Intrinsic and Extrinsic Contextual Factors Influencing Advocacy in Literacy Leaders:
Perspectives of District Reading Supervisors

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my parents, Douglas and Elizabeth Pratt, for instilling the value of perseverance, the ability to keep everything in perspective, and the importance of family.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Background for Inquiry</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of Problem</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Problem</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Problem</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarification of Terms</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Literature Review</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusions and Exclusions of Search</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review Design</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy Grounded in Democracy</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy Grounded in Inclusive Leadership</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy Grounded in Literacy Leaders</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy Grounded in Acts and Dispositions of Reading Supervisors</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Methodology</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants and Setting</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meredith</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monique</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Sources</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Results</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Experiences</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Situated Advocacy in Literacy Leaders</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Substantive Theory of Advocacy in Literacy Leaders</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Public school literacy leaders have complex roles and responsibilities associated with their positions, including being literacy advocates. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the factors that contributed to district reading supervisors’ perceptions of advocacy. Participants included five district reading supervisors in the state of Virginia. Using grounded theory design, a series of three rounds of interviews with each participant yielded data related to intrinsic and extrinsic contextual factors that influenced how district reading supervisors and school-based reading professionals worked to meet literacy needs in K-12 settings. Results indicated that past experiences informed both roles and dispositions. Supervisors and reading professionals used their roles to support others in meeting students’ needs. Professional and personal dispositions influenced the
ways in which literacy leaders negotiated relationships with literacy stakeholders, particularly principals. These extrinsic and intrinsic factors subsequently influenced the ways in which district reading supervisors perceived and enacted advocacy. Discussion includes a substantive theory of advocacy in literacy leaders, questions warranting further study, and implications for teacher educators, school-based administrators and educational policymakers.
1. Introduction

Personal Background for Inquiry

“It is by acts and not by ideas that people live.” Anatole France

I chose to begin this dissertation with the quote by France because it fully represents the unlikely path which led me to an interest in advocacy as explored in this study. During an exceptionally tight fiscal year, the district in which I worked was undergoing a significant budget crisis. There were obvious differences of opinion between the two political bodies controlling and managing the schools’ purse strings. For the third year in a row, teachers faced another freeze on pay, yet increased costs for health insurance. On the eve of a crucial budget meeting, members of the district’s education association organized an after-school demonstration at the county seat publicly denouncing the lack of concern for the welfare of teachers and students as evidenced through the under-funding of the schools. Unfortunately for me, the demonstration coincided with an end-of-year poolside staff party at our principal’s home, but there was no real decision to make as to how I would spend the afternoon. I was committed to standing up for what I believed was the right thing to do for the all teachers. Therefore, as I marched in the hot sun and soaking rain with my home-made cardboard sign, I noticed that I was one of two teachers from my school that had a
staff of over 90 people. Where was everyone? Didn’t they care? Why weren’t they there? After mulling these questions over in my mind, I decided I was asking the wrong questions. Instead of asking why others weren’t there, I wanted to know why people were there. What was it that made us take a stand, publicly participate and want our voices heard? From where did those desires and beliefs come? Could they apply to literacy in any way?

Thus, France’s quote captures not only the way I approached the above events and the design of this study, but also encapsulates what I hope the reader will conclude by the end of the study: that acting is living. I do not wish each reader to believe as I do, rather my intention is that what lies ahead is a logical, thoughtful and idea-provoking trail for others to consider, modify, follow and expand upon in a quest for deeper understanding of how literacy leaders carry out their work in service to others.

Introduction

Traditional views of advocacy are rooted in the study of law as exemplified by the definition of an advocate as one who argues for a cause or pleads on another’s behalf (Lewis, Jongsma & Berger, 2005). The use of the term in this manner can generically apply to anyone who supports, assists, aids, and defends people or causes. More recently, advocacy specific to education evolved, and is typically associated with actions applied to political environments where opinions are presented to local, state and national lawmakers. The end result being policymakers’ decisions on particular education issues influenced by those engaged in advocacy efforts; however, the term
advocate is increasingly applied to education professionals without an outward political orientation.

