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A Phenomenological Study of Third-Grade Through Fifth-Grade Teachers' Perceptions of Their Confidence to Teach Struggling Readers

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctor of Education Program

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A Phenomenological Study of Third-Grade Through Fifth-Grade Teachers' Perceptions of Their
Confidence to Teach Struggling Readers

Kristin Nicole Brown

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in
Transformational Leadership

Barbara Weschke, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Dennette Foy, Ed.D., Content Specialist

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Concordia University–Portland

2018

Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perception of their confidence to teach struggling readers. A total of 10 third-grade through fifth-grade teachers were selected to represent the population for this study. The conceptual framework for this study was based on Bandura (1977) theory. Bandura's (1977, 1997) theory of self-efficacy was used to provide a framework to synthesize teachers' perceptions of their experiences to develop the efficacy to instruct struggling readers. To investigate the perceptions of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' confidence to teach struggling readers, an interview protocol was used as the sole data-collection instrument. This study sought to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers and identify how their experiences have influenced their confidence and self-efficacy in teaching these struggling readers. The use of the phenomenological method ensured the lived experiences of the phenomenon were discussed in depth to uncover rich descriptions of the teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers. The teachers' descriptions were coded and organized into themes, using the four derivations of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and arousal mastery experiences, as outlined by Bandura (1977). Three themes and six sub-themes emerged from this study (a) teaching the five components of reading, with subthemes: confidence-level and professional responsibility, (b) meeting the needs of struggling readers with subthemes: small groups and resources, and (c) professional developments with subthemes: common grade-level collaboration and learning from other educators. The emerging themes provided foundational ramifications on how to support third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' confidence to teach struggling readers. The key findings from the study could be shared with K-5 teachers to help them reflect on their

practice. In addition, the key findings from this study may contribute to educational research by raising awareness of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers.

Keywords: struggling readers, teacher confidence, teacher perceptions

Dedication

“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13 New International Version).

This academic accomplishment is dedicated to my children, family, and friends.

Thank you for believing in me.

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I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity to have such an unwavering network of people on my personal and professional teams. I thank God for allowing the alignment, and ordering my steps.

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To my children, Zalen, Ravin, and Kailyn, thank you for being patient while I pursued my educational endeavors. It is my prayer that this great work will inspire you to dream, pursue, and achieve your goals in life. I pray that you will put God first and trust in His word.

Thank you, mama, Leila K. Brown, for believing in me and selflessly helping out when needed - your love, encouragement, and support is invaluable. I know daddy is smiling down...

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Onward and upward . . .

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgement.....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework	3
Background	3
Context	4
History	8
Statement of the Problem	9
Purpose of the Study	10
Research Questions	11
Rationale, Relevance, and Significance	11
Rationale	11
Relevance	12
Significance	12
Definition of Terms	13
Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations	15
Assumptions	15
Delimitations	16
Limitations	16
Summary	17
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	18

Conceptual Framework	21
Review of Research Literature	24
Professional Development	24
Teacher Confidence and Self-Efficacy	26
Third through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence	28
Defining third-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers	29
Research-Based Reading Instruction	30
Interventions for third-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers	31
Teachers of Elementary (Grade 3 through 5) struggling readers	34
Review of Methodological Issues	36
Synthesis of Research Findings	38
Critique of Previous Research	40
Summary.....	41
Chapter 3: Methodology	43
Purpose and Design of the Proposed Study	44
Purpose	44
Research Method	45
Phenomenology	45
Research Population and Sampling Method	47
Research Population	47
Sampling Method	48
Instrumentation	49
Data Collection	50

Identification of Attributes	52
Data Analysis Procedures	53
Limitations of the Research Design	54
Validation	55
Credibility	55
Dependability	55
Expected Findings	56
Ethical Issues	56
Conflict of Interest Assessment	57
Researcher’s Position	57
Ethical Issues in the Proposed Study	57
Summary	58
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results	59
Description of the Sample	60
Research Methodology and Analysis	61
Summary of Findings	62
Research Question 1	63
Research Question 2	64
Presentation of the Data and Results	66
Teaching the Five Components of Reading	66
Confidence-level	66
Professional Responsibility	70
Meeting the Needs of Struggling Readers	70

Small Groups	71
Resources	73
Professional Development	75
Common Grade-Level Collaboration	77
Learning from Other Educators	79
Support from Administrators	80
Peer Observations	81
Teacher Mentor	82
Summary	83
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion	84
Summary of the Results	84
Discussion of the Results	85
Teaching the Five Components of Reading	85
Meeting the needs of struggling readers	86
Professional Development	88
Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Conceptual Framework	89
Discussion of the Results in Relation to Literature	93
Limitations	98
Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory	99
Recommendations for Further Research	101
Conclusion	102
References	104

Appendix A: Reading Foundational Standards.....	117
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	119
Appendix C: Dissertation IRB Consent Form.....	121
Appendix D: Statement of Original Work.....	123

List of Tables

Table 1: Third-Grade through Fifth-Grade Teachers' Information	51
Table 2: Emerged Themes and Subthemes	63
Table 3: Emerged Themes and Subthemes	64
Table 4: Emerged Themes and Subthemes	65

List of Figures

Figure 1: Moustakas (1994) Principles of Phenomenological Research Data Analysis.....	54
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In a typical school day, third-grade through fifth-grade students spend most of their day in a general education class where teachers use various strategies and techniques to deliver instruction, using grade-level materials (Boogart, 2016). Third-grade through fifth-grade students who have been identified with reading deficits require individualized interventions (Harlacher, Sanford, & Nelson-Walker, 2014). Response-to-Interventions (RTI), a three-tiered model, is used to identify specific levels of interventions to support students' academic growth. In Mississippi, this model has been adopted as the multitiered system of support (MTSS), which is implemented in each school district (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). All kindergarten through third-grade students in Mississippi complete a universal screening assessment at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. They receive tier I instruction throughout the duration of the school year (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). Tier I instruction consists of grade-level instruction, for all Grades pre-K through fifth based on the Mississippi college-and-career readiness standards (MSCCRS), which were adopted from the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). Tier I instruction also consists of differentiated, enrichment, and re-teaching activities to meet the needs of the students.

Tier II, supplemental instruction, is provided to students who have been determined to be unsuccessful in tier I instruction through documented formative and summative data, and have been referred to the teacher support team (TST) (Harlacher, et al., 2014; Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). The TST is a team who works collaboratively to identify and address deficit areas in reading, suggest research-based interventions, and monitor the effectiveness of interventions to provide feedback for modifications and recommendations (Harlacher, et al.,

2014; Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). The TST team is comprised of school administrators, teachers, and parents; school psychologists and exceptional education teachers may be members of the team, only if determined to be necessary. If tier II, supplemental instruction, is deemed ineffective by the TST to meet a student's needs, the student is then placed in tier III, intensive instruction, and closely monitored by the TST for recommendations and modifications (Harlacher, et al., 2014; Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). If the student made unsuccessful progress with the Tier III intervention, the student will be referred to have a comprehensive assessment completed by the Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET), which is comprised of school and district level personnel, exceptional education teachers, and school psychologists, if determined to be necessary (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016).

Although schools within the district of this study have interventionists and academic tutors to implement interventions, third-grade through fifth-grade students spend the majority of their day in their classrooms receiving on-grade-level instruction. According to Fiester (2010), third-grade through fifth-grade teachers feel that their students should be able to read on grade level, have been taught foundational skills, and have already mastered these before being promoted. When teachers of third-grade through fifth-grade students teach solely on grade level and not meet the need of the struggling readers, those students reach a frustration level in all subject areas, because they cannot read on grade level (Fiester, 2010). According to Allington (2013), children become frustrated and tired quickly when they cannot read and comprehend grade-level texts.

According to the United States Department of Education (2015), the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) has placed literacy education on the forefront of education in the

nation. The ESSA mandates, for the first time, that all American students will be taught through the implementation of rigorous academic standards to be college-and-career ready (United States Department of Education, 2015). The International Literacy Association (ILA) (2016) advocates all learning to be a byproduct of literacy instruction. Teachers are the primary driving force in the classroom and are responsible for educating their students, regardless of their confidence or efficacy. For the purpose of this study, a struggling reader is considered to be a student who does not have a defined learning disability, but lacks foundational reading skills in one or more areas of the essential components of literacy, and reads at least two grades below grade level (Kucan & Palinscar, 2010; Torgesen, et al., 2007).

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework

Background. In December 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Barak Obama, which affords states the autonomy to incorporate innovative actions to ensure the academic success of all students (United States Department of Education, 2015). The ESSA provides a platform that requires accountability and change in the nation's low-performing schools. The ESSA ensures that essential information is distributed to all stakeholders to facilitate transparency, in an effort to help support the academic growth and student achievement of all students. The ESSA also has measures in place to protect disadvantaged and high-needs students. Previous measures through the history of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), provided a segue between improved student outcomes and equal opportunities for all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, background, or zip code (United States Department of Education, 2015). According to the 2015 report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), of all the fourth-grade students in the United States, only 36% read on a proficient level; 33% read at the basic level;

and 31% read below the basic level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). In Mississippi, 40% of the students read below the basic level, and 31% of fourth-grade students read at or above the proficient level (NCES, 2015). First-grade students who struggle with basic reading skills and concepts will have reading difficulties through and beyond fourth grade (Moats, 2009).

In an effort to reform educational practices within the states, the ESSA requires that state education agencies (SEA) submit reformation plans to the Secretary of the United States Department of Education (United States Department of Education, 2015). In adherence to the expectations of the ESSA, Mississippi's plan to reform its educational practices is called Mississippi Succeeds (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). The Mississippi Succeeds plan provides innovative approaches to increase student outcomes and the provision of opportunities for all students. These approaches include the following: intervention and prevention programs; support for effective instructional practices; student achievement and academic enrichment (including those who are neglected, at-risk, and delinquent); 21st century, homeless, migratory, rural, and low-income programs (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016).

Context. XYZ, a school district in a Mississippi, has about 40 elementary schools, and is the only urban municipality. XYZ has more full-time diverse students than any other district in Mississippi (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). The school district's total of other minority population is very high, according to 2015–2016 statistics (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). The percentage of families who receive free and reduced lunch is very high too. The district's annual dropout rate for high school students is higher than the state average;

and, a graduation rate which is lower than the state average (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016, p. 1).

The 2015–2016 school year state standardized assessment report revealed that third-grade through fifth-grade students, middle school students (Grades 6-8), and high school students (who took the English II exam) in the state were proficient or above-grade-level readers. In the XYZ school district, a low percentage of the third-grade through fifth-grade students read on a proficient or above grade level. The data also revealed a low percentage of the middle-school students and high school students (who took the English II exam) were proficient readers (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016).

The standardized state assessment results are valid and reliable measures of students' achievement of the Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards (MSCCRS), and are used to provide data-driven instruction (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). The results are indicative of a problem in meeting the needs of struggling readers, because low percentage of students from third-grade to high school in the XYZ school district read on a proficient or above level. Once struggling readers fall behind, reading problems will continue into adulthood unless essential literacy strategies are implemented to meet the needs of the students to close the gaps in deficit areas (Moreau, 2014).

In a study conducted by Kucan and Palinscar (2010), the phenomenon known as the fourth-grade slump in which fourth-grade students struggle with decoding words, complex vocabulary, and constructing meaning through synthesizing information was ascertained. Cirino, et al. (2013) found that students who struggle with reading prior to fourth-grade continue to struggle in upper elementary and beyond. They also found that some students' initial onset of reading difficulties occurs in upper-elementary grades and beyond. The shift from learning to

read in Grades K through 2 to reading to learn in Grades 3 through 5 is a contributor to the slump (Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, Elleman, & Gilbert, 2008; Kucan & Palinscar, 2010; Cirino et al., 2013). In addition, there is a strong prediction that students who struggle with reading in the fourth-grade are potential high-school dropouts (Cirino, et al., 2013; Fiester, 2010; Jalongo, 2007). This was ascertained by a longitudinal study conducted by Hernandez (2011) in which he found that one sixth of third-grade struggling readers did not graduate from high school on time.

Struggling readers lack reading skills that are essential to the development of fluency and comprehension (Allington, 2013). When third-grade through fifth-grade students struggle in reading, teachers must be able to identify the students' deficit areas and use effective strategies to meet their needs. Boogart (2016) found that the upper-elementary teachers were aware there was an identifiable gap in the foundational skills of their students. The teachers' perceptions of their own knowledge and ability to help close the reading foundational skills gap showed they felt unprepared and not confident about how to help their students (Boogart, 2016).

According to Allington (2013), enough research has been conducted to show that every child can read on grade level by the end of the first-grade school year; however, the implementation of effective research-based practices does not mirror what research demonstrates in the United States. To meet the needs of struggling readers, they should be taught by classroom teachers who have experience, confidence, competence, and have had effective practice (Allington, 2013). Classroom teachers should understand general foundational knowledge and learn how to responsibly cultivate the content knowledge (International Literacy Association, 2010). These general classroom teachers usually are not reading specialists, nor do they hold a reading certification (International Literacy Association, 2010). They are classroom

teachers who are charged with meeting the needs of their students, regardless of their confidence or efficacy to teach these students.

In the development process of the Common Core State Standards, content knowledge was prioritized based on collaborative efforts and expertise of various teachers, content specialists, lead thinkers, and state leaders. From the process, grade-specific, content-area standards were established with grade-level expectations (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2009). Findings of the National Literacy Trust's (2015) survey in their quantitative study suggested that about 25% of teachers do not feel confident to teach the literacy standards as written in the Common Core Standards; and, roughly 50% feel that their lack of competence impedes effective literacy instruction. In a study conducted by the Education Week Research Center (2016), 39% of the teachers felt "very prepared" to teach the Common Core Standards to their classes, while only 26% felt confident in their ability to teach academically at-risk students (Education Week, p. 8, 2017).

When reviewing the 2016 Mississippi College and Career Readiness standards, there is a vast change in students' reading foundation skills between Grades 2 and 3, because Grades K through 2 are considered to be the lower grades. As a result, phonemic awareness and phonics instruction are no longer identified as requirements of explicit instruction in the Grades 3 through 5 standards. This is due to the expectation that students have achieved mastery of these skills by the time they enter third grade (see Appendix A). The lower elementary-grade standards focus on building foundational reading skills in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, word analysis, and vocabulary acquisition. Elementary standards for Grades 3 through 5 focus on analysis and synthesis of information to acquire meaning (Allington, 2013; Moats, 2009; Torgesen et al., 2007). Third-grade through fifth-grade teachers focus on teaching the complex

requirements of their curriculum with little attention to integrating foundational reading skills in their instruction (Boogart, 2016; Finnán, 2009; Torgesen et al., 2007). Torgesen et al. (2007) asserted that learning to read must continue after the end of third grade. The continuation of explicit, systematic reading instruction is required to increase students' reading proficiency (Torgesen et al., 2007). Explicit, systematic instruction is effective in meeting the needs of struggling readers (ILA, 2016; Moats, 2009; NRP, 2000).

History. Research has shown that teachers have a significant influence on how much a student learns (Wanzek, Wexler, Vaughn, & Ciullo, 2010). Explicit and direct instruction have shown to be most effective in teaching reading (Allington, 2013). The National Reading Panel (2000) provided foundational research and identified phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension as the five essential components of effective reading instruction. The National Reading Panel (2000) also noted that teachers must have extensive instruction in the abovementioned five components of reading, in order to effectively instruct students. In 2008, the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) conducted a study and found that knowledge of the alphabet (upper-case and lower-case letters), phonological awareness, phonological memory, automaticity in naming (letters or numbers), automaticity in naming (objects or colors), and writing are six essential components of effective reading instruction. The ILA (2010) asserted that teachers of reading should have a solid understanding of foundational reading skills and continue to build their capacity to be effective in their practice.

Conceptual Framework

Bandura coined self-efficacy as a person's belief in her or his own capabilities to be effective in the implementation of given tasks and produce effective results (Bandura, 1977). According to Tracey and Morrow (2012) and (Bandura, 1997), highly efficacious people have

high confidence, are intrinsically motivated to persist at tasks, take risks, and have greater endurance; however, those with low efficacy easily succumb to challenges, have lower confidence, rely on extrinsic motivation, and meet basic expectations. When considering the previous statement, Bandura's (1977, 1997) theory of self-efficacy can be used to provide a framework to synthesize teachers' perceptions of their experiences to develop the efficacy to instruct struggling readers. To support third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' confidence to instruct struggling readers, the four types of experiences as outlined by Bandura's (1977, 1997) sources of self-efficacy were used as the focus of this study: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and arousal mastery experiences.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers' confidence is contingent on their education, training, and professional development (National Literacy Trust, 2015; Robinson, 2017). It is not known whether there is a problem when third-grade through fifth-grade teachers are faced with remediating and with intervening with struggling readers. According to Fiestler (2010), most teachers believe that when students are promoted to the next grade level that they have mastered the required skills to be promoted. When third-grade through fifth-grade teachers lack competence in identifying students' specific deficit areas, they are unable to help close the gaps in the essential components of reading (Boogart, 2016). As a result, their confidence in teaching the subject matter and ability is reflective of ineffectively meeting the needs of the students (Robinson, 2017). If third-grade through fifth-grade teachers were equipped with the knowledge base and support to teach and identify the deficits, they would be confident and able to help students' reading readiness development (Boogart, 2016; National Literacy Trust, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to acquire information from third–grade through fifth-grade teachers to ascertain their perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers, and how their experiences have influenced their confidence and self-efficacy in teaching struggling readers. The research goal was to identify themes and discover patterns related to the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers’ lived experiences of teaching struggling readers. A study conducted by National Literacy Trust (2015) found that teacher confidence is directly correlated with teachers’ ability to instruct. According to the study conducted by National Literacy Trust (2015) in the United Kingdom, research that focuses on the area of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers’ perceptions of what they need to support their confidence through lived experiences is scarce. Uncovering third-grade through fifth-grade teachers’ perceptions may provide insight and opportunities for understanding their lived experiences to help support their confidence and increase their efficacy.

When considering the ways in which third-grade through fifth-grade teachers’ confidence influences their efficacy in meeting the needs of struggling readers through the lens of Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy (1977, 1986, 1997) one must consider the teachers’ experiences. Because third-grade through fifth-grade teachers are charged with the task of meeting the needs of all readers, including struggling readers, all four types of experiences as outlined by Bandura’s (1977, 1997) origins of self-efficacy are necessary in the development of effective teachers. These mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and arousal mastery experiences were used as the focus to drive this study.

