading intervention classes.

Problems with communication extended beyond communication about the initiative from the district to the schools. The literacy coaches also described their inability to communicate in meaningful ways with their peers. Ms. Manship's concern about the lack of "opportunity for us to build real relationships with each other [literacy coaches]," reflected a flaw in the plan for implementing the initiative. She felt that literacy coaches were not given opportunities to talk about issues, or given time to really "check in with each other and support each other through the process." Literacy coach meetings were held weekly on Fridays in the first year and then less frequently in the second year, but did not allow time for literacy coach collaboration. The agendas for those meetings were prepared ahead of time by the district staff, without input from the literacy coaches, as demonstrated by the agenda for the first District Literacy Coach Meeting:

- Greeting and Opening Activity
  - LC Success Profile
  - Establishment of Meeting Norms
- Review the district literacy plan.
- Current Status of School Based Literacy Program
- Work Keys

- 10:30 – 11:00 Lunch
- Intervention Placement Tests – procedures/documentation
- LC Success Rubric
- Classroom Observation/Walk-throughs
    - Weekly Plan and Log
    - Classroom Observation/Walk-throughs
    - Core Content classroom Observation
    - Intervention classes - Observation/Walk-throughs
- Annual Goal Setting
    - Literacy Coach Annual Goal Setting
    - Literacy Coach Goals Reflection/Self-Evaluation
- Wrap-up, Questions, Concerns,
- Question/Comments

I reviewed twenty-two meeting agendas and meeting notes from three years of the literacy initiative and could not locate an agenda item that suggested a time for literacy coaches to work collaboratively on problems we encountered in implementation. The literacy coaches did presentations about implementation and intervention data reporting from the respective coach's school for the whole group of literacy coaches, Dr. Martinette, the district coordinators, and other district leaders, but there was never time set aside for problem solving among the literacy coaches.

Though this did not emerge as one of the strong themes for Cory (Student 1), he did talk about not being communicative with his teacher or classmates while he was in the *Read180* intervention class, saying, "I didn't too much communicate with the teacher or communicate that (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) much with some of the students." Cory's refusal to communicate was more a symptom of his complete rejection of the literacy intervention program because he did not want to be part of a stigmatized program.

Directives

The primary communication about the literacy initiative came in the form of directives from district administrators . Viewed as a part of the communication in the system, the use of

directives shed light on the lack of feedback within the system, feedback that could have led to reflection and revision of the activities and strategies that were not being implemented successfully. Rather than facilitate reflective practice, the use of directives engendered negative responses among program participants. This was illustrated by the Assistant Principal, Mrs. Calloway, who expressed resentment about the way Dr. Martinette issued orders to schools, saying, "They were dictating to me, as an administrator, what I should and should not be doing."

In the second semester of 2007-08, the first year of the initiative, it became apparent from school and district administrative walk-throughs and reports from literacy coaches at district literacy coaching meetings that teachers were not using the district sanctioned strategies in their instruction. The district response was to "double down" on efforts to make teachers use the strategies in their classroom instruction.

Communication about this renewed effort was characterized by forced collaboration. The district mandated that teachers meet with literacy coaches to ensure that they were implementing strategies (and only those strategies) disseminated from district training. A schedule was placed at the sign-in desk in the second week of April, 2008. It read: "Please schedule one time-slot to meet with Ms. Hudson in her office," then contained a table for with columns for Monday through Thursday of the last two weeks in April and rows for class periods 1st through 7th with fifteen minute times slots for teachers to sign up for a time with the literacy coach. I was directed to keep a checklist to make sure every teacher had signed up and was required to give a copy of the checklist and schedule to the principal to show which teachers had not signed up for a collaboration time with the literacy coach. This directive illustrates how the district chose to communicate the importance of specific strategies to teachers – again initially bypassing the local level school administrators.

The district tried to ensure that literacy coaches communicated a consistent message to teachers by giving them a scripted presentation along with a district-created PowerPoint for the rollout at the beginning of the first year of the initiative at selected schools. The director of reading "popped in" to several of the presentations to ensure the script was followed. The presenter's script began:

> In response to data collected over a year's time and in relation to the District Strategic Accountability Plan, Objective 1, the EBRP Adolescent Literacy Plan was developed. It is research-based and is aligned with the Louisiana Literacy Plan, K-12. We will not go into all of the data today, but will be happy to do so at another time.

The script for the PowerPoint continues with a slide about "Results-Based Staff Development Research by Joyce and Showers, 1993":

> One of the primary ways you will be supported in this implementation is by the assignment of a literacy coach. Research has show that if we give teachers only the theory and knowledge of the strategies we can expect that only 5% will transfer that knowledge to practice. … We can achieve a 14% rate of transfer to practice if we provide teachers feedback on their practice. But if we really want to have teachers transfer the strategies to their daily teaching then we need to provide peer coaching. Coaching will be a major part of our efforts to improve literacy for all students in our district.

Each slide had accompanying script, which on my copy is notated with the initials of which literacy coach would be reading each scripted slide.

At these meetings the Director of Literacy, Dr. Martinette, issued directives, which are present throughout my meeting notes. If non-compliance was considered as feedback, this was not apparent from the communications coming from the top level of the literacy initiative system. In meeting notes from November 30, 2008, it is noted, "Dr. Martinette is doing our evaluations." Though we were on site at various schools, under the supervision of principals, the Director of Literacy, Dr. Martinette, would be conducting evaluations instead of the principals. We were told to let our principals know this. We were also told by Dr. Martinette to make sure

that "your principals know" school "administrators are using the CORE form to evaluate implementation of literacy strategies." These were typical of the sorts of directives literacy coaches received at district meetings; we were required to communicate the directives back to our principals. Rather than communicate directly to the principals about what should be happening in their schools regarding literacy, the literacy coaches, who were below the principals in the chain of command were responsible for communicating the mandates issued by Dr. Martinette. This put literacy coaches in an awkward position of telling principals what should be happening in their schools, and I believe the circumvention of the chain of communication reduced the clarity and impact district messages.

This indirect communication also complicated implementation at the classroom level and resulted in undermining the literacy coaches' efforts with faculty who were unaware that their requests were district directives, as expressed by Mrs. Thomas, who said, "I tried to share that, but because it was only coming from me and you, it wasn't like it was something that people put any faith in, in terms of legitimacy." The directives about district literacy strategies only came from the literacy coaches, since communication skipped the level of school administration in many cases.

Super-ordinate Theme 2: Control

Many within-case themes formed cross-case Sub-ordinate themes containing the concept of control. From the inflexible duties assigned to roles within the system to the rigid linear structure itself, control was a major theme arising from participant interviews. In Table 5, I present the Sub-ordinate themes, Roles, Fear, Tighter-control with non-compliance, and rigid linear structure, which compose the Super-ordinate theme, Control. I provide evidence for those Sub-ordinate themes derived from the reported experiences of the participants.

Table 5

Sub-ordinate Themes and Emergent Themes of Control

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate themes	Individual Emergent themes	Participant
Control	Roles	Literacy coaches' roles were prescribed and tightly controlled.	LC1
		Tension between school administration and district administration about role of literacy coach.	LC1
		Defined roles were rigid.	LC2
		Director of reading as dictator	LC1
		Director was a distant dictator	LC2
		Mandates = dictates from literacy director	SA
	Fear	Punitive enforcement of responsibilities and activities at all levels of the system.	LC1
		Punitive enforcement	LC2
		Literacy coaches – agents of district	LC2
		Fear – threat	LC2
		Culture of mistrust	LC2
		Literacy coaches were the enforcers of the literacy initiative.	LC1
	Tighter control w/non-compliance	As compliance decreased, control increased.	LC1
		Disruption yielded tighter control.	LC2
		Tighter control when mandates were not strictly followed.	SA
		Teacher non-compliance.	SA
		Micro-control of classroom strategies (VAGO)	T, LC1, LC2
	Rigid linear structure	A rigid, linear structure at the micro and macro levels of the system.	LC1
		Highly structured and prescriptive	LC2
		District-owned literacy	LC2
		Top-down structure	SA
		Highly structured and controlled plan	DA
		Hierarchy created cognizant distance	DA
		Fidelity	DA

DA- District Administrator, SA- School Administrator, LC- Literacy Coach, T- Teacher, S-Student

Roles.

The first Sub-ordinate theme is Roles, which is comprised of emergent themes around the topics of prescribed roles and the role of the director as dictator. Literacy coaches' duties were clearly prescribed by the district. In addition to listing the duties for the literacy coaches, the district also issued a list of duties that were not to be assigned to literacy coaches in the schools, for example, substituting for an absent teacher. The district wanted to make sure literacy coaches were not used as extra-personnel or administrators. When principals or assistant principals attempted to expand the duties outside of the list of stated duties, the district list of duties was referenced to reign in the authority of the school administration over the literacy coaches in their schools. Table 6 duplicates a handout that was given to literacy coaches at a September 2007 District Literacy Coaches' meeting and emailed to our principals describing literacy coaches' roles and duties. It was intended to clarify coaches' roles in the school.