Whitaker (2007) defines an education advocate as someone with knowledge of education who uses that knowledge to influence people, policies or both. Characteristics of education advocates include being proactive, staying current with education policies, focusing on students’ learning, speaking up to promote the good of the whole, motivating others and taking risks (Whitaker, 2007). Those who demonstrate this non-traditional view of advocacy do not necessarily impact the political landscape outside of classrooms, although they may. More often this form of advocacy involves school leaders affecting change within individual schools and districts.

Commitment to and demonstration of advocacy is often an expected professional disposition for education leaders such as superintendents, administrators and instructional supervisors. However, there is little common understanding as to how education leaders perceive advocacy, how it’s enacted in the workplace, or what factors influence leaders’ perceptions surrounding advocacy. The focus of this study is to explore contextual factors including malleable professional and personal dispositions that contribute to their district reading supervisors’ perceptions of advocacy.

Background of Problem

Within the past decade, it has become increasingly important for American public schools to develop comprehensive literacy programs at both the elementary and
secondary levels. Much of this push is in direct response to federal legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and numerous state reading initiatives (Commission on NCLB, 2007; Song & Young, 2008). Public schools are held accountable for the literacy growth of all students. One indicator of this is the provision in NCLB for all schools to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP is a measurement defined under NCLB which allows the United States Department of Education to gauge the progress of students, both overall and in various subgroups identified through socio-economic, demographic and special education services data. Each year, schools must meet increasingly higher minimum levels of state-defined proficiencies on reading assessments as benchmarks to achieving the national goal of 100% of students reaching these minimum levels by 2014 (Commission on NCLB, 2007).

NCLB legislation has forced states to institute mandatory reading assessments at both elementary and secondary levels (Song & Young, 2008). In the Commonwealth of Virginia where my study was conducted, for example, students in grades 3-8, as well as 11, take standardized tests in English which mainly consist of a series of short fiction and non-fiction passages, followed by multiple-choice reading comprehension questions. The tests are based on minimum competency expectations for all Virginia students called Standards of Learning or SOL (Virginia DOE, 2008). Individual schools are expected to direct all of their instructional time and professional development toward increasing the pass rates of all students in an effort to make AYP. Meeting these SOL benchmarks ensures continued state and federal funding, and minimal intrusion into schools by state accountability teams.
Additionally, there are economic implications for ensuring that all students meet minimum reading standards. Illiteracy in America affects the entire economy at a rate of approximately $244 billion annually (National Governors Association, 2006). When students leave high school with less than basic reading and writing skills, it is estimated that businesses and universities spend approximately $16 billion per year compensating for lost productivity and funding remediation efforts (National Governors Association, 2005). On the opposite end of the spectrum, quality schools can mean prosperity for localities that meet AYP requirements as local school districts rely on federal funding to supplement their own state and local funding (National School Boards Association, 2008). As a result, state policymakers feel more urgency for school districts to demonstrate progress in reading, making it incumbent upon school districts to create highly effective literacy programs that meet the needs of all students.

In addition to state and federal accountability, another impetus behind the effective literacy program push is the need for American students to compete on a global level. International data from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) indicates that the literacy skills of fourth grade students in the United States are significantly below numerous other countries including the Russian Federation, Hong Kong SAR and Singapore (PIRLS, 2007). As smaller countries such as Luxembourg, Italy and Hungary outperform the United States on measures of reading, policy makers and stakeholders come to question the literacy efforts in public schools.
Because of the emphasis on accountability and growth at local, state, national and international levels, the need for effective literacy programs for all students regardless of ability cannot be overstated. Essential components of such programs include sustained development of quality reading curricula and instructional practices, as well as appropriate use of assessments (Bean, 2008). Undoubtedly, developing and sustaining such an effective school-wide literacy program takes effort from a wide range of school personnel with literacy expertise who can advocate for programs and individual students.