Research Questions

The first research question ascertained the perceptions of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' confidence to teach struggling readers. The second research question uncovered how third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' experiences in teaching struggling readers were reflective of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and/or arousal mastery experiences. The third research question identified how third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' experiences have influenced their confidence and efficacy to teach struggling readers. These research questions were answered during the interview process, using the interview questions found in Appendix B.

RQ1. What are third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers?

RQ2. How do third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' experiences in teaching struggling readers reflect those of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and/or arousal mastery experiences?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

Rationale. Across the world, education is significant. Mississippi ranks second-to-last in the nation in student achievement (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). There is a sense of urgency to ensure the students are provided with quality instruction to yield student achievement. Teachers should be accountable for the implementation of strategies and best practices that meet the needs of struggling readers in Mississippi. The Literacy-Based Promotion Act (LBPA) was implemented in Mississippi during the 2014–2015 school year to prohibit social promotion and lend favor toward the implementation of research-based strategies to help improve the reading skills of K through third-grade-students. The LBPA requires third-grade

students to score above the lowest achievement level on the established statewide assessment, to be promoted to fourth grade. Those who score at the lowest achievement level on the initial assessment are given two additional opportunities to pass an alternate assessment before being retained, unless they qualify for a good cause exemption. The good cause exemption allows promotion for English Learners, students with an IEP or a Section 504 Plan, and Tier III students who meet certain requirements, as outlined by the LBPA. The results of this study may help with the sense of urgency to help support third-grade through fifth-grade teachers in meeting the needs of the struggling readers in Mississippi.

Relevance. Several studies have reviewed pre-service teachers' and in-service early childhood/lower elementary (K through 2) teachers' perceptions of teaching literacy (Hammond, 2015; Lesley, 2011; Perkins, 2013) and teachers' perceptions of struggling readers (Gambrell, Morrow, & Presley, 2007; Scharlach, 2008; Washburn, Joshi, & Cantrell, 2011). These studies focused on teacher efficacy, which confirmed that the acquisition of teacher perceptions is imperative to understand underlying factors that may impede effective classroom instruction. Teachers' confidence in their ability to teach students yields efficacy. To have high teacher efficacy, teachers must have a high level of confidence (Silverman & Davis, 2009). To have a high level of confidence, certain needs must be met. Understanding third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers will yield pertinent information to help meet the needs of the teachers to support their confidence and efficacy.

Significance. Third-grade through fifth-grade teachers are expected to meet the needs of all readers, including struggling readers. The support in the preparedness of these teachers is necessary. According to Boogart (2016), "the knowledge base of upper elementary teachers for teaching reading is fairly undefined and significantly complex, a topic ripe for study at this time"

(p. 14). A phenomenological study of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers provided insight into factors that influence their confidence. This study may yield a contribution to research through the lived experiences of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers and their perceptions of their confidence to make them more effective in teaching struggling readers.

Definition of Terms

Consortium on Reaching Excellence in Education's CORE Reading Sourcebook.

Provides research-based instructional practices to help build foundational literacy skills and comprehension (CORE Reading, 2018).

Diebels. An oral reading fluency standardized assessment used to measure fluency and text-reading accuracy (DIEBELS, 2018).

Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). An assessment that measures accuracy, fluency and comprehension to determine a student's reading level (DRA, 2018).

Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR). A website that has a plethora of instructional resources and activities to support foundational skills and the five components of reading (FCRR, 2018).

Instruction. Instruction that utilized research-based practices and teaching strategies that incorporate all five components of reading (Allington, 2013).

IXL. An "immersive, adaptive" learning experience that provides content aligned to the standards to meet students where they are in language arts and math in Grades K–12 (IXL, 2018).

Journey's Tool Kit. Provides intervention lesson cards for small group or individualized instruction in the five components of reading (Journey's Literacy Tool Kit, 2018).

Language Essentials for Teaching Reading and Spelling (LETRS). A program that combines interactive activities and user-friendly language to teach foundational reading skills (Moats & Sedita, 2004).

Literacy Coach. “A literacy coach partners with teachers for job-embedded professional learning that enhances teachers’ reflection on students, the curriculum, and pedagogy for the purpose of more effective decision making” (Toll, 2014, p. 10).

Mentor--“The mentorship relationship is one in which one colleague supports the skill and knowledge development of another, providing guidance to that individual based on his or her own experiences and understanding of best practices” (LINCS, 2015, p. 1)

MobyMax. An interactive learning program that uses adaptive, differentiated instruction to meet the needs of struggling learners in the areas of language arts, math and science, in Grades K–8 (MobyMax, 2018).

Phonics Boost (Grades 3–12) and Phonics Blitz (Grades 4–12). Interventions for students who struggle with foundational reading skills (Blitz, 2015).

Self-Efficacy. The confidence one has in their ability to perform a specific task, problem-solve, and execute a plan (Bandura, 1997).

Science Research Associates (SRA) Laboratory kit. Provide students with leveled reading materials to help increase their reading ability and accountability for learning (SRA, 2012).

STAR Reading. A nationally normed assessment, which closely aligns to state standards and common core. This assessment also provides individualized learning paths for students using the Compass Learning software and the independent reading component of Accelerated Reader (AR) (Learning, 2010).

Stride. An adaptive, individualized game-based learning curriculum that provides reading and math interventions and enrichment to student learners in Grades pre–K–12 (Stride Academy, 2018).

Struggling Reader. A student who lacks reading skills that are essential to the development of fluency and comprehension (Allington, 2013).

Teacher Confidence. The result of an individual’s belief that he or she can perform a specific task, yielding self-efficacy (Moen & Allgood, 2009).

Assumptions

For this study, the intent was to provide third-grade through fifth-grade teachers a platform to voice their perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers, through their lived experiences. This yielded the assumption that the teachers would share rich descriptions of their experiences, in response to the research questions. While conducting the interviews, and analyzing the teachers’ responses, there was also an assumption that this researcher would remain neutral and not impose my presuppositions and experiences as a literacy coach or fourth-through fifth-grade teacher. To help control researcher biasness, this researcher used epoché, the initial step of Moustakas’s (1994) principles of phenomenological research data analysis, which required the researcher to be discerning and not judgmental, during the data collection and analysis process. To ensure data collection and analysis were credible and reliable, the researcher put aside personal beliefs, experiences, attitudes, and presuppositions that were related to third-grade through fifth-grade teachers’ perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers (Moustakas, 1994).

Delimitations

Using a phenomenological design for this study imposed an automatic delimitation, because of the sample size. According to Creswell (2007), phenomenological studies do not require large sample sizes, because the goal of the design is to acquire rich descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants. This study was delimited by a small sample size of 10 participants, which made the results not generalizable to larger populations. To participate in the study, the teachers had to have a license to teach third-grade through fifth-grade students. The participants were delimited to those who had a minimum of 3-years' experience as a certified classroom teacher. A single school district was used to represent the state of Mississippi, which also impeded generalizability to other districts within the state. However, the results are transferrable into practice, because they may provide great insight on third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of what they need to help support their confidence in teaching struggling readers.

Limitations

This study was limited to a sample of 10, third-grade through fifth-grade reading teachers, in a single school district. The limited number of participants hindered the findings from being generalized to a larger population. Subjectivity of the researcher was identified as a possible limitation of the phenomenological design of this study, because it could have resulted in reliability and validity issues. According to Creswell (2014), reliability and validity issues may be caused by the researcher's personal feelings, presuppositions, experiences, and beliefs, because they may influence the researcher's judgment about the truth and reality of the participants' responses. Teachers' reluctance to be completely honest and detailing how they feel about their confidence and/or needs to support their confidence to teach struggling readers

was also identified as a possible limitation. Although this researcher employed measures to ensure and maintain the teachers' confidentiality, she was not able to guarantee that the teachers would not talk to each other or share their responses outside the study, which could have posed an additional limitation to the research.

Summary

As support to justify the need to conduct research about third-grade through fifth-grade teachers and their confidence to teach struggling readers, this chapter sought to provide an overview and insight into the background of the importance of effective instruction in foundational reading skills and the fourth-grade reading slump. The context and history sections ascertained the significance of the need to understand teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers. Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy provided a framework to synthesize teachers' perceptions of their experiences to develop the efficacy to instruct struggling readers. The rationale and significance sections emphasized the importance of acquiring teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers, through discussion of the current student achievement deficit in Mississippi and importance of effective teachers. This chapter also discussed possible assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 will review current literature focused on teacher confidence, third-grade through fifth-grade teachers, struggling readers, and their needs. Chapter 3 will review the methods used in this study. Chapter 4 will present the results of the study, explanations, and discussion; and, Chapter 5 will synthesize the results and provide recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In an effort to reform educational practices within the states, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that state education agencies (SEA) submit reformation plans to the Secretary of the United States Department of Education (United States Department of Education, 2015). In adherence to the expectations of the ESSA, Mississippi's plan to reform its educational practices is called Mississippi Succeeds (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). The Mississippi Succeeds plan provides innovative approaches to increase student outcomes and the provision of opportunities for all students. These approaches include the following: intervention and prevention programs; support for effective instructional practices; student achievement and academic enrichment (including those who are neglected, at-risk, and delinquent); 21st century, homeless, migratory, rural, and low-income programs (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). In an effort to facilitate educational reform, Mississippi Succeeds corroborates the Mississippi State Board of Education's Strategic Plan 2016–2020:

VISION: To create a world-class educational system that gives students the knowledge and skills to be successful in college and the workforce, and to flourish as parents and citizens.

MISSION: To provide leadership through the development of policy and accountability systems so that all students are prepared to compete in the global community

GOALS:

1. All Students Proficient and Showing Growth in All Assessed Areas
2. Every Student Graduates from High School and is Ready for College and Career
3. Every Child Has Access to a High-Quality Early Childhood Program
4. Every School Has Effective Teachers and Leaders

5. Every Community Effectively Using a World-Class Data System to Improve Student Outcomes
6. Every School and District is Rated “C” or Higher (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016).

Mississippi Comprehensive Literacy Plan. According to the information found in the Mississippi Comprehensive Literacy Plan (MCLP) (2017), the Mississippi Department of Education conducted a survey to assess classroom teachers and administrators from various areas in the state, using the Literacy Organizational Capacity Inventory (LOCI), a nationally-normed needs assessment. In the MCLP (2017), goals were provided with descriptions of their current implementation, opportunities for expansion, and plans for sustainability. In the areas of current implementation, pre-kindergarten students are given an assessment to determine their kindergarten readiness. Diagnostic screeners are in place to identify students in Grades K–3, who need support in foundational reading skills. The Individual Reading Plan (IRP) is in place to document data to support grades K–3 students who have an identified reading deficiency. Observation tools are also in place to help assess early childhood classrooms. However, there was not anything in current implementation in place to diagnose and identify the needs of students in Grades 4 through 12; however, there are identified measures under the opportunities for expansion section for the future implementation of diagnostic assessments to identify students with reading deficiencies in Grades 4–12 (Mississippi Comprehensive Literacy Plan, 2017, p. 8). According to the results of the study,

there is a need to invest more in professional learning around literacy at the secondary level and in highly embedded forms of learning such as coaching and peer observation. The data specifically indicate the need for more professional learning around writing,

vocabulary instruction, content-area literacy, and supporting special populations in literacy, including English Learners and students with disabilities (Mississippi Comprehensive Literacy Plan, 2017, p. 8).

Literacy Based Promotion Act. To improve student outcomes and increase reading proficiency, the Literacy-Based Promotion Act (LBPA) was implemented in Mississippi during the 2014–2015 school year to prohibit social promotion and lend favor toward the implementation of research-based strategies to help improve the reading skills of K through third-grade-students (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). The LBPA requires third-grade students to score above the lowest achievement level on the established state-wide assessment, to be promoted to fourth grade. Those who score at the lowest achievement level on the initial assessment are given two additional opportunities to pass an alternate assessment before being retained, unless they qualify for a good cause exemption. The good cause exemption allows promotion for English Learners, students with an IEP or a Section 504 Plan, and Tier III students who meet certain requirements, as outlined by the LBPA (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016).

In light of the LBPA, to meet the Mississippi State Board of Education’s Strategic Plan 2016–2020 Goals, the Mississippi Department of Education implemented its K–3 early professional development initiative and deployed literacy coaches to provide support to grades K–3, in target schools, “those most in need based on the percentage of students in the lowest two achievement levels on the statewide literacy assessment” (Folsom, Smith, Burk, & Oakley, 2017, p. 4). To fulfill Mississippi’s K–3 early literacy professional development initiative Cambium Learning was selected by the Mississippi Department of Education to provide Moats and Tolman’s (2009) Language Essentials for Teaching Reading and Spelling (LETRS) professional

development training to K–3 literacy teachers, K–8 exceptional education teachers, administrators, and higher education faculty (Folsom, Smith, Burk, & Oakley, 2017, p. 3). Beginning in January 2014, LETRS was delivered through face-to-face and online sessions, with consecutive modules 1–7 and 9, over the course of two phases. In phase I, participants completed a six-week online course of modules 1–3. The online course was followed by a three-day, face-to-face review of modules 1–3 and presentation of module 7. Phase I of the training provided foundational elements of language, brain procession of language, speech-sound correlations, phonological awareness, orthography, morphology, and explicit phonics instruction. Phase II followed the same method of implementation with modules 4–6 complete through a six-week online course, followed by a three-day, face-to-face review of modules 4–6 and presentation of module 9. Phase II of the training provided techniques and strategies for instruction in vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and writing. According to Folsom, Smith, Burk, and Oakley (2017), module 8 was not included in the professional development sessions, because its content did not align with the state’s goals. According to the study conducted by Folsom et al. (2017) that examined educator outcomes associated with the implementation of Mississippi’s K–3 early literacy professional development initiative, findings indicated that teachers who participated in the professional development program showed an increase in their early literacy skills teacher knowledge versus those who had not participated in the professional development program (p. ii). Likewise, the quality of instruction and student engagement within the target schools increased versus those who had not participated in the professional development program (Folsom, et al., 2017, p. ii).

Literacy coaches were deployed during the 2013–2014 school year, to work in target schools, as a part of the Mississippi’s K–3 early literacy professional development initiative

(Mississippi Department of Education, 2016). The literacy coaches work to support K–3 teachers, administrators, school-based literacy coaches, and district-level administrators with the implementation of the Literacy Based Promotion Act. The literacy coaches employ a non-punitive, gradual release model to provide support to teachers in the five components of reading. Literacy coaches maintain open lines of communication through conferences and debriefs to provide on-going feedback to make decisions to provide recommendations and set next steps to improve instructional practices. The literacy coaches also provide on-going support through professional development sessions, the promotion of professional learning communities, collaborative efforts, and other trainings to help support teacher efficacy (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016).

Teacher confidence impacts teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy impacts student achievement (Botock & Boon, 2012). The purpose of this literature review is to examine current literature related to third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach elementary (grades 3 through 5) struggling readers. This review will provide a scholarly foundation for this research study. The first section presents the conceptual framework for the study. The second section informs how teacher confidence has been defined in scholarly literature, in relation to self-efficacy; reviews research conducted on third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers; provides characteristics of an elementary (Grades 3 through 5) struggling reader; and, identifies characteristics of an effective elementary (Grades 3 through 5) teacher of struggling readers. The third section provides a review of methodological issues. The fourth section provides a synthesis of research findings. The last sections provide a critique of previous research and summary.

Conceptual Framework

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1977, 1993, 1997) provided the framework for this study. According to Bandura (1977), for self-efficacy to occur, one must have certain experiences. To yield the potential goal of self-efficacy, teachers must have self-confidence; however, before confidence can be achieved, teachers must have certain experiences to help build their confidence. In applying Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy to help support third-grade through fifth-grade teachers, one can possibly achieve increased confidence and self-efficacy. This can be accomplished through providing mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and arousal mastery experiences. According to Bandura (1977, 1993), through these experiences, the teachers will have an opportunity to increase their knowledge and skill-set in applying effective practices. These experiences may take place during classroom observations, professional learning communities, professional-development sessions, grade-level team meetings, staff meetings, and in feedback and discussion forums, in which teachers are able to feel as though they are valued, accepted, and included in opportunities for their growth and change (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009). This allows the teachers to feel like an integral part and contributor to the learning community (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011a). The sharing of knowledge and expertise allows teachers to take ownership of their acquisition of knowledge, and affords the opportunity for them to reflect on their practice (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011b). In these instances, the teachers are able to overcome their challenges, within a positive and supportive atmosphere, which will increase their confidence in their ability to perform the task of teaching struggling readers. More confidence translates into improvement in their performance and teaching practice (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Bandura's self-efficacy theory

contends that self-efficacy is derived through four sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and arousal mastery experiences.

Mastery experiences. According to Bandura (1977, 1993, 1997), mastery experiences are the primary source through which an individual can obtain self-efficacy. Mastery experiences are those in which one successfully completes a given task through persistence and determination. In these instances, individuals experience achievement through the success of overcoming challenges. This provides them with a sense of adequacy, which yields confidence and self-efficacy. Through mastery experiences, teachers will realize and own their potential, capacity, and seek self-fulfillment.

Vicarious experiences. Vicarious experiences are those in which one has the opportunity to observe a task being successfully implemented and completed (Bandura, 1977). Through vicarious experiences, individuals can see their peers perform similar, expected tasks effectively. By observing others, one can increase her or his competency in a particular area through the use of effective strategies and techniques (Bandura, 1994). When one can witness successful implementation of a given task, it may intrinsically motivate her or him to believe that he or she too can accomplish the same task with persistent effort.

Verbal persuasion. According to Bandura (1994), verbal persuasion occurs when one is motivated by others through encouragement. The verbal persuader acts as a supported to help build an individual's self-efficacy. The experience of verbal persuasion serves as motivation to help instill the belief that one has the capability to develop effective skills and be successful in their implementation. By establishing positive atmospheres and promoting skill development, verbal persuasion can build one's confidence and self-perception. This can yield a higher perceived self-efficacy of oneself (Bandura, 1994).

Arousal mastery experiences. Through arousal mastery experiences, one is adept with her or his emotions, and how they affect her or his experiences. These experiences are paramount in one's personal judgement of her or his self-efficacy. Arousal mastery experiences result in physical reactions, which are interpreted and perceived by others as either positive or negative. When those with high efficacy have these experiences, they show what they know through their physical emotions with high confidence; however, those with low efficacy physically show what they do not know by succumbing to their doubt of capability (Bandura, 1994).