Table 6
Literacy Coach Roles Prescribed by the District

The Literacy Coach is:	The Literacy Coach is NOT:
a collaborator	an evaluator
a learner	a small group tutor
a facilitator	a substitute teacher
a supporter	a gossip columnist
a mentor	an undercover agent
a data analyzer	

The district's position that only the district could ordain the roles of literacy coaches created tension between school administrators and district staff. Dr. Martinette came to be

regarded as a dictator, somewhat because of the mandates she issued, but also because of her "my way or the highway" attitude, as Mrs. Calloway reported. Ms. Manship stated that Dr. Martinette did not really know the literacy coaches as individuals, which created a feeling of distance, as if the literacy coaches simply served a role of enforcing the district mandates, rather than a being part of a collaborative partnership with the district.

Fear.

The second Sub-ordinate theme is Fear, which stems from concepts having to do with the punitive enforcement of implementation activities and the mistrust present among members of the system at the school level. When mandates were not implemented according to the district plan, punitive enforcement resulted. This occurred at all levels of the system. Principals were called out for not properly using or supervising the literacy coaches in their schools, literacy coaches were targeted when implementations were not going well in their schools, and teachers were written up individually or admonished as a group by principals or assistant principals for not implementing district sanctioned strategies in their classrooms. In notes from a district literacy coaches' meeting on November 30, 2008, it is noted that Dr. Martinette requested a list of "which teachers are implementing which strategies" in the classrooms from each school. Specifically, the list was a list of *all* core content teachers from each school, presented as a table, with columns for each strategy and how many times we found evidence each teacher had implemented each strategy.

Mistrust described the overall experiences described by one literacy coach and the school administrator. Though the topic of mistrust was not broached other participants, the emphasis placed on this phenomenon by Ms. Manship and Mrs. Calloway indicated that this was an important factor in the implementation of the literacy initiative in schools. Ms. Manship felt the

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punitive enforcement fed into a "culture of fear" that existed before 2007 in the district. Literacy

coaches were seen as agents of the district, like the "literacy police" in the schools. This created

fear that prevented teachers from engaging with the literacy coaches in any meaningful way and

made building working relationships between teachers and literacy coaches difficult and rare.

There were teachers who worked on classroom implementation through cooperation, but many

teachers who did use the district strategies in their classroom instruction did so out of fear of

being written-up or put on a list of non-compliant teachers. In notes from the Literacy Coaches'

meeting October 26, 2008, I found instructions to, "Make of list of core subject teachers, who

has been trained and who is using strategies." In notes from February 29, 2008 Literacy

Coaches' meeting, I had written:

> Martinette - literacy strategies need to be on lesson plans.
> - submit samples weekly
> - look at lesson plans and do walkthroughs to check on strategies
> - if strategy is being used, then go in and observe
> -

A comment in my literacy coach meeting notes also reminded me that the icebreaker we were

instructed to use with our faculties was called "Phobia," which looking back, is apropos.

Tighter control with non-compliance.

A third Sub-ordinate theme under Control is Tighter Control with Non-Compliance. As

it became evident at district literacy coaching meetings and school site visits by district staff that

implementation of the literacy interventions was not being done with fidelity and that classroom

literacy strategies provided by the district were not being used by teachers, literacy coaches were

given instructions to visit the intervention classrooms more frequently and for longer periods of

time. Ms. Young talked about a site visit from district personnel after the literacy coaches turned

in the implementation reports for core content teachers, stating, "Dr. Gold came to observe or

something and maybe I was team teaching with a teacher … we were not doing THAT strategy

the way that they [the district] said it was supposed to be done." The other literacy coach, Ms. Manship spoke about the pressure literacy coaches were under, "You had to get them [teachers] to implement, so that it can be shown that you are doing your job at the school site."

To address non-compliance by core subject teachers for literacy strategies, literacy coaches were required to turn in records that indicated which teachers were using literacy strategies in the classrooms, as well as provide samples collected from those teachers. In the second semester of 2007-08 (the first year of the initiative), the district provided a model "survey" for literacy coaches to use with their schools; however, the gist of the form was an accounting of which district literacy strategies they had implemented and a directive to schedule a meeting between the literacy coach and the teacher to review and implement those strategies that had not been implemented yet. The form began with the heading "AHS Literacy" and read:

> In an effort to assess the implementation of the Literacy Initiative at Armstrong High, we need to document our use of the Literacy Strategies. Please schedule a time on Ms. Hudson's schedule posted in the office for a short meeting to review the use of literacy strategies in your instruction. You will need to bring this completed survey and samples of the strategies you have used to the meeting.

To the right was a place for the teacher's name, content area, the date and time of the meeting.

As site visits by district administrators revealed literacy coaches were moving beyond their prescribed duties, implementing strategies other than those provided by the district, or performing duties not included in the district's job description for coaches, the literacy coaches' schedules came under scrutiny and we received more frequent site visits from district staff in order to monitor the activities of literacy coaches. School administrators were asked to control or "rein in" the literacy coaches who were not implementing the district plan as mandated. An increasingly detailed schedule was required by the district for literacy coaches before their work week began. In addition, a "report" about how that schedule had been implemented, down to the

minutes spent on each activity, was due at the end of the week. In notes from the Literacy

Coaches' meeting on September 9, 2009, I had written, " – no more teacher activity logs. Instead

– on report, under Core activities, list teachers you worked with and if you did a specific

strategy, list that plus Core [content] area." Literacy coaches and principals came under scrutiny

from these end-of-week reports and contributed to a paranoia among the literacy coaches about

recording and reporting how they used their time during the school day.

Rigid linear structure.

The fourth Sub-ordinate theme under Control is the application of a rigid, linear structure

on the implementation of the district literacy initiative. This rigid structure was evident from Dr.

Anderson's discussion of the plan in which she states that district leadership "did not, though, get

so involved in what was going to be done. That was left to the literacy team." There was a clear

role, even for the district literacy team. Dr. Anderson spoke about being relieved when she was

able to go into the classroom and get a closer look than the "fifty-thousand foot" perspective of

the district leadership. The structure was also evident in email communication from the director

to principals, copied to the literacy coaches. "We now have our two literacy coordinators in

place. This week our *Language!* (Greene, 2006) training will be in their very capable hands."

The instructional component of the district plan was evident in the PowerPoint used to

introduce the plan to select school faculties. The plan was prescriptive, as evidence in the use of

RTI levels, as well as the use of prescriptive and scripted intervention programs, *Read180*

(Hasselbring, et al., 2004) and *Language!* (Greene, 2006) that were expected to be implemented

with "fidelity."

The perception of the district director as a dictator with her "underlings" given the task of

training and controlling the literacy coaches. The coaches were then to disseminate the plan in

schools and enforce the activities of the plan in teacher's classrooms in a clearly a *top-down*

structure. The rigid hierarchy created distance between the various members of the system and

limited collaboration across levels, keeping feedback from reaching the top level of the structure.

Super-ordinate Theme 3: Disruption

Table 7 displays the three Sub-ordinate themes that form the Super-ordinate theme

Disruption: Friction, Lack of Authority of Literacy Coaches, and Flexibility.

Table 7
Sub-ordinate Themes and Emergent Themes of Disruption

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate themes	Individual emergent themes	Participant
Disruption	Friction	Friction between roles of those within the system	T
		Tension between school administration and district administration about roles & responsibilities of Lit. Coach	LC1
		Conflict about roles/responsibilities/supervisor	LC2
		Friction between school and district	SA
		Friction between literacy coach/district and literacy coach/teachers	SA
	Lack of authority of Literacy Coach	Lack of authority hindered implementation.	LC2
		Teacher –Lit. Coach relationship difficult.	LC2
		Lit. Coach role lacked authority, autonomy, and power.	SA
	Flexibility	Literacy coach was flexible against the wishes of the district prescribed directives.	LC1
			SA

DA- District Administrator, SA- School Administrator, LC- Literacy Coach, T- Teacher, S-Student

By disruption, I mean to consider those relational spaces or events that created a disruption to the

smooth operation or implementation of the literacy initiative. Friction within the system was

discussed by six of the seven participants in the semi-structured interviews.

Friction.