The need for effective literacy programs is contributing to an expanded interest in the roles and responsibilities of literacy professionals working in K-12 settings. The International Reading Association identifies five separate categories of literacy professionals who provide reading instruction: paraprofessional, classroom teacher, reading specialist, teacher educator and administrator (IRA, 2007). Within the reading specialist category falls the position of reading supervisor or reading coordinator. In addition to leading school literacy programs and professional development, reading supervisors must also be prepared to “provide leadership in student advocacy” (IRA, 2007, p.1).

This advocacy can take many different forms depending on the needs of a particular school including providing instructional support to teachers, purchasing resource materials, serving on school or district planning committees, promoting district literacy initiatives, providing professional development to teachers, and acting as a liaison for the school with parents, community members and businesses (IRA,
Although often not in direct contact with students in schools, reading supervisors have the potential to influence the literacy culture within a particular school or district in significant ways (Rickert, 1990).

Embedded within this role is the fundamental need for reading supervisors to demonstrate and communicate appropriate leadership qualities to those responsible for literacy programs within schools, specifically reading specialists and literacy coaches (Sturtevant, 2003). Although supervisors and specialists/coaches have differing roles and responsibilities, I assert that the interconnectedness of their advocacy efforts results in environments which ensure the literacy growth of all students. This assertion is based on my personal experience as a reading specialist, and forms the basis for my inquiry into advocacy in literacy leaders.

Statement of the Problem

In general education settings, the term ‘student advocate’ is increasingly used to describe roles, responsibilities and characteristics of school leaders including superintendents, principals, and media specialists (Eisenberg, 2003; Stader, 2003). The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a non-profit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education throughout the United States. The organization’s primary responsibilities are to provide “leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues…and expressing their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 4). The CCSSO created the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), a committee of educational...
representatives from states and professional organizations charged with the task of developing a set of core standards for education leaders. These core standards are characterized by three dimensions: knowledge, dispositions and performances. The disposition for Standard One states that an “administrator believes in, values and is committed to inclusion of all members of the school community” (Rebore, 2003, p.xi). While the term advocacy isn’t explicitly used, one can certainly draw a connection between advocating for all and including all in the school community. If one is advocating for students, then one possesses the belief that students have the right to be included.

The second ISLLC standard calls for educational leaders to “promote the success of all students by advocating, nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning” (Rebore, 2003, p. xii). With both implicit and explicit references to advocacy, the significance of the term in relation to the development of school leaders is clearly evident.

Additionally, the term advocacy is being attached to the characteristics and qualifications inherent to those in positions of literacy leadership. This includes literacy coaches, reading specialists and district reading supervisors (IRA, 2007). As this study shows, there is minimal scholarly research on reading supervisors’ roles and responsibilities in general, and no specific research on perceptions of advocacy, dispositions connected to advocacy or how reading supervisors contextualize advocacy. Therefore, exploring these issues with literacy leaders will provide a much-
needed articulation of how advocacy efforts can transform both instructional growth in teachers, and literacy growth in students.

Significance of the Problem

Understanding the influence that literacy leaders have within the public school system is an important part of providing equitable education to all students. District reading supervisors serve in capacities that are often highly visible to a variety of education stakeholders. Supervisors generally report to superintendents and school boards, and they are often tasked with leading district-wide literacy efforts, further positioning them in the public eye. At the school level, reading supervisors are responsible for guiding the practice of reading specialists and literacy coaches (Sturtevant, 2003). As instructional literacy leaders who have lived experiences of visible advocacy, reading supervisors can inform how advocacy is demonstrated in public school settings (Archer, 2008). Obtaining rich descriptions of their advocacy experiences, meanings and actions will further contextualize the phenomenon of advocacy, add to the nuances of educational interpretation, and contribute to a better overall understanding of literacy leadership.

Furthermore, district office personnel have the decision-making power to determine how curriculum is developed, grants are administered, and policy interpreted, yet very little research exists as to how these stakeholders use their influence for change within schools (Grogan, 2005; Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). Obviously, educational change occurs because of influence from a multitude of stakeholders and participants. Understanding how district literacy leaders contribute
to educational change via their perceptions of advocacy will add insight into potential policy shifts needed to improve literacy leadership preparation programs particularly for reading professionals.