Review of Research Literature

Professional development. Recent studies have shown that professional development has an impact on teacher confidence and efficacy (Dierking & Fox, 2013; Damon, 2016; Niemela, 2016; Powell-Moman & Brown-Schild, 2011; Schmidt, 2017; Swiger, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011; Velthuis, Fisser, & Pieters, 2014). For instance, Bates and Morgan (2018), corroborated the findings of Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner's (2017) meta-analysis of 35 studies that yielded a connection between the influence of professional development on "teachers' practices and positive student learning outcomes" (p. 623). According to this meta-analysis, there are seven elements that should be included in order to facilitate effective professional development (Bates & Morgan, 2018). These elements of effective professional development include the following: active learning, focus on content, support for collaboration, models of effective practice, coaching and expert support, feedback and reflection, sustained duration (Bates & Morgan, 2018, p. 623–625). These elements are centered around knowledge building, hands-on training, opportunities to collaborate, and on-going support to influence teacher confidence and teacher efficacy. Therefore, "A one-shot, sit-

and-get approach to professional learning, (Darling-Hammond, 2010), no matter how dynamic”, is not sufficient (Bates & Morgan, 2018).

In addition, in the semi-grounded theory study, conducted by Dierking and Fox (2013), they sought to examine how the professional-development model of the National Writing Project (2012) impacted the efficacy of middle-school writing teachers. This researcher found that professional development empowered the teachers and gave them a sense of autonomy and support through collaboration, which yielded self-confidence (Dierking & Fox, 2013). A phenomenological study, conducted by Damon (2016), confirmed the importance of effective professional development for teachers. Damon (2016) examined the relationship between professional development and six elementary teachers’ self-efficacy. The relationship between the teachers’ self-efficacy and their professional development was distinct. The results showed that the engagement of professional development, based on the teachers’ needs, increased their confidence, knowledge, and professional growth, which established autonomy and purpose for their practice (Damon, 2016). A mixed-methods participatory action-research study, conducted by Schmidt (2017), examined the effects of professional development on grades K through 2 teachers’ self-efficacy and its influence on their students’ achievement in reading. The teachers’ confidence, self-efficacy, and their students’ reading achievement increased statistically significantly, as a result of the professional development specifically designed to the teachers’ needs (Schmidt, 2017). Also, a study conducted by Nieman (2016) found that grades K through 12 teachers’ efficacy and confidence to implement the Common Core State Standards in literacy instruction can increase if professional development is intentionally designed to meet the content-area focus, with collaboration, coherence, active learning, and adequate time for development and implementation.

A case study, conducted by Udealor (2016), acquired three kindergarten and three first-grade teachers' perceptions of how their reading instruction met the literacy needs of their students through their professional-development opportunities. The findings of this study were similar to those of Neiman's (2016) study, in which the teachers felt they needed a shared practice and learning culture that was reliable, appropriate, and directly related to their specific needs to build their confidence and instructional practice (Udealor, 2016). This showed that establishing a sense of belongingness through collaboration is essential in meeting the needs of teachers to build their confidence, which essentially yields higher teacher efficacy (Velthuis, Fisser, & Pieters, 2014).

Tschannen-Moran and Johnson (2011) conducted a correlational study that sought to investigate the experiences of 648 teachers' beliefs of their self-efficacy of literacy instruction and its connection with their self-efficacy of general teaching. The participants of the study were recruited through a convenience sample of teachers with represented the population of elementary schools (20) and middle schools (6), across three states (Arkansas, Kansas, and Virginia) (Tschannen-Moran & Johnson, 2011). The findings of this study indicated that literacy teachers who participated in on-going professional development opportunities yielded an increase in their self-efficacy beliefs. The findings of this study also revealed that there was limited research that solely focused on teachers' self-efficacy in relation to literacy instruction.

Teacher confidence and self-efficacy. In reviewing and analyzing scholarly definitions of confidence, confidence is directly correlated with self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Moen & Allgood, 2009, National Literacy Trust, 2015, Norton, 2013; Silverman & Davis, 2009). According to Moen and Allgood (2009), self-confidence is defined as the result of an individual's belief that he or she can perform a specific task, yielding self-efficacy. Bandura

(1997) defined self-efficacy as the confidence one has in his or her ability to perform a specific task, problem-solve, and execute a plan. Teachers who have high self-confidence have high confidence and efficacy in the implementation of effective strategies to meet the needs of struggling readers (Moen and Allgood, 2009), and can identify and set student-specific goals (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). A study conducted by Klassen and Chiu (2010) revealed that teachers who had high confidence in their ability to effectively implement strategies had positive student engagement.

A phenomenological study of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs revealed that in order for teachers to sustain self-efficacy, they must be confident in their content area (Norton, 2013). In this study, 12 secondary teachers participated in four different methods of data collection. These included focus groups, interviews, self-efficacy assessment, and essay questions. Confidence was identified as a major theme in the data analysis of the interview and focus group responses. Confidence in making a difference, perceptions of themselves as teachers, and leading classroom instruction were common topics. The findings of this study yielded that teacher confidence impacted their efficacy. The study also noted that teachers' feelings about their content area and teaching the specific content-area impacted their confidence, which affected their self-efficacy (Norton, 2013). According to Swackhamer, Koellner, Basile, and Kimbrough (2009), for a teacher to feel highly effective in his or her practice, content-specific, specialized training is required.

A mixed-methods study, conducted by Tate (2016), sought an understanding of upper-elementary teacher knowledge for teaching reading to struggling readers and used partially structured interviews and a survey. This study quantitatively identified teachers' content knowledge through the survey; and, qualitatively identified common themes related to the

teachers' perceptions of their skill-set and knowledge related to teaching and helping struggling readers overcome their deficit areas. The upper-elementary struggling readers' lack of confidence and ways to build their confidence were prevalent in the study. The theme of teacher confidence only emerged in two of the teacher interviews. One teacher, who had primary grade teaching experience and a master's degree in early childhood education, felt confident in teaching basic, foundational reading skills and less confident in teaching the higher-level reading skills; however, no ways to support the teacher's confidence were identified in the study. The other teacher, who was a pre-kindergarten teacher assistant with special education certification, felt very confident in teaching both basic foundational reading skills and higher-level reading skills (Tate, 2016). This demonstrated that teachers who have high confidence believe that they can meet the needs of students, which yields high ability in trying to meet the needs of the students.

Third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence.

According to Sanfer and Osguthorpe (2013), teachers' perceptions are a result of their background, experiences, education, upbringing, and persona. When compiling and analyzing research for this study, Studies examining third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence and third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers were scarce. Various aspects of literacy instruction, including the perceptions of pre-service teachers, have been the focus of past and most current research (Abernathy-Dyer, Ortlieb, & Cheek, 2013; Johnson, 2011; Lesley, 2011; Perkins, 2013; National Literacy Trust, 2015). Little research has been conducted to investigate teachers' perceptions of their confidence (National Literacy Trust, 2015). Despite the limited number of studies, research

in this area is of great importance, because teachers' confidence has a great impact on their instructional practice.

Robinson (2017) conducted an exploratory case study that investigated grades K through 5 teachers' perceptions of their confidence level and their preparedness to implement the common core state standards in Alabama. Findings from this study indicated that teachers did not feel confident in their ability to implement the common core state standards effectively, due to a lack of training and resources, although they wanted to get an understanding of the standards (Robinson, 2017). This corroborates the finding from the Hobbs (2011) qualitative pilot study of 23 math and science teachers from three rural secondary schools that stated teachers' perceptions of their confidence and competence to implement new curriculums, and teaching "out-of-field," which means "teaching a subject for which they are not qualified" was contingent on their preparedness and support (Hobbs, 2011, p. 271). According to Hobbs (2011), the teachers in the study felt that their lack of knowledge in how to integrate effective teaching strategies with the curriculum, and how to effectively deliver it to the students, justified their needs of preparedness and support. Teaching struggling readers can be related to the previous statement, because teachers of struggling readers should have a knowledge base of foundational reading skills and strategies to meet their individual needs (Allington, 2013; Moats, 2009; Washburn et al., 2011). Third through fifth-grade teachers should have knowledge and skill-set to meet the needs of their struggling readers.

Defining third-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers. It is common knowledge that struggling readers are students who have difficulties with reading. Enrique, Jones, and Clarke (2010) identified struggling reader as a label that encompasses a student's difficulties while interacting with reading. Dudley-Marling (2011) believed struggling reader is

a less offensive term used to identify and inclusively label a student who has difficulty learning to read. Others have defined struggling readers as students without an identified learning disability (Limbrick, Wheldall, & Madelaine, 2011), those who read below grade-level (Hall, 2016), and have been identified as low achievers in reading (Washburn et al., 2011). They struggle in on-grade-level reading comprehension, due to a lack of competence in one or more components of reading (Allington, 2013). Additionally, these students are unmotivated to participate in reading activities, due to a lack of confidence in their ability to read (Coombs, 2012). Lo, Wang, and Haskell (2009) further suggested that these students also struggle in other subjects, because of the grade-level expectations that require them to read to learn.

These readers also possess various characteristics when they encounter the task of reading (Washburn, et al., 2011; Kucan & Palinscar, 2010). Kucan and Palinscar (2010) stated that before reading a text, they usually show resistance or reluctance in reading, have limited background knowledge, and have no clear purpose for reading. While reading a text, upper-grade (fourth-grade and beyond) struggling readers tend to use limited decoding skills, lack fluency, intonation, and prosody, lack comprehension of what they are reading, unable to monitor their understanding to self-correct, need assistance, and, have limited reading stamina (Washburn, et al., 2011; Kucan & Palinscar, 2010). As result of the during-reading characteristics exhibited, after reading a text, upper-grade struggling readers tend not to retain the information they read, rely solely on the written text to answer questions, seek assistance for information, and have a negative or avoidance attitude toward reading (Washburn, et al., 2011; Kucan & Palinscar, 2010). This is a result of lacking foundational skills in one or more of the essential components of reading: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Allington, 2013).

Research-based reading instruction. Current research cites the National Reading Panel (2000) as the foundation of research-based reading instruction (Allington, 2013; Boogart, 2016; Johnson, 2011; Moats, 2009; Toste, Williams, & Capin, 2017; Wanzek, et al., 2010). This means that effective reading instruction should incorporate the five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). Mastery of the basic skills in each component is necessary because reading is a process and not an automatic action. The International Reading Association (2011) ascertained the importance of the incorporation of the previously mentioned components by stating,

Reading requires the development and maintenance of a motivation to read, the development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print, sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension, the ability to read fluently, the ability to decode unfamiliar words and the reading skills of an effective and balanced reading program and knowledge to understand how phonemes or speech sounds are connected to print.

(p. 42)

Third-grade through fifth-grade students are expected to be able to decode and read complex words proficiently, with the ability to access prior knowledge and make connections to text (Allington, 2013). Toste et al. (2017) noted that upper-elementary struggling readers receive less instruction in word reading, which is a disadvantage to their development of word-reading proficiency.

Interventions for third-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers. According to Flynn, Zheng, and Swanson (2012), research-based interventions for older struggling readers is limited, which leaves educators to utilize interventions that have shown to be effective for early

elementary struggling readers. Their selective meta-analysis of intervention studies on 5th–9th–grade struggling readers found that most of the studies focused on phonics-only interventions or combined phonics and phonemic awareness interventions, which proved to have low effect sizes on meeting the needs of the upper-grade struggling readers. According to the results of the study, comprehension interventions proved to have higher effect sizes, while vocabulary instruction was not mentioned in any of the studies. The researchers noted the importance of further research for the upper-grade population of struggling readers to identify specific components of reading and interventions to meet the needs of these students (Flynn et al., 2012). The researchers specifically stated that upper-grade struggling readers will have greater outcomes with interventions that focus on a combination of vocabulary and comprehension instruction.

The results of a meta-analysis conducted by Scammacca, Roberts, et al., (2015), which compared the characteristic of intervention studies conducted between 1980–2011, found that between 1980 and 2004, no studies included the population of grades 4 and 5. Only 26.5% of the studies, between 2005–2011, included the fourth- through fifth-grade population. Majority of the studies focused on struggling readers with all or some learning disabilities. From 1980–1990, none of the studies included struggling readers without a learning disability; and, the same was reported for those conducted with some learning disability, including the years 1991–1995. Only 5.3% of the studies conducted between 2005–2011 included struggling readers with no disability; and, all of the studies yielded positive results for the struggling readers (with and without a learning disability) who received interventions in the areas of fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Scammacca, et al., 2015).

Recent studies have found that direct and explicit instruction in the components of fluency and vocabulary instruction are effective in yielding text-based comprehension for upper-elementary struggling readers (Wanzek, et al., 2010; Wanzek et al., 2013, Toste et al., 2017). Wanzek et al. (2010) conducted a synthesis of 24 reading intervention studies of fourth- and fifth-grade struggling readers. The study sought to determine the effects of the interventions on the students' reading achievement. The interventions in the study were focused on fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension in isolated and multiple component interventions, which also included word reading and spelling. The findings of the study indicated that upper-elementary struggling readers benefited from comprehension interventions with the use of before-during-and-after reading strategies, according to the measures developed by the researchers. Multiple component interventions showed positive effects in increasing outcomes and achievement in the fluency and comprehension of upper-elementary struggling readers (Wanzek et al., 2010).

Wanzek et al. (2013) conducted a continuation study from one they conducted in 2007, which reviewed research on interventions for struggling readers in grades K through 3. The 2013 study reviewed research on interventions for struggling readers in grades 4 through 12. The purpose of the study was to identify specific characteristics of extensive interventions, which helped meet the needs and improved the outcomes of upper-grade struggling readers (Wanzek et al., 2013). The review of studies indicated that students who received interventions in the areas of fluency, comprehension, and spelling, in 75 or more interventions sessions had a positive effect on the students' outcomes (Wanzek et al., 2013). Multiple component interventions also showed positive effects in increasing outcomes and achievement in the fluency and comprehension of upper-grade struggling readers (Wanzek et al., 2013).

Toste, et al. (2017) identified five research-based instructional practices that will help upper elementary struggling readers decode complex words and read more fluently, while promoting continued reading development. The research-based instructional practices focused on decoding multisyllabic words through the identification of word parts (roots and affixes) to promote automaticity, versus using traditional rules-based instruction. According to Kearns (2015), the ability to read multisyllabic words is not contingent on a student's knowledge of traditional rules-based phonics instruction. This was substantiated across two studies conducted by Toste, et al. (2017) and Toste, Capin, Williams, Cho, and Vaughn (2016), in which they investigated the effect of the multisyllabic word reading intervention they created, versus the adopted school reading intervention on 175 third-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers. The students who received the multisyllabic word reading intervention grew significantly in the areas of decoding, spelling, and word reading, as compared to those who received the adopted reading intervention program implemented by the school.

Teachers of elementary (Grades 3 through 5) struggling readers. In general, teachers of struggling readers must understand the complexity of teaching reading (Kiriakidis, 2010). For teachers to be successful in meeting the needs of their struggling readers, they must first understand their role, how to introduce and implement effective strategies, engage in professional development, and have self-efficacy (Kiriakidis, 2010; Rupley, et al., 2009; Nichols, 2009; & Wanzek, et al., 2013). To meet the needs of elementary (grades 3 through 5) struggling readers, third-grade through fifth-grade teachers must know and understand how to implement research-based interventions and strategies effectively (Allington, 2013). According to Boardman, et al. (2016), teachers of struggling readers need instructional models to help them increase their students' reading comprehension. According to Rupley, Blair, and Nichols (2009),

teachers of struggling readers must be able to support students' learning by scaffolding through direct and explicit instruction, with specific attention to the individual students' learning styles. Third through fifth-grade teachers must implement specific interventions tailored to meet their students' individual needs (Allington, 2013; Scammacca, et al., 2015; Wanzek, et al., 2010; Wanzek et al., 2013; Washburn et al., 2011). For teachers to maximize the achievement of struggling readers, they must be given an "opportunity to learn" (Rupley, et al., 2009, p. 129). Providing students with an opportunity to learn not only allows the students to learn skills and cognitive strategies, but to be able to apply those skills and strategies to actual reading tasks. Teachers who strategically plan interventions incorporate direct and explicit instruction using strategies, such as modeling and scaffolding, while also giving the students an opportunity to learn, are more successful in closing reading gaps (Allington, 2013; Moats, 2009; National Literacy Trust, 2015; Scammacca, et al., 2015; Wanzek, et al., 2010; Wanzek, et al., 2013; Washburn, et al., 2011).

Marshall (2011) conducted a case study that sought to acquire an understanding of kindergarten through fifth-grade reading teachers' experiences in teaching struggling readers. The study included 15 certified reading teachers who were over the age of 18, and had no less than five years' experiences as a reading teacher. The study took place in a Reading First elementary school. The participants shared their experiences in a semi-structured interview. The findings of the study revealed that all of the participants felt they were able to meet the needs of their struggling readers, although meeting them where they are is a difficult task. The K-3 teachers felt more prepared to meet the needs of their struggling readers, because of the support they received from their Reading First literacy coach. However, the fourth- and fifth-grade

teachers felt like they did not have the same support in meeting the needs of their struggling readers.

In the study conducted by Boardman, Vaughn, Buckley, Reutebuch, Roberts, and Klingner (2016), they sought to acquire an understanding of how using a specific instructional model (Collaborative Strategic Reading) would influence the comprehension of fourth- and fifth-grade struggling readers. Their charge was that using the instructional model would provide a scaffold for students to increase their understanding of text through the use of “before, during, and after reading” strategies (Boardman, Vaughn, Buckley, Reutebuch, Roberts, & Klingner, 2016, p. 410). There were 60 randomly selected teachers in the study who represented 14 elementary schools from three different urbanized school districts, in two different states. Teachers were random assigned to treatment and control groups, which included 1,372 students in the initial sample who were split into control and treatment groups. Prior to implementing the specific instructional model, the teachers completed professional development to ensure they understood how to implement, support, and introduce strategies to students. The teachers were also afforded the opportunity to engage in booster sessions to help maintain consistency in the development and implementation of effective lessons. The teachers were also afforded the opportunity to engage in biweekly coaching sessions. In these sessions, a coach who specialized in Collaborative Strategic Reading would model, co-teach, or observe the gradual release of lessons, and debrief with teachers, to provide commendations and recommendations. The findings of the study revealed that the fourth- and fifth-grade students who received interventions using the specific instructional model (Collaborative Strategic Reading) had an increase in their reading comprehension outcomes than those who did not. The showed that the teachers who received ongoing support through professional development sessions and support from

specialized coaches helped increase the teachers' efficacy in meeting the needs of their fourth-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers.