Though the themes containing the concept of friction as conflict emerged from only four of the participant interviews, two other participants alluded to some idea of friction related to their roles in the system. Both Cory (Student 1) and Dr. Anderson (District Administrator) spoke about a certain level of friction present. Cory talked about not getting along with his intervention teacher while he was in the intervention class, "Me and the teacher, at first, we didn't get along. When I was in her class, I didn't want to be in her class so it kinda made a bad relationship between me and her." I associate the "struggle" mentioned by Dr. Anderson as friction. She spoke about the idea of moving students in and out of Tiers and interventions, "I remember that being a struggle for some teachers, coming from the district level."

Ms. Thomas spoke about the friction between the roles of those within the system, "I guess a lot of times I wound up being a sounding board more than anything else, with people who were disgruntled with the literacy coach and what they didn't understand to be a literacy initiative." Both Mrs. Young and Ms. Manship talked about the friction that arose in their roles as literacy coaches at their schools, both with their school administration and district administration. Mrs. Young explained the tension of being "caught in the middle" between district expectations and school administrator expectations. Ms. Manship revealed a large disturbance that happened early in the roll-out of the literacy initiative, in which the director publicly scolded Ms. Manship's principal via an email that was sent out to all principals in the district, about his using Ms. Manship for duties that had not been assigned by the district for literacy coaches. Ms. Manship responded to this friction by deciding to comply with her principal's demands over the district demands.

Mrs. Calloway used the word "friction" more than any other participant in her description of the implementation of the literacy initiative. Mrs. Calloway described her relationship with the district Director of Reading as "clashing on a number of levels" and spoke about the "friction" between the literacy coaches and teachers, stemming from what Mrs. Calloway attributed to a lack of authority for the literacy coach over teachers. On January 5, 2010, Mrs. Hoffpauer ended an email to the principal of Plato High, regarding me, the literacy coach, by stating, "I have been told that she is not my supervisor, yet she tries to come off with this supervisory attitude." This statement reflects the resentment Mrs. Hoffpauer had developed about what she saw as my interfering in her intervention classroom.

Lack of Authority of Literacy Coach.

Lack of Authority of Literacy Coach is the second theme, which I placed into the thematic Super-ordinate theme, Friction, with the rationale that some of the friction between literacy coaches and teachers stemmed from the literacy coaches' lack of authority. This also seemed to be the case for district expectations not being met by literacy coaches. Ms. Manship spoke about this making the teacher-literacy coach relationship difficult in that it hindered implementation of the initiative at the classroom level, "because we didn't have any administrative rights in a school, we're not writing teachers up, we're not doing evaluations, it was really up to the teacher whether or not they wanted to implement and try what we had."

Mrs. Calloway also stated that lack of authority created a situation in which literacy coaches were unable to fulfill the expectations of implementing strategies at the classroom level. "They didn't have the authority, but … were supposed to do something about it [non-compliance by teachers]." In an email from Mrs. Hoffpauer to Mrs. Calloway that was copied to me, Mrs. Hoffpauer stated, "I have been told that she [the literacy coach] is not my supervisor, yet she

tries to come off with this supervisory attitude." (personal communication, January 5, 2010) The

statement by Ms. Hoffpauer, the *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) teacher demonstrates the

trouble she was having with the literacy coach position. Literacy coaches did not have a

supervisory role in the district plan, yet we were placed in charge of the intervention classes and

required to ensure those programs were implemented "with fidelity." This frequently caused

problems between the literacy coaches and intervention teachers.

Flexibility.

When literacy coaches exhibited flexibility in their positions, initiating activities

suggested by teachers or allowing teachers to adapt classroom strategies to fit their needs, district

personnel complained. The complaints came in the form of emails to the literacy coaches,

complaints to school-level supervisors, or open general admonition in district literacy coach

meetings. In an email dated September 4, 2009, I wrote:

> Ms. Robins [the district literacy coordinator] announced in front of all the literacy
> coaches that you called her and asked her to come out to my school because I was not
> working well with the teachers and still had some resistant teachers.

Thus, those who sought flexibility in implementation were labeled as resistant to the district

initiative. The strong and public reaction to "resistant" teachers and coaches seems to be a place

of disruption, a place where change was trying to happen in the system but instead resulted in

conflict.

In addition to the personal, public admonition, at the end of the first year, literacy

coaches were required to reapply for their positions, as shown in an email from Dr. Martinette on

April 2008:

> Literacy Coaches…
> Write a letter reapplying for the literacy coach position using the following guidelines:
> Maximum of two pages, double spaced with 1 inch margins all around, Times New
> Roman font, size 12.

List your accomplishments this year, give 1-2 specific examples
List your challenges this year and what you have done to overcome them and provide 1-2 specific examples
List the challenges you face still and your plan for addressing them.
Submit letter to Dr. Martinette no later than 3:30 p.m. April 22, 2008.
E. Martinette   (personal communication, April 11, 2008)

The admonition and job insecurity could be considered elements of Control or the sub-ordinate theme Fear; however, disruption occurred at the places where members of the system acted in ways that went against the rigid structure and acted on their own to improve literacy in their schools. The admonitions and threat of losing our positions were part of the disruption. Every place where change began to happen outside of the mandates were natural disruptions and opportunities for generative growth in the system, but the district leadership treated these activities as non-compliance. The non-compliance resulted in corrections of the activities carried out by agents in the system, but not a correction of the plan of the original district literacy initiative nor in a change in the way the plan was implemented..

Super-ordinate Theme 4: Motivation

Motivation of students and teachers is a Super-ordinate theme that includes two Sub-ordinate themes, but it is closely related to Disruption because much of the friction or "disruption" that occurred at the classroom level seemed to surface around the motivation of students and teachers. Motivation emerged as a significant theme in enough of the participants' experiences to warrant a separate Super-ordinate theme. The Sub-ordinate themes belonging to the Motivation are Labeling – stigma, and Buy-in, as shown with the related individual emergent themes and sources in Table 8.

Table 8
Sub-ordinate Themes and Emergent Themes of Motivation

Super-ordinate theme	Sub-ordinate themes	Individual emergent themes	Participant
Motivation	Labeling - stigma	Stigma associated with being in the intervention class.	S1
		Being removed from the intervention class and given individualized help with high interest text removed stigma of being identified as a struggling reader.	S1
		The student valued being part of the ESL cohort in reading intervention.	S2
		Kids not buying into intervention programs.	LC1
		Stigma associated with intervention programs.	LC2
		Student stigma and labeling	SA
	Buy-in	Cory showed dissonance about whether he needed help with reading or not.	S1
		High interest print material made Cory want to read more.	S1
		Javid was grateful to have <u>any</u> help with reading and felt he still needed to learn the sounds of letters.	S2
		Kids not buying into the intervention programs.	LC1
		Limited buy-in.	LC2
		Student motivation (problem)	SA
		Cory felt angry that he was labeled as needing help and was angry about being placed in the intervention program.	S1
		Teachers saw literacy initiative as more work.	LC1 & 2

DA- District Administrator, SA- School Administrator, LC- Literacy Coach, T- Teacher, S-Student

Labeling – stigma.

Students', literacy coaches' and school administrators' interviews yielded themes about labeling and stigma. Cory repeatedly emphasized concerns about students being labeled in the intervention classes, "The *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) class kind of put a mark on us. By being in the class it signaled we were different," and being seen going into that class "makes people look on them as being slow or special or some type of special needs." Once Cory was removed from the intervention class and was given *Sports Illustrated* as his instructional level

text of choice and provided individual support for challenging school work, he engaged with the process of practicing reading. Cory did not mind being seen walking around with *Sports Illustrated*, "because that's a popular book. A lot of kids are interested in *Sports Illustrated*."

Mrs. Young experienced the stigmatizing effect of the program when parents arrived to take students out of intervention classes. When she tried to explain to parents the benefits of their child receiving help in reading through the intervention, she stated, " Some parents would be like, "I still don't want them. This is high school. I still don't want them. They don't want to be in it. I'm not gonna." Ms. Manship experienced students rejecting the program because of stigma involved in being part of an intervention class, because, "In these intervention programs, they are seen as different or lesser by their peers." The same phenomenon was reported by Assistant Principal, Mrs. Calloway, "The kids didn't want to be seen going into the classroom." This kept students from participating in the classes because "they come to you already feeling less than their peers."

Mrs. Hoffpauer, the *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004) teacher, also experienced students' lack of motivation as it extended even to their willingness to be tested. In the email below, she expressed frustration with the behavior of students present in her classroom for testing.

> Ms. Hudson:
> I put those last three girls out that you sent in here. They kept complaining about the test while doing the test. Said they were going to stop taking it and that they weren't coming in here for this class. If you want them to take it, please stay with them. I can't do this and handle an unruly class too. I had [a certain student] last year and she was a problem and she is even more rude.
> Mrs. Hoffpauer   (personal communication, September 26, 2008)

Mrs. Hoffpauer was dealing with disruptive students who were resisting the test, stating that they would not come into the class, and she asked for help from the literacy coach to deal with the disruptive students. She also stated that one of the students was in her intervention class in the year prior and had behavior problems then, too.