Problem

District reading supervisors have the responsibility of being student advocates, as well as leading others in advocacy efforts for students at a school-wide level (IRA, 2007).

It is clear that teachers are advocates for their students but that’s rarely talked about. Teachers stand alone when they advocate. For most teachers there are no courses available on teaching and advocacy. We rarely talk about the role that literacy plays in providing opportunities for teachers to work as advocates (Taylor, Coughlin, & Marasco, 1997).

Currently, there is an expectation that literacy leaders engage in advocacy, but this expectation is muddied by an incomplete understanding of the complexities associated with being an advocate including one’s actions and dispositions.

Although there is research on dispositions necessary for education leaders such as superintendents and school administrators, there is limited research on dispositions needed for those in literacy leadership positions. In a validation study of an instrument measuring administrators’ dispositions, Schulte and Kowal (2005) state that while preparation in curricula is important for education leaders, the development of their dispositions has more of an impact on their overall success. This raises questions concerning the pre-service and in-service training of reading professionals.
If we know that dispositions impact success, and that professional standards call literacy leaders to act as advocates (CCSSO, 2008; IRA, 2007), shouldn’t we have further understanding of how reading professionals’ dispositions impact perceptions of advocacy? Therefore, the current study intends to add to the body of knowledge surrounding personal and professional influences of advocacy in literacy leaders.

Research Questions

The purpose of the following study was to explore the factors which contribute to district reading supervisors’ perceptions of advocacy. The research study described below was designed to answer the following questions regarding advocacy in literacy leaders.

1. What professional roles and personal experiences influence district reading supervisors’ perceptions of advocacy?
2. What professional and personal dispositions influence district reading supervisors’ perceptions of advocacy?
3. What does advocacy look like in the work of literacy leaders?

By clarifying advocacy in experienced literacy leaders, we may be able to translate what is learned into workable guidelines and provide models of successful literacy advocacy for pre-service and in-service teachers. This in turn may lead to more effective and responsive literacy instruction in public schools.

Clarification of Terms

For the purpose of clarification, below are the specific definitions of terms used throughout this study: 1) district or division reading supervisor: one who oversees K-
12 literacy programs from the central office level in public schools; 2) **reading professional**: a school-based literacy leader responsible for some portion of a school-wide literacy program and professional development at the K-12 level; specific in-school titles include reading specialist, literacy coach, and reading teacher; 3) **servant leader**: a leader whose role calls for work in service to others. Servant leaders do not necessarily hold subordinate positions to those they seek to serve. 4) **dispositions**: values, commitments, ethics, or beliefs that are internally held and may or may not be externally exhibited (Cudahy, Finnan, Jaruzewicz & McCarty, 2002), as well as attitudes, and character and personality traits. Dispositions are internal tendencies that move a person to feel a certain way, which then leads to action. Some individuals are adept at verbalizing their dispositions and can readily discuss the connection between dispositions and actions; others do not fully understand the influence that these internal constituents have on external acts. Throughout this study, I assert that dispositions are flexible, malleable and change depending on experiences and context. 5) **context**: the interconnectedness of individuals and circumstances contributing to an event or action. Included in context is an individual’s dispositions as dispositions cannot be separated from an individual. Throughout this research, I hold that context is situated, meaning particular to and inclusive of multiple factors that one brings to a situation. 6) **advocacy**: making a judgment for something or someone by taking a position and defending it with sound argumentation (Spacks, 1997). I believe that advocacy is an outcome-based demonstration or experience. The advocate has a
specific idea of what he/she desires for another individual or group which results in a particular action. This action may or may not be visible to others.
2. Literature Review