Review of Methodological Issues

Qualitative and quantitative approaches were used by researchers to gather data and execute research questions in the areas of literacy instruction and struggling readers (Bostock & Boon, 2012; Francois, 2013; Ganske, Monroe, & Strickland, 2003). The use of non-experimental surveys, ethnographies, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenology, and reviews of literature were the most prevalent in collecting research that focused on obtaining data based on an individual's perception of various subjects (Abernathy-Dyer, Ortlieb, & Cheek, 2013; Johnson, 2011; Lesley, 2011; Perkins, 2013; Scharlach, 2008). The use of qualitative research allows the researcher to answer questions to problems directly through the perception of a small number of individuals who are experiencing the problem, based on their behaviors regarding specific areas or concerns (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is most effective in gathering information related to values, opinions, experiences, behaviors, and social contexts. The use of ethnography and case study methods were most prevalent in researching teachers' perceptions of teaching struggling readers and their perceptions of teaching literacy (Abernathy-Dyer et al., 2013; Allington, 2013; Giles & Tunks, 2014; Johnson, 2011; Lesley, 2011; Mahdavi, J. N. & Tensfeldt, L., 2013; Moats, 2009; Perkins, 2013; Scharlach, 2008).

The exploratory, ethnographic case study by Abernathy-Dyer et al. (2013) was conducted to analyze teachers' efficacy and their perspectives about elementary literacy instruction in Reading First and non-Reading First schools. A combination of observations, interviews, and surveys were used to investigate the relationship among four 1st-grade teachers' beliefs, efficacy, and curriculum, using open-ended and fixed questions with a Likert scale (Abernathy-Dyer et al.,

2013). The study sought to generate hypotheses to develop new theoretical concepts. It was found that student achievement was pivotal to how the teachers felt about their efficacy. This information further asserted the need to acquire teachers' perceptions of their confidence to gain an understanding of their experiences to support it, although the design of this study was not appropriate for my study.

In a case study conducted by Johnson (2011), fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of teaching struggling readers were investigated. An interview, observation, and lesson-plan analysis were used to gather information for the study (Johnson, 2011). The study was bounded by a specific setting and sought to explore several cases, teaching struggling readers through the experiences of four, fifth-grade teachers. The results of the study provided insight into the requirements to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of struggling readers effectively. The study did not investigate the teachers' perceptions of their confidence to implement differentiated instruction to meet the needs of the struggling readers. Other studies sought to create hypotheses, theoretical concepts, or explore various cases without in-depth descriptions of the lived experiences of the teachers (Allington, 2013; Lesley, 2011; Mahdavi & Tensfeldt, 2013; Moats, 2009; Perkins, 2013; Scharlach, 2008).

In the review of methodologies, no qualitative study between 2007–2017 has addressed teachers' perception of their confidence to teach struggling readers from the perspective of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers through a phenomenological lens. Because the phenomenon of confidence through the perceptions of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers is unique and has not been largely studied, the use of phenomenology can produce great insight for understanding its subjective impact on the teaching of struggling readers. This method of

research will provide awareness of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers, and overtly describe it through lived experiences.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Several studies have reviewed pre-service teachers' and in-service early childhood/lower elementary (K through 2) teachers' perceptions of teaching literacy and teachers' perceptions of struggling readers (Gambrell, Morrow, & Presley, 2007; Hammond, 2015; Lesley, 2011; Perkins, 2013; Scharlach, 2008; Washburn, Joshi, & Cantrell, 2011). These studies focused on teacher efficacy, which confirmed that the acquisition of teacher perceptions is imperative to understand underlying factors that may impede effective classroom instruction. In Hammond's (2015) study, results indicated that early childhood teachers understood that their knowledge about literacy and literacy instruction is vital to their profession, but they indicated a low understanding of prerequisite literacy skills, which impacted their teacher efficacy. Washburn et al. (2011) reported that pre-service teachers showed high confidence in their efficacy to teach struggling readers. In a study conducted by Putman (2012), preservice teachers with limited field-based experiences had lower self-efficacy than those with more opportunities to have field-based experiences. Rogers-Haverback and Mee (2015) conducted a study which sought to acquire the relationship between preservice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and field-based experiences. They used Bandura's social cognitive theory and self-efficacy (1986, 1997) as the conceptual framework of the study. In the study, eight middle school preservice teachers were enrolled in a reading methods course, which required field-based experiences. The preservice teachers kept reflection logs and completed the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale which showed increased self-efficacy with acquired knowledge in teaching reading through the field-based experiences.

The National Literacy Trust (NLT) conducted a national survey in the United Kingdom, the only one of its kind, to investigate teachers' perspectives of their attitude, beliefs, and confidence toward literacy (National Literacy Trust, 2015). The NLT study used 2,326 primary-and-secondary school teachers from 112 schools in the UK (National Literacy Trust, 2015). The findings from the study indicated that there is opportunity to support teachers' confidence regarding their competence, and to support unique groups of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, with special educational needs, or able, gifted, and talented (National Literacy Trust, 2015). The study also reported that teachers with no more than 3 years' experience and those with greater than 10 years' experience were more confident in teaching those unique groups of children. (National Literacy Trust, 2015).

In the studies that focused on teachers' perceptions of teaching literacy and/or struggling readers, Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy was primarily used as the conceptual framework to drive the studies (Gambrell, Morrow, & Presley, 2007; Hammond, 2015; Lesley, 2011; Narkon & Black, 2008; Perkins, 2013; Scharlach, 2008; Washburn, Joshi, & Cantrell, 2011). Narkon and Black (2008) used Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory and concluded that teachers' beliefs of their ability and their belief about the task/result influenced their level of confidence and self-efficacy. Teachers' confidence in their ability to impart knowledge in students yields self-efficacy. To have high teacher efficacy, teachers must have a high-level of confidence (Silverman & Davis, 2009).

Critique of Previous Research

In the study conducted by Washburn et al. (2011) pre-service teachers' preparedness to teach struggling readers was examined. The findings in this study indicated that pre-service teachers lacked the competence in basic concepts necessary to instruct students with deficits in

reading. The findings indicated those teachers' perceptions of their skill-set and instructional ability were incompatible (Washburn et al., 2011). Washburn et al. (2011) noted that the incompatibility of the teachers' perceived skill-set and actual skill-set may possibly result in future problems in providing effective instruction for struggling readers. The previous statement asserts that a future need may arise in providing effective instruction for struggling readers, but does not address it from the teachers' perspective. Although the study focused on pre-service teachers' perceptions of teaching struggling readers, it did not fulfill the requirements of understanding third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers, nor did the study address teachers' experiences to support their confidence to enhance their ability to teach struggling readers.

The previously mentioned study by the National Literacy Trust (2015), which reported findings on teachers' confidence to teach literacy, fell within the realm of gaining third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach literacy; however, it failed to address their confidence to teach struggling readers or identify their needs to support confidence explicitly. The study, conducted by Johnson (2011), focused on fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of teaching struggling readers. Although the study fits into the realm of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers, its focus was on their views of using differentiation to meet the needs of struggling readers, environmental structure conducive for struggling readers, and the identification of the components of reading instruction most beneficial to the improvement of older students who struggle with reading (Johnson, 2011). The research for the Johnson study did not fulfill the requirements of the scope of this study, which is to acquire third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers.

Summary

Based on this review of literature, no recent phenomenological research has been published that solely focused on the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers with the use of Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1977, 1997) as a conceptual framework as a guide to help identify the experiences required to help support teacher confidence. Investigating the impact of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence in teaching struggling readers may yield important findings. Based on the researcher's review of literature, a significant gap was identified, yielding high relevance and importance for the implementation of this study. The literature review provided strong support for pursuing a research project to answer the following research questions: What are third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to educate struggling readers? How do third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' experiences in teaching struggling readers reflect those of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and/or arousal mastery experiences?

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides a review of the methodology selected for the study that was most effective in acquiring information from third-grade through fifth-grade teachers to ascertain their perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers; and, how their experiences have influenced their confidence and self-efficacy in teaching struggling readers. The chapter begins with a review of the purpose of the study, and discussion of the research method and design. Next, in-depth information about the participants, sampling method, instrumentation, data-collection procedures, identification of attributes, and the data analysis process are provided. Limitations to the research design, validation (through credibility and dependability measures), and expected findings are also discussed. Issues that could occur in the study, which include the conflict of interest assessment, researcher's position, possible ethical issues, and a summary conclude the chapter.

The review of literature revealed there is a lack of research that investigated third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers. Teachers are expected to meet the needs of struggling readers; therefore, the implementation of essential literacy strategies to help struggling readers is necessary for third-grade through fifth-grade teachers. According to the International Reading Association (2010), teachers should have extensive knowledge and know how to implement the essential components of effective literacy instruction. Although teachers may be aware of, and implement these strategies, it is possible they may not feel confident in doing so due to their skill-set or lack of training.

In order to support third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' confidence to teach struggling readers, the four types of experiences as outlined by Bandura's (1977, 1997) sources of self-efficacy were used as the focus of this study: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences,

verbal persuasion, and arousal mastery experiences. Because third-grade through fifth-grade teachers are charged with the task of meeting the needs of struggling readers, all four sources of self-efficacy are necessary for the development of effective teachers.

The research questions below were used to interview participants in a Mississippi school district, and acquire sufficient information to ascertain if and how Bandura's (1977, 1993, 1994, 1997) criteria can be met to support teachers' confidence to teach struggling readers. The first research question ascertained teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers. The second research question uncovered how third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' experiences in teaching struggling readers were reflective of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and/or arousal mastery experiences. The third research question identified how third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' experiences have influenced their confidence and efficacy to teach struggling readers. These research questions were answered during the interview process, using the interview questions found in Appendix B.

RQ1. What are third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers?

RQ2. How do third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' experiences in teaching struggling readers reflect those of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and/or arousal mastery experiences?

Purpose and Design of the Study

Purpose. The purpose of this study was to acquire information from third-grade through fifth-grade teachers to ascertain their perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers, and how their experiences have influenced their confidence and self-efficacy in teaching struggling readers. The research goal was to identify themes and discover patterns related to the

third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' lived experiences to support their confidence in teaching struggling readers. According to the National Literacy Trust (2015) teachers' confidence is directly correlated with their ability to instruct. Research that focuses on the area of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of what they need to support their confidence through lived experiences is scarce (Hobbs, 2011; National Literacy Trust, 2015; Robinson, 2017). Uncovering third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions may provide insight and opportunities for understanding their lived experiences to help support their confidence and increase their efficacy.

Research method. Qualitative research was chosen for this study. Qualitative research allows a deep, full-detail, examination of a phenomenon in its natural setting (Creswell, 2007). Their perceptions of their experiences and how these experiences influence their confidence to teach struggling readers is a phenomenon. Third through fifth-grade teachers teaching struggling readers is ongoing and, according to recent research (Boogart, 2016; National Literacy Trust, 2015), it is a topic that is significant for further study. Using a qualitative method provided a means for third-grade through fifth-grade teachers to share their lived experiences, which may contribute to educational research and give their voices a chance to be heard (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Although there were some qualitative studies centered around teacher confidence (Narkon & Black, 2008; National Literacy Trust, 2015; Robinson, 2017; Washburn, et. al, 2011), their focus was not centered on teaching elementary (grades 3 through 5) struggling readers.

Phenomenology. Although there are several types of qualitative research designs, (phenomenology, case study, narrative, grounded theory, and ethnography), phenomenology was the design chosen for this study, because the focus of this study was centralized on the common and shared experiences of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers. A phenomenological study

encapsulates the reality of the lived experiences of individuals, and captures rich descriptions of the lived experiences (Creswell, 2014; Waters, 2016). In phenomenological research, the researcher seeks to acquire in-depth accounts of the participants' reality of their lived experiences through contextualized information (Creswell, 2007). This design affords the researcher the opportunity to uncover meaning, and the participants' perceptions of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). According to Conklin (2014) "phenomenology holds the potential to contribute to understanding the possibilities of self and others, and to mobilizing the energy and resources to create environments where everyone can do their best work" (p. 118).

As related to this study, acquiring third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers afforded the opportunity to explore their lived experiences and uncover ways to support them. The use of this design also afforded an opportunity to examine perceptions of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' experiences, and ascertain how they have influenced their confidence and efficacy in teaching struggling readers. The use of a phenomenological design was appropriate for this study because it was justified by the present study's similarity to what Marshall and Rossman (2011) describe in their quote,

to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of the lived experience [of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers]: how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others (p. 19).

The intent of this study was to uncover rich descriptions of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' lived experiences; therefore, using a phenomenological design was most appropriate for this study. The use of an ethnographic design was not adequate because cultural influences were not considered in this study. Grounded theory was not appropriate because the

intent of this study was not to create a new theory or model (Creswell, 2007). A narrative study was rejected because the goal of this study was not to develop a story. A case study was not appropriate because this study was not bound by specific attributes (Creswell, 2007).

Research Population and Sampling Method

Research population. Ten third-grade through fifth-grade teachers from a school district in Mississippi was recruited to represent the population for this study. Creswell (2007) defined a population as a group of people who share common characteristics. For the purposes of this study, the population included two male and eight female teachers of diverse ethnicities, which included seven African American, two Caucasian, and one other nationality. The population included teachers who have a license to teach third- through fifth-grade, and at least 3 years of experience as third-, fourth-, or fifth-grade elementary, classroom teacher. The teachers had varying years of experience, as shown in Table 1. According to the International Reading Association (2010),

Pre-K and Elementary Classroom Teachers are professionals responsible for teaching reading and writing to students in either a self-contained or departmentalized setting at the pre-K or elementary levels. These professionals may also be responsible for teaching content such as social studies or science. Regardless of their role, these individuals must be able to provide effective instruction for all students in the classroom, from those who struggle with learning to read to those who need enrichment experiences. These teachers collaborate with reading specialists and other professionals to improve instruction and to modify the physical and social environments as needed. [Moreover, these teachers must have] an undergraduate or graduate degree with a major in early childhood/elementary education, with Reading and reading-related course work (typically 9–12 credits) that

enables the candidate to demonstrate mastery of elements identified in Standards 2010.

(International Reading Association, 2010, pp. 37–38)

The third-grade through fifth-grade teachers selected for this study were not reading specialists, nor those who held a reading certification. They were general classroom teachers who are charged with meeting the needs of their students, regardless of their confidence or efficacy to teach those students.

Sampling method. Purposeful sampling was used to select specific participants, in order to obtain a clear representation of the lived experiences of the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers. This sampling method was selected to ensure the participants have lived experiences of the phenomenon, and could provide in-depth information and insight to address the research questions (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), a sample of 10 or fewer teachers is sufficient in identifying themes for analysis, although up to 15 are warranted. The participants selected met the criteria for the research population as previously stated, and represented a cross-section of teachers from third-through fifth-grade. The small sample size of 10 participants afforded this researcher the opportunity to uncover rich descriptions about the phenomenon, and acquire deep individual inquiries to allow multiple perspectives of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

The researcher contacted the school district and principal of the target schools to gain permission to conduct the study. Once permission was granted, teachers meeting the selection criteria were notified via email about the intent of the study. Teachers intending to participate were asked to respond to the email, and were provided background information for the study, ethical procedures for confidentiality, and their participant rights to establish a

researcher/participant rapport. The participants signed an informed consent, which ensured them the right to withdraw their participation in the study at any time.

Instrumentation

According to Creswell (2014), data collection for a phenomenological study is best accomplished through the method of open-ended questions to ensure the acquisition of in-depth information. To investigate the perceptions of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' confidence to teach struggling readers, an interview protocol was used as the sole data-collection instrument. The interview protocol allowed me as the researcher to be informed purposefully through the acquisition of real-time, lived experiences of the teachers (Creswell, 2007). A practice session was conducted to ensure dependability of the interview questions, which yielded consistent results among the teachers who participated in the practice sessions (outside of the study). For this study, 10 participants were individually interviewed face-to-face, one-time. Although some phenomenological studies are conducted using multiple interviews, a single interview took place, because the researcher sought to acquire the teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers in real-time and space to acquire authentic answers (Creswell, 2013). The teachers' responses were recorded and transcribed as direct quotes. The interview protocol began with gaining a general insight of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' confidence to teach struggling readers to corroborate their confidence. The subsequent questions specifically delved more deeply into the phenomenon to gain rich data through structured inquiry. This aligned with DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree's (2006) notion that "the basic research question may well serve as the first interview question, but between 5 and 10 more specific questions are usually developed to delve more deeply into different aspects of the research issue" (p. 316). The interview questions, found in Appendix B, focused on the four

sources of self-efficacy, as outlined by Bandura (1977, 1993, 1994, 1997), in relation to the teachers' experiences in teaching struggling readers. Ten questions were used during the interview with an approximate duration of 45–60 minutes.

Data Collection

The duration of the study was 13 weeks. In-person, individual interviews were conducted to collect the data. All interviews were completed within a 48-hour timeframe at participants' school sites, in their own classrooms. Conducting the interviews in the participants' classrooms provided the teachers with a sense of comfort, which helped in acquiring completely honest, rich descriptions of their lived experiences of the phenomenon. Teachers were aware that their responses were recorded with a digital recorder and the researcher's iPhone 7s (for back-up) during the interview process. The interviews were saved as audio files, and a back-up digital copy was saved on a flash drive, which was secured in a locked file cabinet. The teachers' responses were uploaded to the NVivo 11 data-management software, and transcribed for data analysis and the presentation of findings. Teachers received copies of their data collection transcript to review before the data-analysis process. This member checking afforded the teachers confirmation and reassurance of accurate accounts of their information (Creswell, 2014).

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), participants' privacy and anonymity are of utmost importance. To ensure confidentiality throughout the data-collection process, no person-specific or identifying information was used. According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), the researcher must ensure anonymity of the participants because they may provide information that could threaten their position within their organization. Therefore, ensuring confidentiality helped alleviate possible participant reluctance to answer the interview questions, which

increased the integrity of the study and encouraged reliable responses.