Javid's experience differed greatly in this category; Javid felt that he belonged in the group of intervention students and attributed this to being part of the ESL cohort at Armstrong High. Javid valued the experience of learning to read and write in English with his fellow ESL students. He was not stigmatized because he already belonged to the group of "ESL" students and they were assigned to homogeneous intervention classes as a pre-labeled group. It appears that belonging to the group of peers countered the stigma that Cory had identified in his intervention experience.

Buy-in.

Buy-in is the next Sub-ordinate theme derived from participant themes that fit into the Super-ordinate theme of Motivation. Students, literacy coaches, and school administrators emphasized this concept enough to justify a theme in the descriptive analysis of those interviews; however, the district administrator mentioned this as a problem, too, "The students who came in appeared to be over-aged as they came into her classroom, the conversation was not about 'Oh! the exciting lesson that's going to happen today.' They were not exactly the most motivated."

Cory's buy-in was intermittent; he wavered about whether or not he needed help with reading. He expressed that, "I knew I understood a lot of the stuff they were teaching me already," but also said, "At the end of the day, I did need some help with my reading." Another factor in Cory's lack of buy-in while he was in the intervention class was his anger about being in the class. Cory used strong language about being in the class, saying it "put a mark on us" and

he sounded angry when he described his experience during the interview. It seemed that his resentment about being placed in the program stood in the way of accepting help in the reading intervention class. Cory did buy in to intervention once he was removed from the class he felt "put a mark on him" as special needs, and accepted that he would need to become a proficient reader in order to keep his grades up to remain eligible for his varsity athletics, as well as to have a chance to progress to college level football. Once he was offered individual assistance using high-interest materials, Cory consistently and enthusiastically came to my office to get his weekly *Sports Illustrated* issue and share with me some of the topics about which he had read.

Ms. Young spoke about how "the kids were not really buying into *Read180* (Hasselbring, et al., 2004), I think maybe my second year in *Language!* (Greene, 2006)." She noted that the teachers were also reluctant to buy in to the district strategies Ms. Young was trying to implement because they thought, "I was giving them more work to do." Mrs. Manship reported limited buy-in among the teachers in her school, too. "There was so little teacher buy-in because it just felt like something extra and not something they felt would be beneficial."

Mrs. Calloway attributed the students' lack of participation in the intervention classes to a "more adversarial than nurturing" classroom environment and felt the teacher did not "build the bond" with "students who are deficient in areas they come to you already feeling less than their peers, there's a whole process you have to go through to make them feel valued." Students were forced into the classes based upon reading test scores.

The lack of buy-in became especially apparent as students began to exit the program in the first few months of the initiative. This became a significant enough problem that the district responded with a "Refusal of Services" form designed to record a mandated meeting between a parent or guardian and the literacy coach. The literacy coach was required to write the student's

reading level and grade level reading equivalent and explain to the parent that the student would

not be receiving services. The form further stated,

> I understand that my child has been offered access to a reading intervention program by the [district] School System and Plato High. I further understand that my child is reading below his /her current grade placement and that failing to improve his/her reading ability may result in lower grades in all classes and possible poor performance on the LEAP, iLEAP, or GEE exams. Having considered this, I have decided to refuse this service for my child at this time.

The form was one deterrent to parents withdrawing their children from the literacy intervention

programs. Additionally, literacy coaches and principals were instructed to discourage parents

from removing their children from the intervention programs. This contributed to the feeling of

being forced into the programs against their will.

Details from records I kept during the implementation of the literacy initiative support

both the Sub-ordinate themes, as well as the Super-ordinate themes and reveal spaces where the

implementation was not working. The support details also show the attitudes of members, their

relationships within the system and voices other than those of the participants, which triangulate

findings in the descriptive analysis and resulting theme clusters. In the next chapter, the themes

find a place in Complexity Theory, which illuminates concepts in the study and enables answers

to the research questions put forward earlier in the paper.

CHAPTER 6: COMPLEXITY

Applying Complexity

Research Questions Through the Lens of Complexity Theory

This chapter presents conclusions to the study of a complex adaptive system by applying complexity theory; this is where I look for the *simple* in the *complex*. This chapter also addresses *deep commonalities in complex systems*, which means I look for how a school system behaves as other organic systems might behave. I first return to the research questions to briefly address the conclusions. The sections that follow address the questions and illuminate the findings in more depth through the lens of complexity theory.

Research question one (RQ1).

How are the stakeholders within a district literacy initiative system interconnected and what do these relationships reveal about the design implementation? My first research question answers how the stakeholders interconnect in this system. If I imagine the expansive outward nested structure of the system, I can see that change was possible at those borders where literacy coaches interacted with the teachers and students in the schools; however, there were limitations placed upon those relationships and activities through upper level management control of the roles and duties of the literacy coaches. The relationships and activities were further limited by distorted communication patterns or in some cases, no communication at all. The design implementation sought to prescribe the relationships and activities of the members of the system, thereby limiting the potential for meaningful change.

Research question two (RQ2).

How did the design and implementation of the literacy initiative contribute to generative processes within the literacy intervention system? The district plan placed literacy coaches in the

schools to interact and communicate with local site level members of the system. The placement of literacy coaches held potential for generative processes and this was observed by several participants who reported literacy coaches carrying out activities at the local school site levels that were valued by teachers, students and the school administration. The independent activities carried out by the literacy coaches, reported by the literacy coaches and the school administrator, suggest there were places of disruption that carried potential for adaptation. In the places where these activities continued in spite of the district personnel's objection, the outcome was reported as positive for the local school site.

Research question three (RQ3).

How did the design and implementation of the literacy initiative thwart generative processes within the literacy intervention system? The Super-ordinate themes that emerged from the study of the literacy intervention system contributed more to RQ3 than to RQ2. From the reported experiences of members of the literacy initiative system, it seemed that there were more factors thwarting than contributing to generative processes.

Generative processes in the literacy intervention system were thwarted first by the reported control of activities and duties of the literacy coaches and by control of the prescribed literacy strategies imposed upon core content teachers. Second, the dynamics of the plan design did not nurture communication among the short-range relationships in the system. Third, disruptions that occurred were not given space to create change since the change was being controlled by the plan. Fourth, the motivation of teachers and students was lacking. Teachers seemed to reluctantly interact with literacy coaches, many only when forced to meet with the literacy coaches. The literacy coaches and one student reported resistance to the literacy

intervention programs. They each expressed the experience of students feeling that being part of those programs carried a perceived stigma associated with special education status.

Given these findings, I next apply concepts from Complexity Theory to broaden my analysis of the district-wide literacy initiative. I first focus specifically on the concept of change as it is represented in Complexity Theory since that was the primary goal of the initiative. Thus, I look at the places where change did or could have occurred in the implementation of the literacy initiative.

Change in a Complex System

Dewey emphasized the importance of describing an experience in order to get to the essence of the experience (Fleener, 2002). Complexivists seek deep commonalities as well as deep simplicity in complex systems. The Super-ordinate themes that emerged from the experiences of participants in the system of the district literacy initiative provide a grasp of the commonalities across levels of the system as well as allow a look at some of the simple issues of a very complex system.

Banathy states, "systems philosophy brings forth a reorganization of ways of thinking and knowing perceived reality, a view manifested in synthetic, expansionist, dynamic, and multiple/mutual causality modes of thinking and inquiring, how things work more than what things are." (as cited in Fleener, 2002, p.103) Examination of the system of the district literacy initiative through a lens of complexity moves away from considerations of causality. Causality implies a linear approach, which is not a characteristic of complex systems nor is it part of complexity thinking. The matter at hand for the district literacy initiative was *change*. Change was the basic goal of the initiative. The first goal that involved change was to move students in the district toward higher levels of literacy. The second goal was a change in how teachers of

core subjects used literacy strategies in their classrooms. The district wanted to increase use of

specific strategies in classrooms. In order to adopt an attitude of complexity thinking as it

applies to the district's attempts to effect those changes, I consider one model of the cycle of

change. With a cyclical model of change, the characteristics of the literacy initiative that

emerged as themes from participants' experiences can be explored in terms of systems thinking.