Inclusions and Exclusions of Search

I searched numerous education databases to gather literature relevant to this study. The databases searched were ERIC, Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, PsycINFO, ProQuest, EBSCO Host, Digital Dissertations and Dissertation International Abstracts. The following search terms and their derivations were used in various combinations to yield the most search hits: education, advocate, disposition, social justice, literacy, critical literacy, leadership, reading, supervisor, coordinator, central office, and language arts. Additionally, the following scholarly journals were searched: The Reading Teacher, Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, Reading Research Quarterly, Language Arts and Language Teaching Research. Finally, I used WRLC Libraries Catalog and online commercial websites to find literature resources pertinent to the study as well. Literature that focused on advocacy as it relates to educational leaders was included. Literature which explored advocacy as political action in forums outside the context of public schools was beyond the scope of this study and thereby excluded.

Literature Review Design

The literature reviewed for this study was organized in the following manner in order to narrow-in on advocacy in district reading supervisors. First, I chose literature
which situates advocacy within the historical context of democracy as the foundation of public education. Second, studies highlighting the necessity for educational leaders to be grounded in the cultural understandings of democracy and advocacy are presented. Third, literature related to advocacy specific to literacy leaders in public schools is discussed. Finally, research focusing on in-school, and district reading supervisors and coordinators is presented.

Advocacy Grounded in Democracy

The concept of advocacy is quite prevalent in American schools, the foundation of which stems from historical beliefs surrounding the purpose of public education. Dewey (1915) stated that as a society, we should consider the end to a proper education as “the promotion of the best possible realization of humanity as humanity” (p. 78). This outcome is accomplished through education that enables citizens to realize their best moral, rational and free selves. Dewey (1915) went on to suggest that a true democratic society does not merely rely on its governing system for equality, but more on its educational system. Schools take on this role because education is a form of social community and communication where one has to “refer his own action to that of others, and consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own” (p. 71). As this democracy is realized through education, racial, social, and economic barriers are broken down leaving way for equity in all contexts of a functioning society.

In his early writings on democracy in education, Paolo Freire (1970) expressed the need for teachers and students to collaborate in the development of a more democratic
society. This would only be accomplished when both would stand together to challenge the social circumstances that prevented students from fully participating in classrooms. Freire insisted that a commitment to others through listening to the concrete experiences of students was one of the virtues of a democratic educator (Cherland & Harper, 2007).

In a 2004 article explaining how democracy is demonstrated in schools, Edelsky defined, compared and contrasted two categories of democracy: political and living. Political democracy is equality of participation in the law, and alternation of power. Lived democracy is more applicable to education and is defined as political democracy plus. The plus includes all persons having a voice in decisions which affect them, as well as having equal opportunity to resources which allow their voices to be heard in a society free from barriers based on class, race and economic status (Edelsky, 2004).

These understandings of democracy are evident in the preparation of education leaders today. Bredeson (2004) described the three-year restructuring of an educational leadership program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison which focused on providing pre-service principals with opportunities to “develop and experience democratic values in their on-going professional development and in their daily work” (p. 710). Through strategic planning, faculty retreats and reflection on current curricular practices, 15 faculty members revised their program to ensure that principals understood their work in schools was to advance ‘educational quality and opportunity for all learners (p. 719). In the article, Bredeson described two roles,
creator and dismantler, that democratic school leaders need to assume if the schools in which they work are to embody true democratic principles. As creators, principals create “just, fair, humane and caring conditions, processes, and structures that provide equitable opportunity, access and experiences for everyone” (p. 712). Creators can be considered advocates for equity within their schools. However, principals also play the role of dismantler by “challenging the inequities in the school and disrupting the sources and systems that contribute to those injustices” (p. 712).

Bredeson’s comments regarding the program and the university’s realignment of professional development requirements for pre-service leaders suggested that the dispositions, or internal beliefs, which are valued in democratic leaders such as principals, do not just occur randomly. These dispositions need to be identified, validated and nurtured explicitly. Structures for learning them need to be established and evaluated in the context of higher education if application in actual school settings is to occur (Bredeson, 2004).