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned for each teacher (e.g. T1, T2, T3...). According to Yin (2011), the use of pseudonyms helps protect the participants' confidentiality. These pseudonyms were assigned to participants in the order in which they were interviewed. Individual interviews were scheduled at different times to prevent participant interaction. Teachers were informed that they may be excused at any time from the data collection process at their choice without penalty. Also, the hardware used for data collection was stored in a secure location, to prevent a breach of confidentiality. Table 1 shows the pseudonym for each participant, the grade-level they currently teach, their years of experience, and the date of their interview.

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Participants

Participant	Current Grade-Level	Ethnicity African American (AA) White (W) Other (O)	Gender Male (M) Female (F)	Years of Experience as a third-, fourth-, or fifth-grade Teacher	Total Years of Experience
T1	3rd	AA	F	15	15
T2	5th	AA	F	15	17
T3	4th/5th	AA	M	5	19
T4	3rd	O	F	7	22
T5	3rd	AA	F	13	32
T6	4th	W	F	4	10
T7	4th	AA	M	15	18
T8	4th	AA	F	30	31
T9	3rd	AA	F	11	11
T10	5th	W	F	3	7

Identification of Attributes

Teacher confidence is the primary attribute that defined this study. In reviewing and analyzing scholarly definitions of confidence, a correlation between confidence and self-efficacy was derived (Bandura, 1997; Moen & Allgood, 2009; National Literacy Trust, 2015; Norton, 2013; Silverman & Davis, 2009). According to Moen and Allgood (2009), self-confidence is defined as the result of an individual's belief that he or she can perform a specific task, yielding self-efficacy. Teacher confidence is a teacher's belief that he or she can deliver effective instruction to meet students' needs. Teachers who have high self-confidence have high confidence and efficacy in the implementation of effective strategies to meet the needs of struggling readers (Moen & Allgood, 2009). Before teachers can have high efficacy, they must have high teacher confidence.

For the purposes of this study, four sources of self-efficacy, as outlined by Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1977, 1993, 1994, 1997) were used as the conceptual attributes for this study. These attributes are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and arousal mastery experiences. After the interviews were conducted, the responses were transcribed and coded by the identified attribute, using the NVivo 11 data management software. After the responses were coded, this study attempted to operationalize the attributes by reviewing the responses to determine if the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers have had related experiences that have influenced their confidence to educate struggling readers. This helped this researcher to acquire an understanding of the teachers' essential needs based on their lived experiences and perceptions. Commonalities in the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' lived experiences, coded by attribute and derived sub-categories, produced themes that were used to further explain the phenomenon of the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

According to Moustakas (1994), data analysis of phenomenological research requires four principles: Epoché, Phenomenological Reduction, Imaginative Variation, and Synthesis of Meaning. Figure 1 shows the systematic order of Moustakas's (1994) principles of phenomenological research data analysis.

Moustakas (1994) Principles of Phenomenological Research Data Analysis

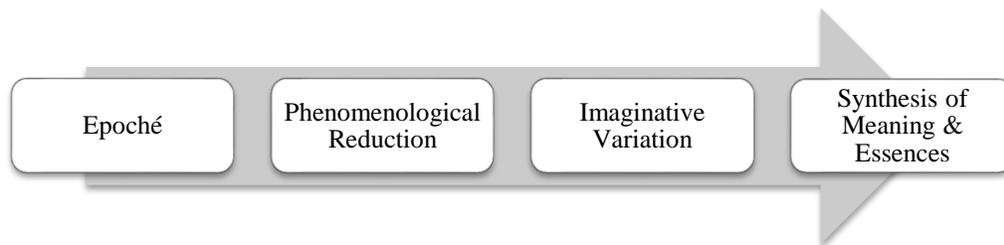


Figure 1. Moustakas (1994) principles of phenomenological research data analysis are epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meaning and essences.

Epoché is the initial step of Moustakas's (1994) principles of phenomenological research data analysis. Epoché requires the researcher to be nonjudgmental during the research process. The interviewer was discerning, not judgmental, during the data collection and analysis process. This means that this researcher's personal beliefs, experiences, attitudes, and presuppositions that were related to third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers were put aside (Moustakas, 1994). Finlay (2008) noted that the goal of phenomenological research is to remove presuppositions and acquire a clear understanding, without taking anything for granted. This allowed the prevention of researcher bias, and the data to represent itself (Creswell, 2014). As a result, the integrity of the data and findings are credible and reliable.

The second phase is phenomenological reduction. This phase was completed using the NVivo 11 data-management software, in which patterns emerged from the coded attributes of the phenomenon, through the use of the software's classification structures. In this phase, this researcher was able to identify relationships between the participants' responses, categorize, and organize the data into meaningful units (Moustakas, 1994). These key findings were highlighted and organized for the researcher's convenient-retrieval and management.

In the third phase, imaginative variation, common themes were categorized to gain insight and make meaning of the experiences identified by the teachers (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The themes were represented visually, in a table and graphic organizer, using the NVivo 11 software. According to Creswell (2007), the use of tables affords the opportunity for the representation of conceptual findings, unexpected findings, trends, patterns, and any preconceived expectations.

At the conclusion of data analysis, direct quotes and paraphrasing of teachers' responses were used to convey detailed descriptions of their lived experiences in the findings of the study (Creswell, 2014). Reporting direct quotes and paraphrasing (as needed) provided concrete evidence in understanding the phenomena through the perspectives of the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers. In the fourth phase, synthesis of meaning and essences, the data were synthesized into a statement of essences. The statement of essences is generalizable to the lived experiences of all of the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers in the study about the researched phenomenon.

Limitations of the Research Design

The goal of the phenomenological design was to gain perceptions and lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 2007). According to the phenomenological design, the use of 10

teachers was a small sample size, which yielded a limitation. The limited number of participants hindered the findings from being generalized to a larger population. In addition, subjectivity from the researcher's perspective was a limitation of the phenomenological design, because it may result in reliability and validity issues. Conflict of interest was not a limitation to the research design or ethical consideration, because none existed between the researcher and teachers. A possible ethical consideration could have been the result of teachers' reluctance to be completely honest and detailing how they felt about their confidence and/or experiences in teaching struggling readers. Although measures were employed to ensure and maintain the teachers' confidentiality, one could not guarantee that the teachers would not talk to each other or share their responses outside the study, which may have posed a possible limitation to the research.

Validation

Credibility. According to Creswell (2014), internal validity indicates there are no internal errors to the design of the study; the fewer errors, the higher internal validity. In addition, the use of member checking, by allowing the teachers to review their interview transcription, minimized researcher bias and increased the validity of the study (Creswell, 2014). External validity may occur if the study is generalizable to other populations. The use of the phenomenological design may produce non-generalizable results (Creswell, 2007). In addition, the limited sample size of 10 teachers did not lend the results to be generalizable to a larger population (Creswell, 2007).

Dependability. The dependability of this study was directly related to how the interview questions were structured and their consistency. According to Creswell (2007), interview questions must be structured in a specific manner that directly align with the conceptual

framework to acquire responses that met the intent of the study. If questions are too general and vague, they may produce inconsistent and unreliable responses from the teachers (Creswell, 2007). To ensure dependability, a practice session was conducted with five teachers who were not included in the study population. This session was conducted to ensure the interview questions were clear, and were conveyed as intended to acquire consistent and related answers among the teachers. Before the field-tested sessions, the teachers were provided with background information, ethical considerations, and they had to sign an informed consent as previously discussed in the population and sampling methods. The field-tested sessions were conducted at the teachers' school sites, in their own classroom, for a duration of approximately 60 minutes. After each practice session, the teachers were asked to provide feedback about the clarity of the questions, and to recommend additions, omissions, and modifications of the questions. The teachers' feedback about the questions helped verify their consistency and alignment with the purpose of the study to yield dependable results.

Expected Findings

The expectation of this study was to identify common attributes and themes related to third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers. The outcome of this study was expected to yield an understanding of what third-grade through fifth-grade teachers perceived as essential in helping them support their confidence to teach struggling readers. This finding may contribute valuable information to the field of education, in an effort to provide adequate help to third-grade through fifth-grade teachers in reaching their full potential to help struggling readers.

Ethical Issues

Conflict of interest assessment. This researcher is a literacy coach for the State Department of Education, who is charged with the responsibility to build teachers' capacity in literacy education; and, ensure the needs of struggling readers are met, in an effort to close achievement gaps. Although the researcher serves two schools in the XYZ school district, I work in a non-evaluative role. There was not a conflict of interest in this study, because the research population did not include teachers from the schools I serve. I do not have an economic interest in the outcomes of this study. This left my position in the study solely as a researcher and not an influence.

Researcher's position. Teachers meeting the needs of struggling readers is imperative for all students to be prepared for college and career. Teacher confidence is a phenomenon that influences effective teaching. As a literacy coach, this researcher's position is to build teachers' capacity in literacy instruction, in which this could affect her perspective. Understanding teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers may yield pertinent information to help meet the needs of the teachers to make them more effective in their practice (yielding self-efficacy).

Ethical issues in the study. There were not any foreseen ethical issues in the study. A possible issue could have been participants' reluctance to be completely honest in detailing how they felt about their confidence to teach struggling readers; and, how their experiences have influenced their confidence and self-efficacy in teaching struggling readers. Teachers communicating with each other about their responses outside the study could have also been an ethical issue. To address the possible issues, participants were assured that data would be coded

in non-identifying methods, and all information would be kept in confidence. They were also assured that they may opt out of the study at any time, without consequence.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study and foundational research questions were presented in this chapter. The population and sampling method identified participants who were expected to yield contributory information to the study. The use of the interview protocol afforded this researcher, the opportunity to gather in-depth responses through the use of open-ended questions that asked participants to express their perceptions of confidence to teach struggling readers. With Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1977, 1997) as the conceptual framework, the research questions were used to acquire the lived experiences and perceptions of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers. Validity and credibility was warranted for a successful study, with limitations and ethical concerns at a minimum. The next chapter will present the data analysis and results of the study.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

The researcher of this phenomenological study sought to acquire information from third-grade through fifth-grade teachers to ascertain their perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers and, how their experiences have influenced their confidence and self-efficacy in teaching struggling readers. The review of literature revealed there is a lack of research that investigated third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers (Boogart, 2016; National Literacy Trust, 2015). Teachers are expected to meet the needs of struggling readers; therefore, the implementation of essential literacy strategies to help struggling readers is necessary for third-grade through fifth-grade teachers. According to the International Reading Association (2010), teachers should have extensive knowledge and know how to implement the essential components of effective literacy instruction. Although teachers may be aware of, and implement these strategies, it is possible they may not feel confident in doing so due to their skill-set or lack of training. This study provided a foundation to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers?

RQ2. How do third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' experiences in teaching struggling readers reflect those of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and/or arousal mastery experiences?

Face-to-face interviews were used to acquire third-grade through fifth-grade teachers lived experiences about their confidence, and how their experiences have influenced their confidence and self-efficacy in teaching struggling readers. The nature of the study, its design, data, findings, and analysis, are uncovered in the following sections: description of the sample,

research methodology and analysis, summary of findings, presentation of data and results, and chapter 4 summary.

Description of the Sample

The study took place in a school district in Mississippi. The researcher provided the superintendent and department of accountability and research with a description of the study, consent form, and IRB approval-to-conduct-research letter, to acquire permission to conduct research within the district. After gaining permission to conduct research within the district, 15 elementary principals were contacted, via email, and provided a letter with the description of the study, consent form, the IRB approval letter, and the permission to conduct research. Seven of 15 principals responded with permission to interview teachers at their school, after which the researcher asked the administrators to provide the names and email addresses of the teachers who had a license to teach third- through fifth-grade, with at least 3 years of experience as a third-, fourth-, or fifth-grade elementary, general classroom teacher.

After identifying teachers who met the participant criteria, the researcher notified the teachers via email about the intent of the study. Teachers intending to participate were asked to respond to the email, and were provided background information for the study, ethical procedures for confidentiality, and their participant rights to establish a researcher/participant rapport. The teachers were provided with written informed consent that in-person, individual interviews would be conducted to collect the data, and interviews would be scheduled according to their schedules. A purposeful sampling method was used that identified participants to obtain a clear representation of the lived experiences of the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their needs to support their confidence to teach struggling readers. Moreover, purposeful sampling was used to ensure the participants provided in-depth information and

insight about the phenomenon, to address the research questions (Creswell, 2007). Ten third-grade through fifth-grade teachers were recruited to represent the population for this study. The participants included four, third-grade teachers; three, fourth-grade teachers; and, three, fifth-grade teachers. They represented a male and female population of varying ethnicities and years of experience (see Table 1).

Research Methodology and Analysis

The goal of this study was to acquire information from third-grade through fifth-grade teachers to ascertain their perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers and how their experiences have influenced their confidence and self-efficacy in teaching struggling readers. To ensure the interview questions were clear and conveyed as intended, and to acquire consistent and related answers among the teachers, field-tested sessions were conducted. In the field-tested sessions, five teachers, not included in the study population, were asked the interview questions. They were also asked to provide feedback about the clarity of the questions, and to recommend additions, omissions, and modifications to the questions. The field-tested sessions were conducted at the teachers' school sites, for a duration that ranged between 10 and 15 minutes. The teachers' feedback about the questions said they were clearly worded and easily understood. The responses of their lived experiences verified this, because they supported the intent of the study. Furthermore, this confirmed that the interview questions were clear and would yield dependable results.

After the field-tested sessions were conducted, 10 third through fifth-grade teachers were interviewed for the study. The duration of the study was 13 weeks. To ensure accurate accounts of participants' experiences were acquired, these in-person interviews were conducted at the participants' school sites to provide them with a sense of comfort, to help acquire completely

honest, rich descriptions of their lived experiences of the phenomenon. Teachers were aware that their responses were being digitally recorded with a digital recorder and iPhone 7s (for back-up) during the interview process. The interviews were saved as audio files on the computer, and a back-up digital copy was saved on a flash drive, which is secured in a locked file cabinet. After the interviews were completed, the teachers' responses were transcribed by the researcher. Teachers received copies of their data-collection transcript to review before the data-analysis process for member checking. This allowed the teachers to review their transcribed interviews, to ensure their responses were accurately recorded. After member checking was completed, the data were analyzed and common patterns and themes were identified. The data were coded, and themes were organized into a table (see Table 2). In the next two sections, the findings of the study are reported to provide concrete evidence in understanding the phenomena through the perspectives of the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers.

Summary of the Findings

The goal of this study was to uncover themes related to third through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers and how their experiences have influenced their confidence in teaching struggling readers. After implementing Moustakas's (1994) principles of phenomenological research data analysis, three themes and six subthemes emerged from the findings of the study. The themes and subthemes are presented in Table 2. They will be further discussed, in their relation to the research questions.

Table 2

Emerged Themes and Subthemes

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Subthemes</i>
1. Teaching the Five Components of Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence-level • Professional Responsibility
2. Meeting the Needs of Struggling Readers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small Groups • Resources
3. Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common Grade-Level Collaboration • Learning from Other Educators

Research question 1. The first research question was What are third-grade through fifth-grade teachers’ perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers? The purpose of the question was to acquire how the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers perceived their confidence to teach struggling readers. According to Sanger and Osguthorpe (2013), teachers’ perceptions are a result of their background, experiences, education, upbringing, and persona. When compiling and analyzing research for this study, background and experience in teaching the five components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) and meeting the needs of struggling readers influenced the participants’ confidence to teach third-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers. In addition, the teachers felt that it was their professional responsibility to teach their struggling readers. When the participants were asked their perception of their confidence to teach struggling readers, the seven of 10 participants stated they felt confident about their ability to teach struggling readers, while three of 10 felt little to no confidence. The lived experiences of the participants yielded themes 1

and 2 and their subthemes will be discussed in the presentation of the data and results section.

These themes and subthemes are summarized in table 3.

Table 3

EmergEd Themes Related to Research Question 1

Teachers	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10
<i>Theme 1 - Teaching the Five Components of Reading</i>										
Confidence				*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Lack of Confidence	*	*	*							
<i>Theme 2 - Meeting the Needs of Struggling Students</i>										
Small Groups	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Ability or Skill	*				*		*	*	*	*
Heterogeneously and Homogeneously		*	*	*		*				
Resources	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
STAR Assessment	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
IXL						*				
Moby Max				*		*				*
DIEBELS			*						*	
DRA					*				*	
Core Reading									*	
LETRS	*			*	*				*	
STRIDE						*				
Journey's Tool Kit		*					*	*		

Research question 2. The second research question was How do third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' experiences in teaching struggling readers reflect those of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and/or arousal mastery experiences? The

purpose of the question was to uncover how third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' experiences in teaching struggling readers were reflective of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and/or arousal mastery experiences. Data revealed that five of 10 participants' experiences reflect vicarious experiences, two of 10 of the teachers reflect mastery experiences. These experiences are uncovered in theme 3 and its subthemes, which are summarized in table 4. They will be further discussed in the following section.

Table 4

Emerg ed Themes Related to Research Question 2

Teachers	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	T10
<i>Theme 3 - Professional Development</i>										
Common Grade-Level Collaboration										
Grade-Level	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Vertical			*	*			*		*	*
Learning from other Educators										
Literacy Coach	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Interventionist	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Administrators	*	*		*	*	*		*	*	*
Peer Observation	*		*		*			*	*	
Mentor	*					*	*	*		*

Verbal persuasion was implied through the collaborative grade-level efforts and learning from other educators. This was manifested through the participants' discussion of how they were able to share ideas and strategies of what worked for them to encourage their students to perform well in various areas. Arousal mastery experiences were also implied through the collaborative grade-level efforts and learning from other educators. For example, the teachers' body language and tone changed during the interviews, while answering the questions. If the

participants felt comfortable, they sat upright and leaned forward, spoke clearly, with excitement, and without hesitation. They smiled and used frequent hand motions. However, those who felt less confident, sat back, paused, stuttered, grabbed their face, folded their arms, and some even grabbed their hair. The following sections will provide rich descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants.

Presentation of the Data and Results

The findings from the data revealed three themes and six subthemes. These themes and subthemes are reflective of experiences that were generalizable to the third through fifth-grade teachers. To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to the teachers, according to the order in which they interviewed. Detailed accounts of their real-time lived experiences are provided in the following sections. The first theme is teaching the five components of reading and the subthemes are confidence and lack of confidence.