In the change cycle illustrated in Figure 3, Fleener demonstrated the cycle of change that requires

all four components for completion in a complex system. In this model, a Question leads to

Action, which leads to Reflection about the action, which leads to Revision, and so even the

question is revised in order to move forward with the cycle of change. (M.J. Fleener, personal

communication, April 19, 2015)

Revision   Question
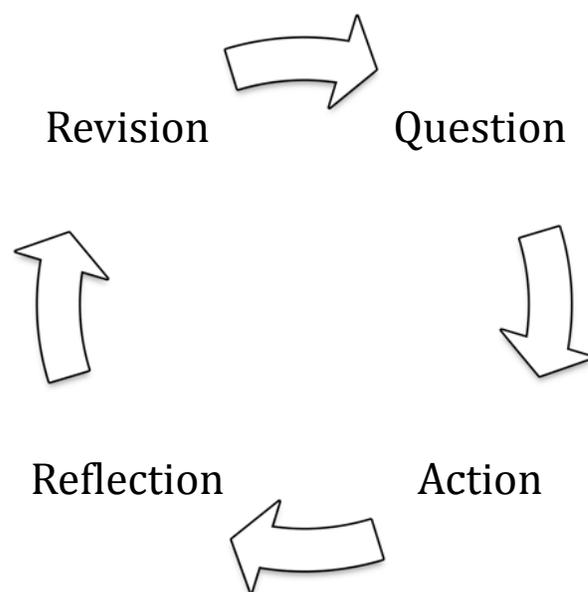
Reflection   Action

Figure 3. Change Cycle as presented by Fleener. (personal communication, April 19, 2015)

      The district's plan clearly demonstrated that a plan for action was put together at the

district level; however, the district administrator, Dr. Anderson, never mentioned a question,

other than a desire to implement "the state's literacy curriculum framework." Was there ever a

question at the district level? In any case, it appears from the interviews and evidence that much

of the energy of the system went toward the action part of the cycle. There were places where reflection might have occurred, but according to the district administrator, the reflection that happened when the district leadership received feedback that teachers were struggling with implementing strategies, seemed to be supplanted by more action as they "provided more support" for the teachers to implement those strategies. There was no mention in the plan of reflection and revision. In my experience as a literacy coach, we were never told to bring feedback from teachers to the literacy coach meetings. In fact, we were not asked for our feedback, only for reports on how thoroughly the implementation was happening at our schools. With a focus on action without reflection and revision, at least half the cycle could not be completed. Feedback is necessary for a system to make change or to continue in the iteration of successful activities; however, this system never had an opportunity to reflect on whether its activities were successful or not. Without reflection, there is no opportunity for revision in the case of activities that are not successful, so ineffective activities are repeated, driving the system into stagnation and eventually extinction.

Looking at the Super-ordinate Themes with Complexity

I want to emphasize that the themes described in Chapter 5 have emerged as overarching themes, but have not been reduced, since reduction is antithetical to complexity thinking. Reducing implies larger to smaller elements and this process has been one of broadening the scope of the emergent themes across cases to sub-ordinate themes, which broadened more to Super-ordinate themes. The super-ordinate themes are Communication, Control, Disruption, and Motivation. In some cases there is a blurring of borders between themes, which is consistent with Complexity thinking.

All Super-ordinate themes could possibly fit under the Super-ordinate category of Control; however, I believe a more subtle exploration of the phenomenon can occur by considering all four Super-ordinate themes, Communication, Control, Disruption, and Motivation. Since this study is interpreting and exploring, rather than searching for some reality or causality, one approach is to look closely at the themes that have emerged from participants' personal interpretations of their experiences, as well as my interpretation as historically grounded in the phenomenon itself. "From a systems perspective, there is no longer the possibility of an objective observer or an Archimedean stance." (Fleener, 2002, p.103) And in this study, my role as a literacy coach in the system being studied further imbeds my perspective within the system and makes the possibility of being an objective observer moot. With that caveat, I now discuss each of the Super-ordinate themes in relation to complex system theory and the model of change described above.

Communication.

In a complex system, the reflective stage of the change cycle depends upon feedback and, thus, upon communication. The Sub-ordinate themes within Communication were lack of communication and directives. Members of the system reported a lack of communication across all levels beneath the district level. As Wheatley (2006) puts it, "Meaningful information lights up a network and moves through it like a windswept brushfire. Meaningless information, in contrast, smolders at the gates until somebody dumps cold water on it." (p. 151) This begs the question of whether the information that was not being communicated through the literacy initiative system from district staff to teachers had meaning for the agents in the system. Wheatley further states that the communication capacity of a network is "directly linked to the meaningfulness of the information." (p. 151)

So, there are two factors now in looking at the issue of *communication* in the district

system. First was the lack of communication present in the system. Second, and directly related

and linked to the lack of communication, was the meaningfulness of the transmitted information.

The data presented thus far certainly suggests that communication was lacking in many

instances. Was the information to be communicated meaningful? The information about which

intervention programs would be present in Mrs. Calloway's school, that a literacy coach had

been assigned to her school, and what that coach's duties would be would have been helpful for

the school administrator in carrying out her administrative tasks. Additionally, information

about the implementation of literacy strategies seemed hindered by the structure of the system,

not only through the resistance to the role of the literacy coach, but also by the teachers' lack of

trust for district directives. Though I know I tried to communicate the activities of the district

initiative through emails, handouts, and professional development with one-on-one coaching, the

information about literacy strategies for use in classrooms seemed to wither.

Directives as means of communication meant that communication flowed in one

direction, from top to bottom. This hierarchical flow from top to bottom is the reverse of

bottom-up emergence that should take place in a dynamic adaptive system. In a CAS,

information at the lowest levels feedback up or across the system to create solutions to local

problems.

Since much of the communication flowed in one direction, it was almost impossible for

the necessary information to be fed back up the hierarchy in order to facilitate reflection.

Feedback is a necessary component of reflection and some complexivists emphasize the need for

both positive and negative feedback in both directions (Cilliers, 1998). There was no apparent

reflection phase on the part of the system, which could be associated with the missing *question*

phase. So, *revision* in response to feedback would not be taking place either. The system seems

to be stuck in the planning and action phase of the cycle. No real change could occur because

the complete change cycle was not present.

Control.

Control as a Super-ordinate theme contained the Sub-ordinate themes: *roles, fear, tighter*

control with non-compliance, and a rigid linear structure. The level of control reported by

members of the system prevented reflection or revision and limited the adaptive possibilities of

the system. Some organizations are stuck in a top-down, hierarchical activity cycle. Without

essential components of the change cycle, the cycle in which the district was functioning was

simply an activity cycle. The activity cycle, as illustrated in Figure 4, consisted of a plan,

activity with fidelity to the plan, and reaction to correct activity not carried out with fidelity.
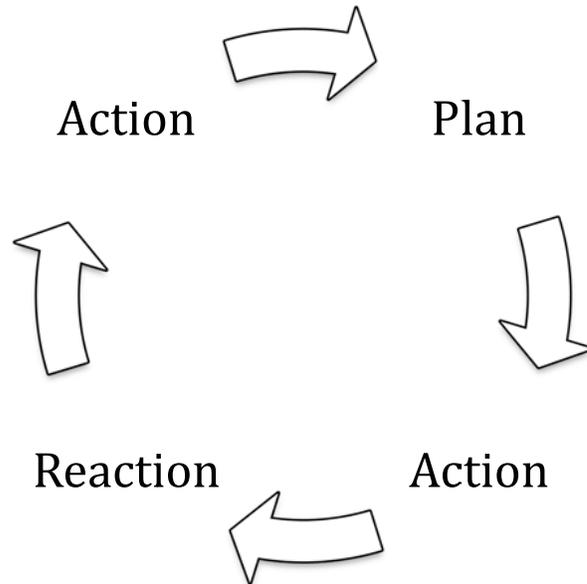
Action   Plan

Reaction   Action

Figure 4. Cycle of action and reaction engaged by the district initiative

The district's implementation of their plan was action, but not action as part of adaptive

change. The hierarchical manner in which the district attempted to control the actions of the

system in order to control the outcome uses the *logic of domination*. (Fleener, 2002; Wheatley,

2006) Characteristics of the logic of domination are that it is control-oriented, objective, certain/definitive, and has defined variables and measures. Since most participants spoke about control, it took time to separate themes like communication, disruption, and motivation from under the umbrella of control. A more nuanced examination was achieved by considering the other three categories, though control seeped across themes, too. Complexity thinking accepts and encourages blurred borders. Further, complexity asks the researcher to become comfortable with uncertainty. Indeed, Fleener suggests that complexivists learn to "blur the borders." (February 27, 2010, personal communication). It is this blurring of borders that allows for elements of some themes to appear within other themes. Making sense of the blurred borders from a complexivists' perspective means being comfortable with *both/and* in terms of where those elements belong. There is uncertainty in the conclusion as it is within the system.