In a 2005 commentary on closing achievement gaps through the careful preparation of education leaders, Johnson & Uline suggested that specific dispositions are necessary in district leaders, including the belief that every student can learn, and the willingness to nurture this belief in others. Successful district leaders engender necessary dispositions, as well as create practices and polices which support those dispositions in other school personnel (Johnson & Uline, 2005). It is this supportive collaboration that moves individual teachers from narrow-focused content teaching, to a broader view of teaching within the democratic purpose of public schooling.
Susan Ohanian, educator, author and advocate stated in a 2008 interview, “It is often a challenge for an educator to realize that part of their professional responsibility is to…address social justice issues that are grounded in the ideals of our democracy” (Hunt & Hutchinson, p. 5). Ohanian suggests that if teachers spend too much of their time focusing on content, they will never get to what counts: every child’s right to a quality education that empowers them to be productive citizens of democracy (Hunt & Hutchinson, 2008). Viewing schooling and teaching through this critical lens means that school leaders have the moral responsibility to create school cultures and structures which facilitate equity for all students.

Advocacy Grounded in Inclusive Leadership

Advocacy is a complex and abstract concept which needs to be contextualized in order to comprehend the full capacity of its meaning. Even then, the way one defines advocacy will vary from person to person based on his or her particular circumstance. However, from an educational perspective, McAloon (1994) defined advocacy as “defending or promoting a child or an educational program” (p.318). With this definition, she went on to state that defending means “to supply needed support” while promoting means the “active advancement of the child or the program” (p. 318).

McAloon (1994) categorized advocacy even further by suggesting two types: “advocacy from within” and “advocacy from without.” The latter described advocates of education, essentially third-parties who are not necessarily educators yet who assist teachers, schools and parents, and communities by claiming to represent their best
interests on a broad range of education related topics. This type of advocacy is distinct from ‘advocacy from within’ in that professional educators from within each school or district, rather than outside the district, work on issues important to students and teachers.

McAloon identified three types of within advocacy; the one most relevant to the current study was teacher to teacher. As a reading specialist, McAloon found that building rapport and trust with teachers was essential to effectively advocating for a particular student, teacher or program. It was not clear, however, whether such traits were essential relational precursors to advocating, or were they established through the process itself.

McAloon’s definitions and descriptions are crucial to understanding the basic premise underlying advocacy: inclusion. Inclusion refers to the responsibility of school leaders to ensure that all students are full participants within the culture of school in order to have all learning needs met (IDEA, 2004). Inclusion and advocacy are prevalent in the field of special education. It is a professional expectation as well as a legal requirement that special educators act as advocates for their students as they strive to include students with disabilities in least restrictive environments (IDEA, 2004). To fully include students with disabilities in all facets of a school, administrators and instructional school leaders need to be visible advocates for all students.

Inclusion is also a premise of servant leadership first identified by Greenleaf (1977) as leader who possesses “the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve
first” (p. 27) and then lead others. When developing this framework of leadership, Greenleaf drew upon Biblical theory referencing Jesus Christ as the ultimate servant leader. Although ‘servant leader’ is seemingly a contradictory use of terms, Greenleaf (1977) stressed that servant leaders are not beneath others in a typical pyramid-shaped organizational hierarchy. They are, rather, designated leaders who are smaller in number in an organization, but who support and serve the greater numbers doing the work in and of the organization. Their purpose is to “make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served” (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 27).

Sipe and Frick (2009) expanded on Greenleaf’s conception of servant leadership using their years of experience in the fields of psychology, business and education. They identified seven pillars or characteristics of servant leaders who work to support an organization and its stakeholders: 1) “person of character; 2) puts people first; 3) skilled communicator; 4) compassionate collaborator; 5) has foresight; 6) systems thinker; 7) leads with moral authority” (p.5-6). Within each characteristic above is a set of exemplifying competencies. Although advocacy is not specifically identified, several relate to themes underlying advocacy and potentially to district supervisors roles. These include mentoring, building teams, negotiating conflict, creating a culture of accountability and considering the greater good (Sipe & Frick, 2009).