Teaching the five components of reading. When compiling and analyzing research for this study, data revealed that teaching the five components of reading was a theme that either increased the participants' confidence or hindered their confidence to teach third-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers. The five components of reading consist of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Seven of 10 participants stated that they felt confident in teaching the five components of reading; however, three felt little to no confidence. The subthemes of confidence, and lack thereof, are illustrated in the following two sections.

Confidence-level. The results from the findings revealed that seven of 10 participants felt confident teaching the five components of reading to struggling readers. For example, T5 stated, I'm very confident. My background is that you probably don't remember, Reading Recovery. I was in Reading Recovery a long time ago. So, I still use some of those

strategies from Reading Recovery. Besides it is our professional responsibility to teach all of our students.

T9 stated:

I've been prepared through a reading institute, so I'm very confident in teaching grades three to five reading. Even though it is our professional responsibility to teach the five components of reading, I enjoy teaching all the components. The reading institute thoroughly trained us on every component. For instance, we had to learn different strategies to teach student how to identify letters and sounds to help them read. I've had training with LETRs, and I've also had training with Phonics Blitz, Phonics Boost, and other programs.

T8 stated:

I'm very confident in my ability to teach third-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers; and, I guess the confidence comes from me being a preschool teacher and a 2nd-grade teacher for 17 years. The foundational skills of reading are phonemic awareness and phonics. It was imperative to teach student how to identify their letters and know how to say and hear each letter. I taught that for so long, so you know I'm very confident. Also, it is our professional responsibility to teach students to read.

T6 stated, "I feel that I am confident. I mean it (my confidence) is pretty positive, so far. As long as I see continued growth, and I know that they're being successful (as long as their fluency increases and their interest increases)."

T7 stated:

Sometimes, I am confident teaching the five components of reading; and, sometimes I am not. Well honestly, I'm an alternate route teacher so a lot of my preparedness came with

mentoring and collaboration with some of my coworkers and my confidence was built that way, because you know you collaborate and you learn different strategies from people that have more experience in that area. So, through the years, my confidence was built that way, and some by professional development. But, I am more confident teaching vocabulary not to mention. The phonemic awareness, the phonics, and fluency, not as confident. Even though, I don't feel confident in phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency, it is my professional responsibility to learn how to effectively teach those components with my students.

T4 stated:

I feel confident, because I am passionate about reading. In addition, I have had plenty practice with teaching comprehension, fluency, phonics, phonemic awareness and vocabulary.

T10 stated:

First, of all teaching the five components of reading is our professional responsibility. I enjoy teaching the five components especially comprehension. However, I know the importance of teaching phonics and phonemic awareness. What I have realized is that the five components are needed to help students learn how to read effectively. Even though I have taught middle school for 15 years, I have enjoyed learning how to teach the five components of reading.

The evidence, listed above, demonstrated that a majority of the participants stated that they were confident in teaching the five components of reading; however, based on the results of the data, some of the participants stated that they were not. For instance, T3 stated,

Most times I feel confident in my preparedness to teach the struggling readers in my

classroom. However, at times, I do not feel confident. I know what needs to be done for them. However, there are times when I don't feel very confident, because I am not seeing them progress as much as I would like. That sometimes can be due to them being so far behind.

Likewise, T2 stated, "I'm not very confident in teaching third-grade through fifth-grade students to be successful readers because I've never taught kindergarten or 1st-grade. So, I'm really not familiar with how you teach them phonics and how you teach them to read." In addition, T1 stated:

You know like you don't really expect the third-grade through fifth-grade teacher to really be teaching phonics. But, a lot of kids that we are getting now, what they need goes back to phonemic awareness and their ability to use word attack skills. Typically, when you teach third- through fifth-grade, that's not your expertise area. You know we expect these kids to come to us in the upper-grades already readers, you know not teaching them to read. You know we're not expecting to teach a child to read in third-grade. In third-grade, we expect these kids to be reading for information, not us teaching a child to read. So, therefore that's why I feel as a teacher of third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade, we struggle. Therefore, I am not confident in teaching reading the five components to struggling readers.

"Teaching the five components of reading is not an easy task for teachers in grades three through five, but necessary, if students lack the ability to read and comprehend what they read," stated T3. T2 also stated, "If students are struggling with reading in grades three through five, it is imperative for the teacher to find ways to help the student with his or her deficiency."

Professional responsibility. All 10 participants stated that it is their responsibility to teach the struggling readers in their classrooms, regardless of the participants' level of confidence. This was illustrated by T2's statement, "I do feel responsible to teach them, but I really don't know how to teach them. So, I just do the best I can." The other participants' expressions were aligned with T8's response, "I do feel responsible for teaching the struggling readers, because if I don't teach them, who will? I just feel it's my professional responsibility to teach them." Likewise, T1 stated, "If I don't teach them, how will they ever learn? If they didn't get to know what they needed before they came to me, I can't see them leaving me the same way they came." T6 stated, "I feel like it's my responsibility to keep them from future failure, because if I can give them the confidence to try, in the end, if they try hard enough they will succeed." In addition, T4 asserted that

When you work with them and see that smile on their face and they see that they've been successful, you know, it just makes everything better. Then, it causes them to be able to interact with the other kids and actually feel like they belong.

Meeting the needs of struggling readers. The second theme is meeting the needs of struggling readers. To meet the need of struggling readers, teachers must identify them first. Based on the T10 responses, "one way the teacher could identify struggler readers within their classroom is to use some type of assessment." For example, T10 stated, "Well, one way is just by working with the students and having them read to you. I know when someone can't read well when they're struggling with words." Another way, stated T7, "The assessment will provide the teacher with information of each student strengths and deficiencies in reading. Once students' weaknesses and deficiencies are identified, then the teacher must figure out how to address the

deficiencies.” Based on the results of the data, the use of small groups was identified as one strategy that all the participants utilized to help meet the needs of struggling readers.

Small groups. Small groups were identified as a subtheme of meeting the needs of struggling readers. The following participants’ responses confirmed this determination. T9 expressed, “small groups are effective only if teachers plan well. Therefore, teachers must either group their students by ability or skills.”

T1 stated:

I use small groups, in which I support and guide the students with text that is on their instructional level. It also allows me to assist and support the students as they respond to the text in varying ways. In addition, I am able to hone in on skills that they need such as comprehension, fluency, phonics, vocabulary, or phonemic awareness. The groups I utilize within my classroom are mostly ability grouped, based upon skills that they need. Even though grouping may not be popular in fourth- or fifth-grade, it is necessary. That is why I utilize ability groups daily. In fact, I have placed all my students in groups either to meet the needs of struggling readers, or enhance my average readers, and challenge my advance readers. In agreement, T10 stated:

Teaching struggling readers can be a challenge, because as the teacher even though you teach third grade, you must meet the struggling student where they are. The different resources and material may vary depending on what that student needs and most times at a level where they can understand. Therefore, I utilized small groups in order to effectively meet the needs of struggling readers. I used ability grouping within my classroom.

T7 further expressed:

Teaching struggling readers can be a daunting task. To teach struggling readers, I use a variety of methods which vary by student. During whole group instruction, struggling readers are taught using on-grade-level materials and resources. When the students come to me for small group instruction, materials are geared toward their specific needs. For instance, if there is a third-grade student that needs help with phonemic or phonological awareness, materials for that particular reading area are used. Content is delivered verbally to the students, but activities are usually hands-on until it is time to progress monitor what they have learned. Depending on what the students are being pulled into a group for, determines how they are grouped. I group my students based on skills needed.

Similarly, T5 stated:

Now, the Tier three students meet with me and they are grouped by ability. So, I have about four of them, but the other students are grouped together. First, I grouped them by our STAR performance at the beginning of the year where all the greens, that was probably about three together. And, then the yellow, and weekly when we get our testing I regroup them. Sometimes, I want to put the green in with the blue, or with the yellow to help out, because if you have all you have all the yellows together, somebody may not know what to do. So, now I'm having, I have the green with the highest students helping the lowest students' but they don't know how they're grouped. So, I constantly group them almost every two weeks.

T8 expressed:

I find ability grouping is the best way that I work with children. Sometimes children are intimidated when they're with the group or with someone in the group who quote, unquote knows more than them. So, what I try to get them on their level with children of the same ability and work with them that way to meet the needs of the children. Again, I try to work with them one on one small groups. My students like to meet with me in groups instead of individually. I think they feel embarrassed when they work with me by themselves.

The other participants utilized groups too, but in a different way. For example, T4 and T3 utilized heterogeneous or homogeneously groups to ensure students are receptive to learning. An example of heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping was expressed by two other participants.

For instance, T2 stated:

Depending on what the skill is. In most cases, I will ability group them. So, we rotate centers. My group I usually keep them a little longer. The ones that you know having difficulty, reading deficiencies, but other in other cases they are. Just scrambling about you know top, low, middle. They are heterogeneously grouped in what I would call, the field, and homogeneously grouped when they to come to me.

T6 stated, "Students in the fifth-grade feel embarrassed if they lack a certain skill; therefore, I make sure they are group heterogeneously." Based on the results from the findings, all of the participants believed in utilizing small groups to help them meet the needs of struggling readers. However, resources were also identified as a subtheme of meeting the needs of struggling readers.

Resources. To meet the needs of their third-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers, all 10 of the participants stated they used assessment data to help identify their struggling

readers, identify the students' areas of deficiency, and/or group their students. STAR Reading, a web-based assessment, was identified as a common assessment used among all of the participants, in which they felt confident to help make determinations to meet their students' needs (Learning, 2010). STAR Reading is a nationally normed assessment, which closely aligns to state standards and common core (Learning, 2010). This assessment also provides individualized learning paths for students using the Compass Learning software and the independent reading component of Accelerated Reader (AR) (Learning, 2010). T2 stated, "According to test data when they take their STAR test, I look at those who are in the red and those that are in the yellow to see which ones are the lowest." T6 expressed,

I use STAR screeners to identify my struggling readers. Students are to rotate to me daily to gain intense instruction in a smaller setting. I pull resources from a lower-level that addresses the same standards. I use technology-based programs such as MobyMax, Stride, and IXL in order to make learning the skills more fun and engaging. I am meeting the needs of each student by identifying the problem/concern and implementing strategies in order for the scholar to grow. The resources I used truly have increased my students' learning.

T3 stated, "One thing I use those STAR data results to look at it to see what they are struggling with." T1 agreed, that they used star data and weekly tests. You know whatever exam, whatever assessment they have been given. I use the data from the assessment to decide you know who needs what." Likewise, T4 stated, "STAR reading test is used to show you where their deficiency levels are." T5 stated, "I grouped them by our STAR performance at the beginning of the year." T7 expressed, "Our school utilized the STAR assessment. The STAR

assessment provide data on every student within my classroom. It tells me their reading level and what skills they are struggling in.”

Four of the participants also stated they used other resources to help identify specific areas of deficiency and meet the needs of their struggling readers. T9 stated:

Sometimes, I might use DRA and DIEBELS. I've also used Florida's Center for Reading Research and CORE Reading. I use fluency readers and LETRs module 7 lesson plan. I've also used just a variety of other different resources that I pull from different places, depending on what I need.

T2 also stated, “I've used SRA kits. I've used intervention tool kits that come with our Journey series. I also pull lower-level materials off the Internet.” Likewise, T3 and T7 both stated, “I pull resources from websites.” T3 also mentioned using the Journey’s Toolkit. T6 stated,

Sometimes you encounter children that are hard to reach, and so that will cause a decrease in confidence when you're just like, OK, I can't get them to show any interest. So, I have to use various resources to keep them engaged.

T3 agreed, “small groups and resources are necessary in meeting the needs of struggling readers.” The next section will discuss the third identified theme, professional development.

Professional development. Professional development emerged as a theme when the participants were asked the interview question, “What do you perceive as essential components or essential supportive needs to help you build your confidence to teach and meet the needs of your third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade struggling readers?” Based on the results from the data, all 10 participants stated, “professional development.” In addition, all 10 confirmed that they had professional training on teaching reading, at some point in time, during their educational career. They also stated that they have professional development and get to work with their grade-level

peers, all of the time. However, they all agreed that they are not afforded the same professional development opportunities as the K–2 teachers. For example, T1 stated:

You know, like you don't really expect third-grade through fifth-grade teachers to really be teaching phonics. You know, K–2 teachers go to certain trainings, and three-five teachers go to different types of training. And you know, our training is based upon what I just said... In third through fifth-grade, you are reading for information, not learning to read, so they don't send us to trainings based on really how to teach kids to read.

T2 supported the response by stating:

They'll have workshops specific for K–2, like LETRS training, or what have you. I guess since we don't teach phonics, we don't need to go to them. But, if we went to it maybe we would know what to do with some of our struggling readers.

T7 stated:

Continued professional development is needed, because being an upper-level teacher, upper-grade-level teacher. I think that the lower-grade levels, well, I assume that they think by the time the students get to our grade-level they should already know certain material, or should be at a certain point in their reading or proficiency in their reading, and a lot of our students are still struggling readers and they haven't made it to that point.

In that, they address the pre-K through third-grade more than they do the upper-level.

T3 aligned with T7 by stating:

It has been at least seven years since I have had professional development in teaching students how to read. I guess people think since we teach third-grade through fifth-grade we do not need extensive training in reading, but actually we do.

T5 stated, “I have had professional development on reading comprehension, but not phonemic awareness or phonics.” T6 stated, “Even though I spend a lot of time perfecting my craft, I still need help with teaching reading to struggling students. Therefore, professional development is needed.” The participants who teach third grade reported having recent training in reading. Those participants stated that they have had LETRS training, which consisted of teaching the five components of reading. T7 stated:

We have all these opportunities and we have the meetings. We have all this collaboration, and we have all the opportunities, and the planning, and the sessions. And again, I say that I think it's addressed more for the Pre-K through third-grade. And, by the time they get to fourth- and fifth-grade, it is not addressed as much. I think it's not; the emphasis is not put enough on fourth- and fifth-grade is the point I'm making. I mean all of the everything is in place, but I don't think it's targeted enough on our grade-level, fourth- and fifth-grade.

T4 stated:

I feel like the lower grade-levels (pre-K through 2) have a totally different alignment than the upper-grades. I would love for us to be aligned in order for it to be a smoother transition once they get to the upper grade levels of third- through fifth-grade.

Common grade-level collaboration and learning from other educators will be discussed in the following sections, as underlying themes of professional development.

Common grade-level collaboration. Although the data revealed professional development as a theme to help support the participants’ confidence to meet the needs of their struggling readers, all of the participants spoke of collaboration through common grade-level trainings and planning (in-school and with other teachers in the district). T2 stated, “I enjoy

grade-level trainings, because we get the opportunity to share with one another strategies that worked and did not work in our classroom.” In agreement, T7 stated:

Well, with my grade-level, it's easier for us to plan, because you know we have grade-level planning and we have had some cross-curriculum planning opportunities, but not as many, because their schedules are always busy, especially with all of the things that are going on with the district right now.

T4 stated:

In planning sessions, we do grade-level meetings, and cross-grade-level with all the other grades and the teachers sit down, and we talk about what are they are doing with their class that I'm not doing, and how can I use it to help me with these children.

T3 stated:

Now, with my fourth-grade teachers once a week we meet, and we collaborate at all times. Then, with fifth grade we meet with either math or science. We meet once a week also, and we do content knowledge. Matter of fact, on Monday's all of the ELA teachers meet for our common planning time for 2nd through fifth-grade.

T10 stated:

When they send us to training sessions, sometimes you'll get mixed teachers. But, for the most part, maybe fourth and fifth will be combined sometimes third, fourth, and fifth. But, you're not really going lower than that, because we are the testing grades, so a lot of times our stuff is bunched together. They have all fifth-grade teachers in the same area in the district get together, and we plan and we talk about what our kids are doing. We look at our pacing guides, and we've been able to build relationships each other. So, it's been phenomenal. And also, you know you get to hear them say well this is where my

kids are struggling; and, you're going well my kids are struggling there, too. OK, so what do we do to fix it. What are you doing in your classroom? Yes, that's been really helpful this year.

The results revealed that all the participants participate in grade-level professional training, while some of the participants participate in vertical training. According to T6, “Professional development is very valuable whether it is with grade-level teachers or other teachers from other schools. Professional training allows the participants to mastery their craft.”

Learning from other educators. The second subtheme of professional development is learning from other educators, which illustrates the participants’ experiences and opportunities where they learned from their literacy coach, interventionist, mentor, administrators, and through peer observations. All 10 participants stated they have a Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) literacy coach and interventionist in their buildings. T6 stated, “At their school, they are assigned a literacy coach from Mississippi Department of Education to help with instruction at their school. T2 confirmed, “We have a school literacy coach who helps us with reading in grades K through 3.” T1 stated, “We have a reading interventionist that pulls our students out of class to work on different reading skills.” T5 stated, “We have a literacy coach that comes to our school at least three times a week to work with us on intervention and strategies.” T7 stated:

The last two years we've had MDE Literacy coaches come in and offer services. You know for us and we have been included, so that has been added, but it's still not enough especially when you have fourth and fifth graders that are still struggling and they're getting ready to go to middle school. I think that's where the gap comes in when you have that gap of students that are still failing, and they still go on to middle school.

T4 stated, “I have received support from interventionist [*sic*] and my administrators. They make sure we have everything we need to teach our students. The administrators would make sure we have the opportunity to attend the latest professional development training.”

Support from Administrators. Eight of 10 participants felt that they have the support from their administrators to help teach struggling readers. T10 expressed, “The administrators in our school allow for peer observations whenever they are needed. Administrators help teachers by providing resources and offering trainings when needed.” T2 stated:

All of my administrators support our team. Actually, they support all of our teachers, and provide an excellent partnership, as it relates to assuring that we have the resources and materials needed to assure our scholars are meeting the expectations required.

T1 also stated:

My administrators are go to [*sic*] people. I will say that our assistant principal she has a lot more experience with teaching reading and teaching the lower grades than the principal. So, the assistant principal, she's a great go to person. She has a lot of resources, and she has a lot of knowledge to offer.

T4 stated:

My principal does not just give information to just lower grades. She shares things equally. Just because it is for lower grade teachers, some of those activities can work effectively for some of the students we have in the upper-grades.

T6 stated:

My principal gives us several updates on the different sessions we could attend. She shares resources, I know for sure, even if it's lower level. Because she knows all of the

kids aren't on grade level. So, she's really good about giving resources and sharing things that come through the library and ordering materials.