I suggest it is the fear of uncertainty that prompts organizations like the school system in the study to implement measures for change under tight control. Limiting the possibilities for acting served to limit the potential adaptation of the system. Change is intimidating for some organizations. Wheatley (2006) calls change "the feared enemy," and suggests that organizations characterized by rigid control have not considered that they might "work with the forces of change" rather than attempt to control it. She goes on to suggest that organizations think they "need to manage change and keep it under control every cautious step of the way." (pp. 137-138) Wheatley (2006) claims that the ideas for how to manage change come from a Newtonian approach, treating a problem within an organization as if it were a mechanistic breakdown and writes that senior corporate leaders report that "75% of their change projects do not yield the promised results." (p.138)

Treating the change of a human organization as if it were a machine is where complexity thinking steps in to replace the mechanistic view with a holistic, organic view of an organization as a living system. The members of a school system are not unconscious atomic units, but are members of a living organic system made up of living beings that are in relationship to each other and to the environment in which they act. In complexity, every point in a set is a relationship, so the network of relationships in the school literacy initiative has potential to impact every member of the literacy initiative system.

"Bergson was among the first to explore psychosocial relationships from a systems perspective, focusing on biological and naturalistic processes." (Fleener, 2002, p.101). "The goal of all life, according to Bergson (1911), is creative action rather than knowledge or certainty. Intuition rather than analysis reveals the true reality or nature of the universe. According to his perspective, survival is related to creative action rather than genetic disposition." (Fleener, 2002, p.101). One important lesson that organizations like schools and districts could learn from complexity thinking is the optimistic principal that *the more freedom in self-organization, the more order.* But organizations are often uncomfortable with the uncertainty that comes with freedom. (Jantsch in Wheatley, 2006).

Some of the problems with the district in this study lay in the fact that the district leadership making the decisions about the literacy initiative had any background in literacy, including the Director of Literacy. The district behaved in ways that many large organizations behave. School district leaders are responsible for large sums of money, as well as the welfare of the education of tens of thousands of students. They, too, are under pressure to raise the level of student performance from state and federal levels of the system. District leaders believed they could do that imposing a plan upon schools across the district in a uniform fashion would yield

the results they wished. After all, more than one account representative for reading intervention programs as well as outside consultants had promised results if their programs were implemented with fidelity. There is an argument for some order in an organized system; however, there needs to be both freedom and order. Together these two components generate healthy, well-ordered systems, according to Wheatley (2006). Questions that come from this part of the discussion are: How much freedom and structure would generate a healthy system capable of real change? How would a structure look that allowed for enough freedom for generative change?

Wheatley (2006) stresses "when leaders strive for equilibrium and stability by imposing control, constricting people's freedom and inhibiting local change, they only create the conditions that threaten the organization's survival." (p.89). "To attempt to manage for stability and to enforce an unnatural equilibrium always leads to far-reaching destruction." (Wheatley, 2006, p. 89). In a living system, the conditions for independence and interdependence are primary. Independence in the case of a school system is autonomy at the classroom and school site level. Interdependence requires that the school district nurture relationships across each independent system, which would foster another important characteristic of a CAS - *redundancy*. Redundancy is copying. Teacher A hears about a teacher at another school who is having great success with ESL students learning how to write in English and sends an email to ask how she is going about working with her students on this task. Teacher A duplicates the activities in her classroom and has success with her students. Other teachers hear about the success of both teachers and the information about the successes begins to spread across the school of Teacher A. Remember, meaningful information travels like a wildfire, often engendering change as it does so in a complex adaptive system.

Disruption.

The Super-ordinate theme having to do with Friction, Lack of Control, and Flexibility is called *disruption* in this chapter in order to transition to the language of Complexity. "The theory of evolution was influential in Dewey's approach to and focus of philosophy. He rejected the Cartesian approach to philosophy and challenged the idea that philosophy should be about finding immutable truths." (Fleener, 2002, p.89). In complexity, disruption is the event that contains potential for change and adaptation. When disruption occurs in nature, it looks like a break in the established pattern. It could be perceived as a breakdown, but what happens is that the alternate actions or activities provide options for the system. In nature, evolution takes this course and adaptations happen at the level of DNA codes and switches. If alternate actions work well for the system, that information is fed back into the system, allowing the system to use that information to establish the adaptation. When only one option exists, adaptation ceases to be a possibility and the system becomes extinct. What appears to have happened in the district initiative when the local systems (i.e. teachers and literacy coaches at school sites) acted in ways that were not prescribed by the district plan, or did not follow the established pattern, is that the district attempted to tamp out those activities and force fidelity to their plan.

Beabout (2015) contemplates disruption as he considers perturbation and turbulence in school systems and whether fostering perturbation and turbulence might create meaningful change. It is indeed at the points of disruption in the activities of complex systems that real change is possible. At the points of disruption, where some local part of a system deviates from the preceding pattern, an adaptive system is presented with options, which may result in success and, at some level, survival. If the options for adapting are limited, the chances for survival are also limited. In this way, lack of options could lead to extinction of the system. Local change

means change at the lower levels of the system, those places that receive immediate feedback from the learner – the classroom system, and in that context, the faculty and school, itself.

In the schools, literacy coaches who were acting on information gleaned from the local school site instead of district directives were stifled by district interference in those activities. For example, district literacy staff complained to school administration that in my role as a literacy coach, I was "doing my own thing" when I removed Cory from the intervention class and gave him high-interest print materials as an intervention. That alternative action worked well for Cory. I wonder how it would have worked for other students had the system been allowed to adapt more readily to the needs of students and teachers who could not buy in to the district literacy plan.

Motivation.

Motivation as a Super-ordinate theme when studied in the context of adaptive change is about individual change. Wheatley (2006) notes that motivation for individual change is not in response to hierarchical directives or even in response to the need for personal development. The context of an emergent collaborative process is what motivates people to change. "They want their work to be more effective, and they now see how they individually can better contribute to that outcome." (Wheatley, 2006, p.144) This is an aspect of what complexivists call *collective intelligence. Collective intelligence* in complexity focuses upon the distributed links present between and across relationships that make up the system network. West (2011) declared that all of life in some way is sustained by these underlying networks that are transporting resources. I would suggest that information is one of the resources in the district initiative system. The information traveling through the system was inefficient.

One tenet of complexity theory is that change happens all at once. "Systems logic focuses on the notions that change cannot occur piecemeal and patterns of organization and emergence are central aspects of organic growth and change." (Fleener, 2002, p.78) The district plan for changing the literacy practices of core content teachers began with the delivery of uniform set of strategies, usually one per month, to literacy coaches during the district literacy coaches' meetings. The strategies were introduced one at a time with follow-up "job-embedded professional development" as stated in the State Literacy Plan. The job-embedded professional development also followed a rigid structure. Once a strategy had been taught to literacy coaches, the coaches were to re-deliver the strategy to the faculty who taught core subjects at their schools. The teachers were then to meet with the literacy coach to plan for a lesson to be modeled in their classroom. Once the lesson was modeled, the teacher and literacy coach were supposed to co-teach the strategy together in a lesson. The next step was for the teacher to inform the literacy coach about when he or she planned to use the strategy in a lesson so the literacy coach could observe that strategy and give feedback about correctness of the use of the strategy. Once it was established that the teacher was using the strategy in the manner taught by the district and disseminated by the literacy coach, and the literacy coach checked lesson plans for planned use of the district strategies, observed the strategies in use and collected evidence of the teachers' use of those strategies.

Had job-embedded professional development been used as an opportunity for local solutions to problems in the literacy instruction systems at the school site and classroom levels, there could have been potential for meaningful change; however, the literacy initiative was implemented in the school system in a mechanistic way. The district plan did not honor the organic possibilities for adaption and change and the internal intelligence at each site level.

"Holistic, comprehensive, connected change must be approached from a systems perspective. Infusing social organizations with the flexibility and means of adaptation goes beyond the adaptive capabilities of the individuals comprising the organization." (Fleener, 2002, p.78)

Additionally, student motivation was complicated by engagement in the form of *buy-in* and by *stigmatization*. The students in prescriptive reading intervention programs had no say in their individual learning, which is to say they had no investment in the changes that were expected of them. Because intervention students were forced into the intervention classes, the impetus to seek a solution for a problem was removed from the individual.

Both student and teacher motivation was lacking because the change was initiated from the top-down. Had teachers and students been involved in exploring a variety of actions to address the problem or question, I believe motivation would have been high for these individuals. As we saw with Cory, when I included him in finding a solution to the problem of reading far below his grade level (and the resulting grades that could result in ineligibility for varsity sports), he engaged with me in finding a solution by creating a plan and action – reading sports-themed print material on an instructional reading level in order to increase his interest and reading level. Cory was fully invested and engaged with the entire change phase of the individualized intervention we planned together. Indeed, the *Sports Illustrated* intervention was successful. Cory is in his senior year at a four-year university, playing varsity sports and studying sociology.