T8 stated:

The administrator that we have is very supportive and I think what we're really the plus for her is she was an elementary teacher. The lower grades and she knows the skills she knows curriculum. So, whenever we need support she's able. She can diagnose what the child needs, and she's able to help us with that, which that's a plus for our school.

In contrast, T3 and T7 stated felt like their administrators were unable to assist them, because their areas of need were outside of their area of expertise, which leaves them to rely on their peers for assistance.

Peer observations. Based on the results of the data, five of 10 participants have participated in peer observations, at some point in their career. However, some teachers like T7 and T6, stated that they have not had any opportunities to do peer observations. T6 stated, “We don't have any, I guess because the daily schedule really doesn't permit time to do them.” T7 stated,

We've really not had the opportunity to do peer observations, and just to be honest, because of the fact that we have such a feat to achieve, I guess. So, every now and again I may informally go and maybe sit in other's classes during my planning period to just go and observe, but nothing that is structured or mandated.

T10 stated, “I have been offered peer observation opportunities, and if I were to ask they would be given to me. But, I feel responsible for being with my class, as much as possible, so I have not done any”. T4 stated, “I haven't had the opportunity to do none this year, but I feel like

it's something that will actually help, because we don't get a lot of those kind. Likewise, T2 stated,

This school year, I have done none. But, if I request one that I want to work with someone, or so and so, or this person, if I need help, I can always go. I just have to let them know ahead of time to get someone to cover my class.

T3, T5, T1, T9, and T8 all stated that they have had opportunities to conduct peer observations, but T9 stated, “when you first start teaching you have more opportunities, and when you class is successful you don’t have many opportunities, but it is always good to see another class.” T1 stated,

We have had opportunities to visit other schools, and visit other classrooms within our building. For example, we're working on Four square writing, and we were able to go to classrooms where the teachers are proficient at modeling that. So, we do make observations to help us learn from our colleagues.

T8 stated:

I’ve been teaching for so long that I've had opportunities to do peer observations over the years. I have had opportunities to mentor, and do peer observations, but nowadays I find myself being the one the one that's been observed.

Teacher mentor. The data also revealed that five of 10 participants have had teacher mentors, while others did not mention a mentor. T1 stated, “You get a teacher mentor if you're like a first-year teacher. So, at year fifteen, that's out the door.” T8 stated, “We have a mentoring program. When, I taught years ago, I had a mentor too. I try to mentor new teachers coming into our school and with the district.” T7 expressed, “I learned a lot from my mentor. I

wish I still had one.” T6 stated, “My mentor is very supportive she always comes in and observes. If anything, if she sees an issue I can work on, she provides feedback. T1 stated:

My mentor allowed me the opportunity to reflect on my practice. My mentor took time and found me strategies that I could use in my classroom. In addition, she modeled lessons for me from time to time. Once the students learned the skill. She would always say, look his or her light bulb just came on.

In contrast, T10 stated:

When I started teaching fourth-grade I saw my mentor maybe three or four times and mostly she just gave me like happy papers that said have a great day. Then, I left the district. When I returned to the district, I saw my mentor at the first training session before school started she stood up I saw who she was, and I never saw her again.

Chapter 4 Summary

The interviews conducted with the participants provided real-time insight of their lived experiences. This study sought to answer two research questions, which focused on third-grade through fifth-grade teachers’ lived experiences about their confidence, and how their experiences have influenced their confidence and self-efficacy in teaching struggling readers, with the use of Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy (1977) as the conceptual framework. Bandura’s self-efficacy theory contend that self-efficacy is derived through four sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and arousal mastery experiences, which are used in the next chapter to synthesize the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers’ experiences into themes and a statement of essence. The results of this study seem timely and contributory to address the gap in educational research related to the identified phenomenon.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Low reading proficiency levels in the nation, and specifically, Mississippi, are a result of not closing the skill-deficiency gap in struggling readers (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Once struggling readers fall behind, reading problems will continue into adulthood unless essential literacy strategies are implemented to meet the needs of the students to close the gaps in deficit areas (Moreau, 2014). Teachers are the primary driving force in the classroom and are responsible for educating their students and meeting the needs of their struggling readers, regardless of their confidence or efficacy. If third-grade through fifth-grade teachers were equipped with the knowledge base and support to teach and identify the deficits, they would be confident and able to help students' reading readiness development (Boogart, 2016; National Literacy Trust, 2015).

The purpose of this research was to open new doors in educational research, in regard to third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers. The results of this study may provide valuable insight in understanding the experiences necessary for third-grade through fifth-grade teachers to help meet the needs of their struggling readers. This chapter provides a summary and discussion of the results and their relationship to literature. Limitations of the study and implications for practice, policy and theory are also discussed, with recommendations for further research and conclusions following.

Summary of the Results

The purpose of this study was to acquire information from third-grade through fifth-grade teachers to ascertain their perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers and how their experiences have influenced their confidence in teaching struggling readers. Analysis of the study's results uncovered themes and patterns related to the third-grade through fifth-grade

teachers, in a Mississippi school, relative to the lived experiences when teaching struggling readers. Through the use of Moustakas's (1994) principles of phenomenological research, the data revealed three themes, which included six subthemes. According to the data, the themes and patterns were reflective of all four types of experiences as outlined by Bandura's (1977, 1997) origins of self-efficacy that are necessary in the development of effective teachers. These mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and arousal mastery experiences of the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers provide insight and opportunities for understanding their lived experiences that potentially influenced their confidence. These themes helped derive the statement of essences which provide the relationship between the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers.

Discussion of the Results

According to the participants' perceptions, their confidence was contingent on their experiences, background, and ability to meet the needs of their struggling readers. The findings of this study were permeated with the participants' desire to meet the needs of their third-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers; thus, yielding the themes of teaching the five components of reading, meeting the needs of struggling readers, and professional development.

Teaching the five components of reading. Teaching the five components of reading was the first identified theme (Allington, 2013). Although only seven of 10 participants felt confident in their ability to teach the five components of reading, all 10 participants aligned by stating that it is their professional responsibility to help meet the needs of their struggling readers. This finding corroborates the findings of Narkon and Black (2008) that teachers' beliefs of their ability and their belief about the task/result influenced their level of confidence and self-efficacy. Thus, teachers' confidence in their ability to impart knowledge in students yields self-

efficacy. The seven of 10 participants who felt confident in their ability to teach the five components of reading stated that their confidence was a result of their background as lower-elementary teachers, preparedness through professional development, and opportunities to collaborate with their peers. There were three of 10 participants who had little to no confidence were those who had never taught lower-elementary nor had proper training in teaching the five components of reading. According to Swackhamer, Koellner, Basile, and Kimbrough (2009), for a teacher to feel highly effective in his or her practice, content-specific, specialized training is required. Moreover, struggling readers should be taught by classroom teachers who have experience, confidence, competence, and effective practice (Allington, 2013).

Meeting the needs of struggling readers. Meeting the needs of struggling readers emerged as a theme, through the participants' discussion of their use of formative and summative assessment data to make instructional decisions. All 10 participants mentioned their use of STAR data as a primary means for them to group their students, based on their skill-deficit areas and/or reading level. One participant asserted, "small groups are effective only if teachers plan well. Therefore, teachers must either group their students by ability or skills." Teachers who strategically plan interventions incorporate direct and explicit instruction using strategies, such as modeling and scaffolding, while also giving the students an opportunity to learn, are more successful in closing reading gaps (Allington, 2013; Moats, 2009; National Literacy Trust, 2015; Scammacca, et al., 2015; Wanzek, et al., 2010; Wanzek, et al., 2013; Washburn, et al., 2011).

According to Moreau (2014), once struggling readers fall behind, reading problems will continue into adulthood unless essential literacy strategies are implemented to meet the needs of the students to close the gaps in deficit areas. In order to close the gaps in deficit areas, they must first be identified for proper interventions to implemented. To help close the reading gaps,

the participants also discussed their use of other resources to help identify specific areas of deficiency in the different components of reading. For example, two of 10 participants stated they used web-based programs for interventions. One of the participants mentioned the use of MobyMax, Stride, and IXL to meet the students' individual needs. MobyMax is an interactive learning program that uses adaptive, differentiated instruction to meet the needs of struggling learners in the areas of language arts, math and science, in grades K–8 (MobyMax, 2018). Stride is an adaptive, individualized game-based learning curriculum that provides reading and math interventions and enrichment to student learners in grades pre-K–12 (Stride Academy, 2018). IXL is an “immersive, adaptive” learning experience that provides content aligned to the standards to meet students where they are in language arts and math in grades K–12 (IXL, 2018). To meet struggling readers in the area of fluency, various participants mentioned the use of DIEBELS, DRA, and SRA kits. DIEBELS is an oral reading fluency standardized assessment, used to measure fluency and text-reading accuracy (DIEBELS, 2018). Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is an assessment that measures accuracy, fluency and comprehension to determine a student's reading level (DRA, 2018). Science Research Associates (SRA) Laboratory kits provide students with leveled reading materials to help increase their reading ability and accountability for learning (SRA, 2012). Various participants also mentioned the use of the LETRs, Phonics Boost, Phonics Blitz, Florida Center for Reading Research, and Core Reading as additional resources they use to help meet the needs of their third-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers. Language Essentials for Teaching Reading and Spelling (LETRS) is a program that combines interactive activities and user-friendly language to teach foundational reading skills (Moats & Sedita, 2004). Phonics Boost (grades 3-12) and Phonics Blitz (grades 4–12) are interventions for students who struggle with foundational reading skills (Blitz, 2015).

Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) is a website that has a plethora of instructional resources and activities to support foundational skills and the five components of reading (FCRR, 2018). Consortium on Reaching Excellence in Education's CORE Reading Sourcebook provides research-based instructional practices to help build foundational literacy skills and comprehension (CORE, 2018).

Professional development. All 10 participants believed that professional development in the five components of reading is imperative for third-grade through fifth-grade teachers, in order for them to meet the needs of their struggling readers effectively. This yielded professional development as the third theme. In addition, all 10 participants' responses supported their perceptions that their inclusion in trainings and having the ability to plan with teachers in grades K–2 would serve as an advantage to help them meet the needs of their struggling readers. Data also revealed that although all 10 of the participants have support from a literacy coach and interventionist in their respective buildings, they perceived that having the opportunity to conduct peer observations and have a teacher mentor would be a great benefit to help them meet the needs of their struggling readers.

According to the findings of this study, the participants' responses revealed a relationship between their confidence and efficacy. Specific questions were asked during the interview process, which were associated with the participants' confidence to meet the needs of their struggling readers, their perceptions of their ability to teach the five components of reading, how they meet their students' needs, and what supports they need to help build their confidence and increase their efficacy. The patterns of the participants' responses revealed that although only seven of 10 participants were confident that they could meet the needs of their students, they all had the desire to meet the needs of their students. This was confirmed by the consensus of

professional development, vicarious experiences, and mastery experiences being identified as what the 10 participants believed they needed to help support their confidence and increase their efficacy. Moreover, this revealed that the participants have a high ability in trying to meet the needs of their students.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Conceptual Framework

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1977) explained that self-efficacy is derived through four sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and arousal mastery experiences. According to Bandura (1977, 1993), through these experiences, teachers will have an opportunity to increase their knowledge and skill-set in applying effective practices. To yield the potential goal of self-efficacy, teachers must have self-confidence. However, before confidence can be achieved, the teachers must have certain experiences to help build their confidence. According to the findings of this current study of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perception of their confidence to teach struggling readers, the teachers who expressed high confidence in meeting the needs of their struggling readers were those who had experiences reflective of Bandura's four sources of efficacy. However, the teachers who expressed low confidence had very limited to no experiences necessary to yield self-efficacy. Thus, proving Bandura's (1977, 1997) theory of self-efficacy. This study extends the findings of previous studies (Boogart, 2016; Cirino, et al., 2013; Damon, 2016; Narkon and Black, 2008; Norton, 2013; Kucan & Palinscar, 2010; National Literacy Trust, 2015; Robinson, 2017; Schmidt, 2017; & Udealor, 2016) that the combination of the previously mentioned experiences is required to increase teachers' confidence and self-efficacy.

Mastery experiences were explicitly reflected in the responses of two of 10 participants. Through mastery experiences, teachers realize and own their potential, capacity, and seek self-

fulfillment. These participants were very confident in their ability to meet the needs of their struggling readers, because of their background, experiences, and training. These participants exuded arousal mastery experiences. When teachers with high efficacy have arousal mastery experiences, they show what they know through their physical emotions with high confidence (Bandura, 1997). These participants became excited, maintained eye contact, smiled, and used various hand gestures, as they spoke about their experiences. When teachers with high efficacy have arousal mastery experiences, they show what they know through their physical emotions with high confidence; however, those with low efficacy physically show what they do not know by succumbing to their doubt of capability (Bandura, 1997). These participants had over 10 years' experience as lower elementary teachers, who attributed their ability to meet the needs of their struggling readers through their previous training and professional development. These participants also reflected on their vicarious experiences, in which they had opportunities to do peer observations or have a teacher mentor in their early years of teaching. These participants noted that they are now the teachers who are either being observed during peer observations or acting mentors to new teachers in their respective buildings. T8 stated,

I've been teaching for so long that I've had opportunities to do peer observations over the years. I have had opportunities to mentor, and do peer observations, but nowadays I find myself being the one the one that's been observed.

These participants exhibited verbal persuasion through their desire to engage in on-going grade-level and district-level meetings to collaborate with their peers and share ideas. The sharing of knowledge and expertise allows these teachers to take ownership of their acquisition of knowledge, and affords the opportunity for them to reflect on their practice (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011b). They also spoke of how they used data to drive their instruction and the use of

various resources to meet the needs of their struggling readers. Although these participants were very confident in their ability, they still expressed the need for professional development in grades 3–5 to continue to meet the needs of their struggling readers.

The other five of 10 participants who felt confident in their ability to meet the needs of their struggling readers, implicitly spoke of mastery experiences through detailing how they meet the needs of their struggling readers. They, too, used data to drive their instruction and attribute what they know to previous training and experiences in working with struggling readers, although their background may not have been in lower elementary. For example, T6 expressed,

I use STAR screeners to identify my struggling readers. Students are to rotate to me daily to gain intense instruction in a smaller setting. I pull resources from a lower-level that addresses the same standards. I use technology-based programs such as MobyMax, Stride, and IXL in order to make learning the skills more fun and engaging. I am meeting the needs of each student by identifying the problem/concern and implementing strategies in order for the scholar to grow. The resources I used truly have increased my students' learning.

These participants' experiences were reflective verbal persuasion and vicarious experiences. Their participation in peer observations, professional learning communities, professional-development sessions, grade-level team meetings, and district-level meetings, afforded them to feel as though they were valued, accepted, and included in opportunities for their growth and change (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2009). This allowed the participants to feel like an integral part and contributor to the learning community (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011a). In these instances, the participants were able to overcome their challenges, within a positive and supportive atmosphere, which increased their confidence in their ability to perform the task of

teaching struggling readers. According to Bandura (1977), more confidence translates into improvement in performance and practice.

There were three of 10 participants who expressed little to no confidence in meeting the needs of their struggling readers. These participants had limited to no previous experience or training in teaching the foundational reading skills that are taught in lower elementary. These teachers expressed experiences of verbal persuasion through common grade-level and district-level collaboration; however, they did not speak of mastery experiences or display arousal mastery experiences. These teachers were very honest and simply did not know. For example, T2 stated, “I’m not very confident in teaching 3rd through 5th-grade students to be successful readers because I’ve never taught kindergarten or first grade. So, I’m really not familiar with how you teach them phonics and how you teach them to read.” It was unexpected to find out that these teachers still felt it was their professional responsibility to meet the needs of their struggling readers, and they had a desire to know how to meet them.

This unexpected finding further corroborated Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy that anyone, regardless of their background, past experiences, or current situation are able to increase their self-efficacy, only if they have the desire (Bandura, 1997). To confirm this assertion, results from the study conducted by Moreau (2014) found that some of the middle school teachers felt the need to find ways around meeting the needs of their struggling readers, instead of finding ways to help them. This was due to expressed time constraints and their charge to teach the content, because they felt foundations skills should have been taught in earlier grades (Moreau, 2014). One teachers stated, “[It’s] not the classroom teacher’s [responsibility], as their time must be spent dealing with what will benefit the majority. Special needs require special time with a specialist” (Moreau, 2014, p. 11). In this stated reality, the teacher felt it was the

interventionist's responsibility to help meet the needs of the struggling readers. However, findings of this researchers current study of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teacher struggling readers corroborated the findings of the Moreau (2014) study, because "of the teachers who admitted they felt a lack of skills in the area, all said they would be very interested in further professional development" (p. 12).

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

For the purpose of this study, a struggling reader was considered to be a student who did not have a defined learning disability, but lacked foundational reading skills in one or more areas of the essential components of literacy, and reads at least two grades below grade level (Kucan & Palinscar, 2010; Torgesen et al., 2007). Third through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers was the focus of this study. Struggling readers lack reading skills that are essential to the development of fluency and comprehension (Allington, 2013). When third through fifth-grade students struggle in reading, teachers must be able to identify the students' deficit areas and use effective strategies to meet their needs. Boogart (2016) found that the upper-elementary teachers were aware there was an identifiable gap in the foundational skills of their students. The teachers' perceptions of their own knowledge and ability to help close the reading foundational skills gap showed they felt unprepared and not confident about how to help their students (Boogart, 2016). This supports the current study's findings that the teacher confidence level in teaching the five components of reading and perceived professional responsibility influences how the teachers were able to meet the needs of their struggling readers. To meet the needs of struggling readers, they should be taught by classroom teachers who have experience, confidence, competence, and effective practice

(Allington, 2013). Teachers' confidence is contingent on their education, training, and professional development (National Literacy Trust, 2015; Robinson, 2017).

In a study conducted by Kucan and Palinscar (2010), the phenomenon known as the fourth-grade slump in which fourth-grade students struggle with decoding words, complex vocabulary, and constructing meaning through synthesizing information was ascertained. In this researcher's study, the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers felt that teaching the five components of reading was necessary for struggling readers because they need to be able to read and comprehend. However, they felt that teaching the five components of reading was not an easy task. Cirino et al., (2013) found that students who struggle with reading prior to fourth-grade continue to struggle in upper elementary and beyond. They also found that some students' initial onset of reading difficulties occurs in upper-elementary grades and beyond. The shift from learning to read in grades K through 2 to reading to learn in grades 3 through 5 is a contributor to the slump (Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, Elleman, & Gilbert, 2008; Kucan & Palinscar, 2010; Cirino et al., 2013). In addition, there is a strong prediction that students who struggle with reading in the fourth-grade are potential high-school dropouts (Cirino, et al., 2013; Fiester, 2010; Jalongo, 2007). Findings in the current study of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' confidence to teach struggling readers support Cirino et al.'s (2013) study. For example, in Cirino, et. al.'s (2013) study, it was revealed that the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers expected their students to enter their classes able to read on their respective grade-level. Likewise, in this researcher study, two participants voiced how they expect students to come to their particular grade levels able to read on grade level. The participants' responses reflected that they did not expect to have to teach students foundational skills to learn how to read in third

through fifth-grade because teaching phonemic awareness and phonics are early elementary foundational skills (grades K–2), that are not in the third-grade through fifth-grade curriculum.

In the study conducted by Washburn et al. (2011) pre-service teachers' preparedness to teach struggling readers was examined. The findings in this study indicated that pre-service teachers lacked the competence in basic concepts necessary to instruct students who have deficits in reading. The findings indicated those teachers' perceptions of their skill-set and instructional ability were incompatible (Washburn et al., 2011). Washburn et al. (2011) noted that the incompatibility of the teachers' perceived skill-set and actual skill-set may possibly result in future problems in providing effective instruction for struggling readers. This researcher's study extended the Washburn et al. (2011) study by providing insight on in-service, third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' confidence to teach struggling readers, which is a direct reflection of their preparedness. In the current study, seven of 10 participants felt confident in their preparedness to meet the needs of their struggling readers; however, all 10 participants felt they needed professional development in foundational areas to meet the deficits of their struggling readers. According to the participants, they expected their third-grade through fifth-grade students to know how to read and have mastered their foundational skills prior to coming to their respective grade levels. The participants also stated that they were expected to teach the students the curriculum based on the Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards, which do not include instruction in foundational skills above second grade.

Robinson (2017) conducted an exploratory case study that investigated grades K through 5 teachers' perceptions of their confidence level and their preparedness to implement the Common Core State Standards in Alabama. Findings from Robinson's (2017) study indicated that teachers did not feel confident in their ability to implement the Common Core State

Standards effectively, due to a lack of training and resources, although they wanted to obtain an understanding of the standards (Robinson, 2017). This also corroborates the finding of the current study of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers that although some of the participants did not feel confident in their ability to meet the needs of their struggling readers, as a result of limited training, observation, and collaborative opportunities, they still wanted to acquire an understanding of the foundational skills to help their students. Thus, leading one to believe it is the teachers' belief that if they had adequate training, opportunities to conduct peer observations, and have collaborative opportunities, they would have the confidence and efficacy to meet the needs of their third-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers, which is also relates to the Norton (2013) study. In the Norton (2013) phenomenological study of teachers' self-efficacy beliefs revealed that in order for teachers to sustain self-efficacy, they must be confident in their content area (Norton, 2013). The study also noted that teachers' feelings about their content area and teaching the specific content-area affected their confidence, which also influenced their self-efficacy (Norton, 2013). According to Swackhamer, Koellner, Basile, and Kimbrough (2009), for a teacher to feel highly effective in his or her practice, content-specific, specialized training is required.

A phenomenological study, conducted by Damon (2016), examined the relationship between professional development and six elementary teachers' self-efficacy. The relationship between the teachers' self-efficacy and their professional development was identified as distinct. The results showed that the engagement of professional development, based on the teachers' needs, increased their confidence, knowledge, and professional growth, which established autonomy and purpose for their practice (Damon, 2016). In this researcher's study of third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers, teachers

who engage in professional development in the five components of reading felt more confident in their preparedness to meet the needs of their struggling readers. A mixed-methods participatory action-research study conducted, by Schmidt (2017), examined the effects of professional development on grades K through 2 teachers' self-efficacy and its influence on their students' achievement in reading. The teachers' confidence, self-efficacy, and their students' reading achievement increased statistically significantly, as a result of the professional development specifically designed to the teachers' needs (Schmidt, 2017). Likewise, the teachers in this researcher's current study who previously taught K through 2nd-grade were those who felt confident in their ability to teach the foundational skills (phonemic awareness and phonics) to meet the needs of their struggling readers. A study conducted by Nieman (2016) found that grades K through 12 teachers' efficacy and confidence to implement the Common Core State Standards in literacy instruction can increase if professional development is intentionally designed to meet the content-area focus, with collaboration, coherence, active learning, and adequate time for development and implementation. This researcher's current study validates the finding of the previous studies that professional development, mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and arousal mastery experiences are a necessity for third-grade through fifth-grade teachers to meet the needs of their struggling readers. For third-grade through fifth-grade teachers to have the efficacy to meet the needs of their struggling readers, they must have support to help build their confidence. Professional development, peer observations, and collaborative opportunities must be extended to those teachers to help build their skill-set and instructional best practices for meeting the needs of third-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers.

A case study, conducted by Udealor (2016), acquired three kindergarten and three 1st-grade teachers' perceptions of how their reading instruction met the literacy needs of their students through their professional development opportunities. The findings of this researcher's current study were similar to those of Neiman's (2016) study, in which the teachers felt they needed a shared practice and learning culture that was reliable, appropriate, and directly related to their specific needs to build their confidence and instructional practice (Udealor, 2016). This showed that establishing a sense of belongingness through collaboration (professional development, common planning, peer observations) is essential in meeting the needs of teachers to build their confidence, which essentially yields higher teacher efficacy (Velthuis, Fisser, & Pieters, 2014).

Limitations

This study was limited to a sample of 10 third-grade through fifth-grade classroom reading teachers in a single school district. The limited number of participants hindered the findings from being generalized to a larger population, which reflects the nature of qualitative research. However, the findings may be transferrable into practice, because they provide insight on third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers, thus providing a means to help support those teachers in meeting the needs of their third-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers. Researcher subjectivity was identified as a possible limitation of the phenomenological design of this study because it could have resulted in reliability and validity issues. According to Creswell (2014), reliability and validity issues may be caused by the researcher's personal feelings, presuppositions, experiences, and beliefs because they may influence the researcher's judgment about the truth and reality of the participants' responses. Member checking was used to ensure participants' lived experiences

were accurately presented, to help prevent researcher bias. This was accomplished by providing each participant with his or her transcribed interview. The participants were asked to review their transcripts to ensure their responses were documented accurately. Teachers' reluctance to be completely honest and detailing how they feel about their confidence and/or needs to support their confidence to teach struggling readers was also identified as a possible limitation because there was no way for the researcher to justify the validity of the participants' responses.

Although measures were employed to ensure and maintain the teachers' confidentiality, there was not a guarantee that the teachers would not talk to each other or share their responses outside the study, which could have posed an additional limitation to the research.

Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Although the phenomenological method hinders the generalizability of the findings, they may be transferred into practice. Based on the results of the study, the participants' perceptions of their confidence were contingent on their experiences, background, and ability to meet the needs of their third-grade through fifth-grade struggling readers. All 10 participants revealed the need for professional development, especially in the foundational areas of reading, which include phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. This revelation implied that the participants believed that if they had proper training in the areas necessary to meet the needs of their struggling readers, they would be more confident in their ability to teach them, which may improve self-efficacy. The information gained from the study revealed that in order for third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' self-efficacy to increase, they must first have confidence in their ability to meet the needs of their struggling readers.

To extend this implication for practice, it is imperative for state- and district-level administrators to examine their third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their

skill-set and efficacy in meeting the needs of their struggling readers. This information is vital, because literacy is on the forefront of education in Mississippi, and because literacy extends across the curriculum. Therefore, it is imperative to provide third-grade through fifth-grade classroom teachers with mastery experiences, arousal mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion, in order to be able to effectively implement foundational literacy instruction to meet the needs of struggling readers. Moreover, measures must be in place on the state- and district-levels to ensure the inclusion of these grades 3–5 teachers in professional development opportunities offered to grades K–2 teachers. The ESSA of 2015 asserts that all students will be ready for college and career, but in order for this to grow into fruition in Mississippi, the 3–5 teachers must be afforded the opportunities, time, and support to enhance their skill-set in foundational reading skills, so that they will not be contributors to the effects of the fourth-grade reading slump.

The Literacy-Based Promotion Act (LBPA) was implemented in Mississippi during the 2014–2015 school year to prohibit social promotion and lend favor toward the implementation of research-based strategies to help improve the reading skills of K through third-grade-students. The LBPA requires third-grade students to score above the lowest achievement level on the established state-wide assessment, to be promoted to fourth grade, which s favor to prevention of the fourth-grade reading slump. However, third-grade through fifth-grade teachers and beyond are expected to meet the needs of all readers, including struggling readers. Therefore, support in the preparedness of these teachers is necessary. Also, understanding the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers’ perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers may lend a platform to extend literacy efforts, to help provide the necessary support to build their confidence and efficacy to teach upper-elementary struggling readers and beyond.

According to Tracey & Morrow (2012) and Bandura (1997), highly efficacious people have high confidence, are intrinsically motivated to persist at tasks, take risks, and have greater endurance. However, those with low efficacy easily succumb to challenges, have lower confidence, rely on extrinsic motivation, and meet basic expectations. Therefore, understanding the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers illuminates the importance of the mastery experiences, arousal mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, and vicarious experiences necessary to help support teacher efficacy, as outlined by Bandura (1977). This researcher's current study further confirmed Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, because the third-grade through fifth-grade teachers expressed the necessity for them to have experiences that afford them a sense of adequacy; opportunities to build their skill-set, through the use of effective strategies and techniques; and motivation, through a positive atmosphere. Moreover, the methodological approach and literature review lend validity to the findings of this study because they extend the findings of previous studies (Boogart, 2016; Cirino, et al., 2013; Damon, 2016; Narkon & Black, 2008; Norton, 2013; Kucan & Palinscar, 2010; National Literacy Trust, 2015; Robinson, 2017; Schmidt, 2017; Udealor, 2016; & Velthuis, Fisser, & Pieters, 2014). Therefore, the results of this study may contribute valuable information to the field of education, in an effort to provide adequate professional development to third-grade through fifth-grade teachers to meet the needs of their struggling readers.

Recommendations for Further Research

Third through fifth-grade teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers was explored in this study, through a phenomenological lens. However, a mixed-methods approach could have provided additional information to support the findings of this

study. This could have been accomplished by collecting the STAR assessment data from the participants' struggling readers, since all 10 participants discussed their use of the STAR assessment data to make instructional decisions and group their students based on ability or skill-deficit areas to meet their needs. Doing so would have provided more insight into the effectiveness of how the participants meet the needs of their struggling readers. Another recommendation to extend this study would be to actually assess the teachers' content knowledge in each of the five components of reading to identify their areas of expertise, strength, and weakness, using the Teacher Knowledge of Early Literacy Skills (TKELS) survey (Folsom, et al., 2017). This could be used to validate their perceived confidence and self-efficacy. In this researcher's experience, most teachers are not confident teaching what they do not know, which may be a contributor to the fourth-grade slump (Compton, Fuchs, Fuchs, Elleman, & Gilbert, 2008; Kucan & Palinscar, 2010; Cirino et al., 2013). Extending this study to middle and high school ELA classroom teachers would also contribute to educational research because there is still limited research on upper-elementary, middle, and high school teachers' perceptions of their confidence to teach and meet the needs of their struggling readers, their ability to meet their needs, and if there is even enough time in the day to adequately plan and implement interventions, because teachers in these grade levels are usually content-area teachers, and reading instruction and remediation usually occur with reading specialists (Margolis & McCabe, 2006; Ness, 2016; Rennie, 2016; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

Conclusion

Self-confidence is defined as the result of an individual's belief that he or she can perform a specific task, yielding self-efficacy (Moen and Allgood, 2009). Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as the confidence one has in his or her ability to perform a specific task,

problem-solve, and execute a plan. The purpose of this study was to acquire information from third-grade through fifth-grade teachers to ascertain their perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers, and how their experiences have influenced their confidence and self-efficacy in teaching struggling readers. This study provided a platform that allowed the participants' voices to be heard about their perceptions of their confidence to teach struggling readers.

According to Moen and Allgood (2009), teachers who have high self-confidence have high confidence and efficacy in the implementation of effective strategies to meet the needs of struggling readers, and can identify and set student-specific goals. The results of this study support the literature that revealed that teachers' confidence influences their self-efficacy as teachers of struggling readers. Although only seven of 10 participants felt confident in their ability to teach the five components of reading, they all felt that it is their professional responsibility to help meet the needs of their struggling readers. All 10 participants also agreed that they use data to drive their instruction, and they need more professional development to help them grow in their practice.

The results also supported Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1977, 1997), which stated that for self-efficacy to occur, one must have certain experiences: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and arousal mastery experiences. To yield the potential goal of self-efficacy, teachers must have self-confidence; however, before confidence can be achieved, teachers must have certain experiences to help build their confidence. The findings of this study may open doors for further research to ensure teachers of struggling readers above second grade are afforded experiences and professional development opportunities to help meet the needs of their struggling readers.

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Appendix A: Reading Foundational Standards

These standards are directed toward fostering students’ understanding and working knowledge of concepts of print, the alphabetic principle, and other basic conventions of the English writing system. These foundational skills are not an end in and of themselves; rather, they are necessary and important components of an effective, comprehensive reading program designed to develop proficient readers with the capacity to comprehend texts across a range of types and disciplines. Instruction should be differentiated: good readers will need much less practice with these concepts than struggling readers will. The point is to teach students what they need to learn and not what they already know—to discern when particular children or activities warrant more or less attention (Mississippi Department of Education, 2016, p. 30).

Grade 3

Reading Foundational Skills	
Print Concepts	
Not applicable in grade 3.	
Phonological Awareness	
Not applicable in grade 3.	
Phonics and Word Recognition	
RF.3.3	Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.
RF.3.3a	Identify and know the meaning of the most common prefixes and derivational suffixes.
RF.3.3b	Decode words with common Latin suffixes.
RF.3.3c	Decode multisyllable words.
RF.3.3d	Read grade-appropriate irregularly spelled words.
Fluency	
RF.3.4	Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
RF.3.4a	Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.
RF.3.4b	Read grade-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.
RF.3.4c	Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.

Grade 4

Reading Foundational Skills	
Print Concepts	
Not applicable in grade 4.	
Phonological Awareness	
Not applicable in grade 4.	
Phonics and Word Recognition	
RF.4.3	Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.
RF.4.3a	Use combined knowledge of all letter-sound correspondences, syllabication patterns, and morphology (e.g., roots and affixes) to read accurately unfamiliar multisyllabic words in context and out of context.
Fluency	
RF.4.4	Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
RF.4.4a	Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.
RF.4.4b	Read grade-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.
RF.4.4c	Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.

Grade 5

Reading Foundational Skills	
Print Concepts	
Not applicable in grade 5.	
Phonological Awareness	
Not applicable in grade 5.	
Phonics and Word Recognition	
RF.5.3	Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.
RF.5.3a	Use combined knowledge of all letter-sound correspondences, syllabication patterns, and morphology (e.g., roots and affixes) to read accurately unfamiliar multisyllabic words in context and out of context.
Fluency	
RF.5.4	Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
RF.5.4a	Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.
RF.5.4b	Read grade-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.
RF.5.4c	Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How confident do you feel in your ability to teach third-grade through fifth-grade students and get them to be successful readers?
2. Do you feel responsible to teach the struggling readers in your classroom? In what ways?
3. In what ways do you feel either confident or not confident in your preparedness to teach the struggling readers in your classroom? Why do you feel this way?
4. How do you identify specific areas of deficiency in the struggling readers in your classroom?
5. Based on your experience, do you feel confident in identifying specific areas of deficiency in struggling readers? Why?
6. Describe your experience with teaching elementary (Grades 3 through 5) struggling readers.
What resources and materials do you use?
How is content delivered?
How are students grouped when you work with them?
How do you meet the students' needs?
7. Based on your experience and preparedness, do you feel confident teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension to meet the needs of the struggling readers in your classroom? In what areas do you feel most confident teaching? Why? In what areas do you feel least confident teaching? Why?
8. What do you perceive as essential supportive needs to help you build your confidence to teach and meet the needs of your third-grade through fifth-grade students?
9. In your professional environment, what opportunities have you had, as a third-, fourth-, or fifth-grade elementary, classroom teacher, to collaborate with other ELA teachers in knowledge building and planning sessions? With lower-grade ELA teachers?

10. Do you feel included in all of the knowledge building opportunities offered to lower-grade elementary teachers? Why?

11. In your experience as a third-, fourth-, or fifth-grade elementary, classroom teacher, what opportunities have you had to increase your knowledge in meeting the needs of struggling readers?

What support services are offered?

Have you had a teacher mentor or literacy coach?

What opportunities have you had to do peer observations?

How do administrators help teachers?

Appendix C: Dissertation IRB Consent Form

Concordia University – Portland Institutional Review Board
Approved: _____ ; will Expire: _____

CONSENT FORM

Research Study Title: A Phenomenological Study of 3rd through 5th-Grade Teachers' Perceptions of Their Confidence to Teach Struggling Readers

Principal Investigator: Kristin N. Brown

Research Institution: Concordia University – Portland

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Barbara Weschke

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this interview is to investigate upper-grade elementary teachers' (3rd – 5th grade) perceptions of their confidence-level to instruct struggling readers; and, to identify the area of need most pertinent to support in supporting their confidence to teach struggling readers. We expect approximately 150 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on May 1, 2017 and end enrollment on May 31, 2017. To be in the study, you will participate in a face-to-face, individual, 10 question interview. This should take less than 60 minutes of your time.

Risks:

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside the safe bag in my closet. When we or any of our investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will refer to your data with a code that only the principal investigator knows links to you. This way, your identifiable information will not be stored with the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after we conclude this study.

Benefits:

Information you provide will help by allowing the researcher to gain an understanding of your perceptions of your confidence to teach struggling readers. You could benefit this by getting support in your areas of need to make you more effective in your practice.

Confidentiality:

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Kristin N. Brown at email [Researcher email redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____	_____
Participant Name	Date
_____	_____
Participant Signature	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Name	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Signature	Date



Investigator: Kristin N. Brown; email: [Researcher email redacted]
c/o: Professor Dr. Barbara Weschke;
Concordia University – Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon 97221

Appendix D: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University- Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

Kristin N. Brown

Digital Signature

Kristin N. Brown

Name (Typed)

09/06/18

Date