Characteristics of Complex Systems

A multi-dimensional approach provides a thorough exploration of how the elements of complexity theory manifested in the district literacy initiative. This is represented as a lateral cross-section intersected with a horizontal cross section of the phenomenon as experienced by

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the participants in the study. Looking at the cross-section of both the Super-ordinate themes and the characteristics of Complex Adaptive Systems contributes to the understanding of the literacy initiative as a complex adaptive system. The space where the two merge in Figure 5 is where the depth of understanding occurs.

Characteritics of CAS

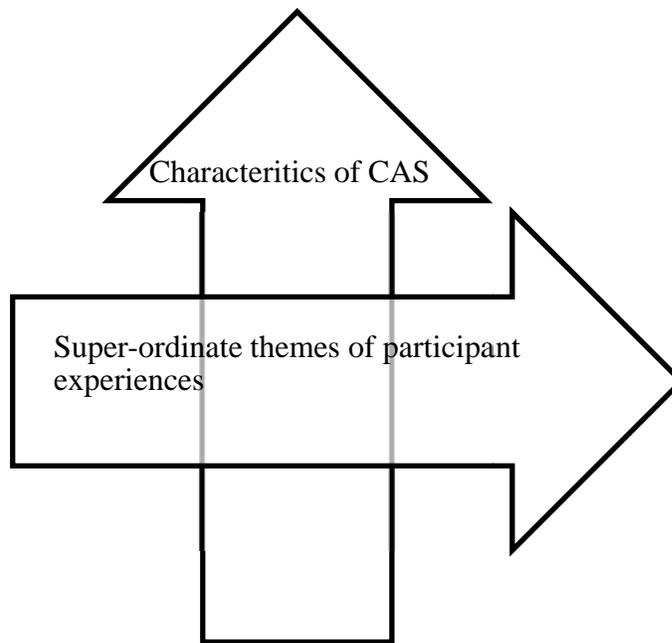Super-ordinate themes of participant experiences

Figure 5. Intersection of multi-dimensional approach

The following characteristics of complex systems are described as they relate to the district literacy initiative. It is readily evident that many of these characteristics were lacking as the initiative was implemented in this particular school system.

- Self-organized – In complex systems, local interactions of a system produce synergy and coordination that eventually expands to include surrounding systems, forming a network of stable interactions. In contrast, in the system researched here, according to the data, local systems trying to produce synergy received corrections, in effect destabilizing even the planned actions of the initiative.

- Bottom-up emergent – In complex systems, change and adaptation are generated from the bottom of the organizational structure. In the local school district studied, emergence coming from the bottom levels of the system happened, but the top levels pushed down against the changes made to the planned actions of the initiative.

- Short-range relationships – In complex systems, the components of the system, or *agents*, tend to interact locally because of the instability of the overall system. Agents in the system researched here did interact locally; however there were interruptions in the interactions in that the interactions of the literacy coach and teachers in the study were limited by teacher buy-in. The interactions between literacy coaches and districts seemed to skip over the level of school administration, which may have fostered the some interactions between literacy coaches and school administrators that would not otherwise have occurred if school administrations had not been alienated by the district leadership. The instability of the overall system was not seen as a natural characteristic of a changing, adaptive system. Instead, the district administration repeatedly tried to stabilize the system through control.

- Nested structure – Components of complex systems are themselves complex systems, often with repeated structural organization, as shown in the nested structure in Figure 6. This could have been the case within the district literacy initiative; however, the district level staff did not recognize the components as independent systems capable of change nor did they honor the natural nestedness of the system.
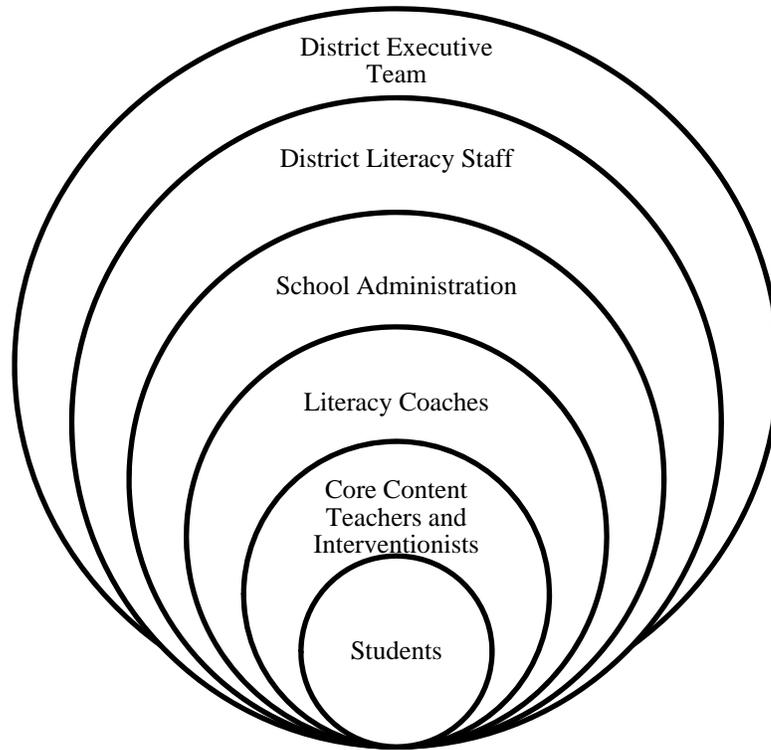
Figure 6. Nested structure of a Complex Adaptive System

The structure in a complex adaptive system looks like the nested structure of relationships in Figure 6; however, the district did not design the initiative to operate within a naturally nested system. The natural nestedness of the system was distorted by the design of the district plan. First, the literacy coaches answered to both District Literacy Staff and School Administration. Second, Literacy Coaches were peers with teachers, and held no real authority. Finally, communication skipped levels of the system.

The diagram of the design structure of the literacy initiative contained very little nestedness. Figure 7 could be described as a form of fractured nestedness. Communication between and among the system agents was limited and opportunities for short-range relationships were compromised. The communication gaps reported by participants may be a reflection of the design structure, in which the short-range relationships were fractured.
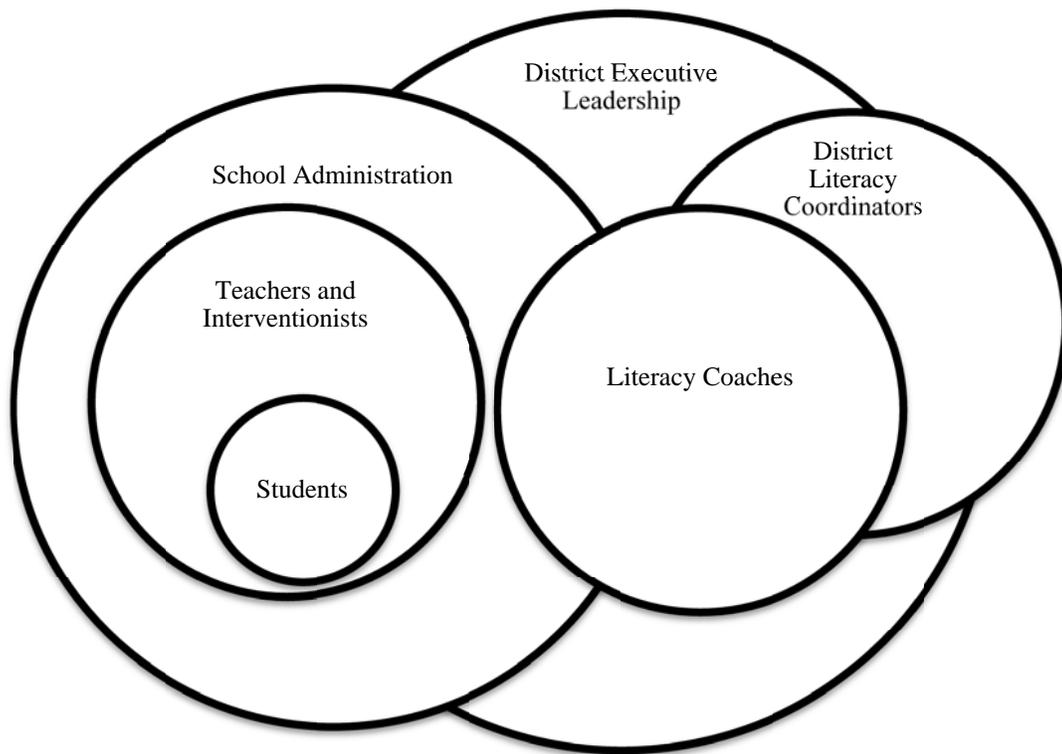
Figure 7. Structure of relationships within the literacy initiative

- Ambiguously bounded – Complex forms are open in the sense that they continuously

  exchange matter and energy with their environment (and so judgments about their edges

  may require certain arbitrary impositions and necessary obliviousness). Because of the

  fragmented structure of the literacy initiative, seen in Figure 7, relationships and

  communication were blocked, which prevented the kind of flow that would contribute to

  the healthy exchange of matter and energy. Ambiguously bounded speaks to the

  imposition of the strict duties of literacy coaches in their schools, meaning the district

  plan for those roles lacked the flexibility that would have enabled a give and take in

  response to the local environment of each school.

- Organizationally closed – Complex forms are closed in the sense that they are inherently stable – that is, their behavioral patterns or internal organizations endure, even while they exchange energy and matter with their dynamic contexts (so judgments about their edges are usually based on perceptible and sufficiently stable coherences). Each level of the nested system is a complete system, containing an internal organization and function. Though school level administration, faculty, and students showed this closed organization, the literacy coaches overlapped, but remained to a large extent outside the school organization. Literacy coaches reported not being administrators and not being teachers, in fact not really fitting in at all. Nor were literacy coaches given opportunities to develop relationships among the literacy coach cohort that may have provided adaptive solutions within such a community.

- Structure determined – A complex unit could change its own structure as it adapts to maintain its viability within dynamic context. In the case of this literacy initiative, both Ms. Manship and Ms. Young's school administration changed the roles and duties of the literacy coaches. Granted, the district team fought against this, but the school administration at their schools were acting in accordance with what would work in the context of the school and in ways that provided flexibility and ultimately viability for the administrator's school.

- Historicity - Complex systems embody their histories – they learn – and are better described in terms of Darwinian evolution than Newtonian mechanics. The overall mistrust of the teachers for district directives provides insight into the history of the teachers' relationships with the district, as well as with district personnel. Teachers saw

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literacy coaches as agents of the district. The history of mistrust of the district extended

to literacy coaches, according to Ms. Manship's interview.

- Far-from-equilibrium – Complex systems do not operate in balance; indeed, a stable

  equilibrium implies death for a complex system. The constant flux happening across

  schools participating in the district literacy initiative was part of a healthy system;

  however, the district fought to keep the system in equilibrium, which manifested as

  control. The far-from-equilibrium state happens at every level of the system and across

  the overall system. Difference would lead to change and adaptation at the school site

  levels, ultimately creating stability at the school site, which would extend in a bottom-up

  emergent pattern to create change across the district.

Overall, it should be apparent that in many ways, the district literacy initiative was

implemented in a way that failed to treat it as a complex adaptive system. Considering activities

like the district-wide literacy intervention in the context of complexity thinking fosters

understanding of how policies and practices affect the members of the system as well as the

system as a whole. Understanding how the school system and its activities act and interact as a

dynamic, complex, living system may support meaningful change, when undertaken with a

holistic systems perspective.

Implications for Practice

With millions spent yearly on fixing problems in public schools across the United States,

it is imperative that there be an understanding of how to create viable interventions for change.

As Wheatley (1994) suggests, "No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that

created it. We must learn to see the world anew." (p. 5). Sustainable solutions must include new

approaches to problems of low literacy and struggling students.

One significant problem uncovered in this study was a lack of motivation on the part of the students for whom the intervention was intended. In keeping with complexity theory, increasing student motivation might be better accomplished by initiating literacy interventions that promote student choice and engagement. I do not believe this can be achieved with commercial literacy intervention programs, but could be achieved by a team of teachers working with students to identify individual reading challenges, and helping students create a body of high interest print material. I believe accountability can be built into the system in a way that provides structure. In Cory's case, he came to pick up his issue of *Sports Illustrated* weekly, which gave me the opportunity to ask him about the topics he had read about in the week prior. The cost per student of this type of intervention would pale in comparison to price of commercial intervention programs. Testing reading levels at the beginning, middle and end of the year would be an activity that provides feedback for all members of the system.   There is a caveat: the system needs to identify the problem in order to engage in the cycle of change for meaningful change to happen. No one outside the local system can initiate meaningful change for the individual. The activities that emerge from short-range relationship interactions would take priority over top-down activities. School and district administration would need to nurture freedom for the activities that emerge from those local solutions.

When school districts begin an intervention, beginning with a solution that has been created at the federal or state level is not a means to begin meaningful change. The school district should engage in identifying problems or questions specific to the local district and the process of identifying problems and finding which questions to ask would involve agents at every level of the system. Keeping in mind that the whole cannot formulate the actions for every local site, actions may include a range of actions schools could take to address the literacy needs

of their students and teachers. I would also encourage any school district to nurture new activities that emerge from local school sites, classrooms, or teacher-student solutions. Knowing the importance of accountability, ways to monitor student and teacher activities without obstructing the generative process would need to be developed. I believe a local level of engagement that provides choice and allows for generative activities to address needed change in literacy instruction would also take care of the issues of motivation and communication since the processes will occur via short-range relationships at the local school site and classroom levels.

In designing and planning educational initiatives, a school system would benefit from recognizing the need for a nested structure like the one in Figure 6 to foster two-way communication, as well as short-range relationships. The nested structure also provides a model for an inclusive, bottom-up emergent structure important to the sharing of successful activities from local school site other local school sites.

Implications for Future Study

Considering that learning is at its very basic element a change from one state to another, I intend to use the study of intervention systems to contribute to the conceptual study of the young field of Complexity Theory in Education. I hope to do this through both practice-focused research as well as conceptual analyses. Fleener suggests that gaining understanding of schools as learning organizations, and building capacity for schools to behave as dynamic systems of learning may nurture the adaptive change needed to recreate schools that allow learning to thrive. "The logics of relationship, systems, and meaning synergistically contribute to a perspective from which the social system of schools may evolve as learning organizations." (J. Fleener, personal communication March 13, 2010).

My interest lies in both the micro and the macro levels of the system. How can a design for future initiatives encourage district or school administration to get comfortable with the uncertainty present in healthy complex adaptive systems? Conducting similar studies in systems that function more like a complex adaptive system would be of interest, as well as moving into a study of classroom level systems in which teachers' and students' relationships reflect the dynamics of complex adaptive systems.

According to Davis and Sumara (2006), the question for complexity research is a pragmatic, *How should we act?* I hope to explore this question further by considering *how* to design intervention systems that honor the cycle of change, and allow for bottom-up emergent solutions to the problems of literacy in schools. Applying the same IPA methodology and complexity lens to the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), funded by the Milken Family Foundation, for example, would be an interesting study, since the design has a more nested structure and solutions are sought at a local level.

Complexivists in education are calling for more practice-focused research, but there is still considerable inquiry into finding methodologies that will serve to clearly reveal practices in education as they relate to complexity. This calls for concept-focused study of methodologies that hold philosophical agreement with complexity thinking. I intend to continue exploring the philosophical agreements of phenomenology and complexity.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview Questions

What was the design and structure of the literacy initiative, as you understood it?

What was your understanding of your role in the system?

Did your understanding of your role change over the time of the initiative? If so, how?

What was your relationship to the other members of the system of the Literacy

Initiative? (District administration, school administration, literacy coaches, intervention

teachers, faculty, and students)

How did those relationships impact your role in the literacy initiative?

Would you share some of your experiences from the initiative?

How do you view the overall impact of the literacy intervention?

How do you feel participating in the literacy intervention impacted you?

APPENDIX 2

IRB Approval

ACTION ON PROTOCOL APPROVAL REQUEST

LSU

Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
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P: 225.578.8692
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TO: Renee Casbergue
            Education

FROM: Dennis Landin
            Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: September 10, 2014
RE: **IRB#** 3518

TITLE: A Complex Systems Theory Examination of District Literacy Initiative Implementation

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

Review type: Full _____ Expedited _X_   **Review date:** 8/26/2014

Risk Factor: Minimal ___X___ Uncertain _____ Greater Than Minimal_____

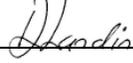**Approved** _____X_____ **Disapproved** _____

Approval Date: 8/26/2014   **Approval Expiration Date:** 8/25/2015

Re-review frequency: (annual unless otherwise stated)

Number of subjects approved: 9

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable)**:** _____

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable) _____

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman _____

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon   request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. SPECIAL NOTE:
All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb

VITA

Mary Kathryn Hudson is a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in the School of Education with a focus on Curriculum and Instruction. She graduated from Louisiana State University with a Bachelor of General Studies in 2000. She earned a Master of Arts in Education in 2005 and an Education Specialist Certificate in 2008, both from Louisiana State University. Mary completed her doctoral work under the supervision of Renee Casbergue, PhD.