Although servant leadership has roots in Biblical theory and ties to organizational leadership (Sipe & Frick, 2009; Greenleaf, 1977) it has been increasingly applied to education leaders. For example, in a 2005 review of literature on female black superintendents, Alton used the conceptual framework of servant leadership to
analyze their roles within public schools. She found that female superintendents tend
to “dedicate themselves to the care of children, use collaboration…and are deeply
caring about their mission to serve, lead and educate children” (p. 682). Again, while
the article did not specifically reference advocacy, female superintendents’ dedication
and commitment to serving children is applicable to advocacy in that these women
were willing to serve to persevere in public education despite obstacles such as
marginalization and discrimination because they believed “they were making a
difference for students” (p. 682).

Similarly, Hall (2009) conducted a single-case study of a female principal in a
high-achieving, low socio-economic elementary school in Texas. Interview data and
field notes from observations revealed that the principal self-identified as a servant
leader. Additional results suggested that creating a student-centered school culture
was central to the principal’s role as school leader (2009). Alton’s (2005) and Hall’s
(2009) studies are relevant to advocacy in that they address leadership through an
inclusive lens: keeping students at the core of a leader’s work.

Additional studies on servant leaders point out the need for modeling in order to
toward inclusiveness in schools. Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson, and Jinks (2007)
conducted a quantitative study of 112 school principals and found that those who
identified themselves as servant leaders modeled leadership to teachers in order to
“enhance the collaboration needed to meet students needs” (p. 412). While there is no
mention of advocacy in their study, based on their results they suggest that servant
leadership should be the focus of training for other educational leaders in order to embrace a commitment to all students (Taylor et al., 2007).

Additionally, Alcala conducted a phenomenological study of five secondary school principals in Texas who identified themselves as servant leaders (2009). She found that principals first and foremost identified themselves as service providers working to meet others’ needs. This should not be construed as the principals meeting the needs of demanding superiors or embracing a subordinate role to others. Instead, principals viewed this service capacity as an integral and necessary part of their positions. As one participant in the study stated, “I do it and don’t really think about it” (p. 96). Alcala’s results also suggested the need for district office personnel to model to principals how to work best to serve the students collectively and appropriately (2009). However, the following research by Theoharis and Causton-Theoharis (2008) indicated that it is difficult to hold a disposition toward inclusiveness unless one has been trained to do so.

In a 2008 study, Theoharis and Causton-Theoharis engaged in a qualitative study of higher education faculty who prepare school administrators “to hold the critical dispositions necessary to be inclusive leaders” (p. 232). The constant comparative method was used to analyze in-depth interviews and secondary data sources including syllabi and instructional materials. The data revealed that although the participants never used the word disposition during interviews, they did purposefully select curriculum materials and pedagogical techniques that fostered inclusive dispositions in their students: the future administrators. The results of this study suggested that
dispositions toward advocating for students can be specifically taught, or at the very least modeled, to adult learners and future school leaders.

As evidenced in the following study, not all educators feel that pre-service programs prepared them to act as advocates in public schools. Bratlien and McGuire (2002) conducted a study examining 909 teachers’ perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of their pre-service preparation program after being in the classroom for three years. Using a Likert scale, participants were asked to rate their feeling of overall preparedness in being an advocate. Of those, 42.2% felt moderately well prepared, 15.6% felt somewhat prepared, 6.4% felt not prepared at all (Bratlien & McGuire, 2002). These results showed that teachers were being called on to be advocates in schools, yet did not necessarily feel prepared in how to advocate. This study further demonstrated the policy implications surrounding advocacy as preparation programs need to examine its role within a curricular context.

In some instances, school leaders hold advocacy dispositions, yet need specific prompting to elicit that knowledge. In a study of the use of self-reflection as a tool to nurture moral leadership capacity, Branson (2007) found that principals came to understand how life experiences and definitions of self resulted in leadership behaviors which were aligned with aspects of democracy as specified by Dewey (1915). That is, to “successfully act rightly, justly and to promote good” (Branson, 2007, p. 492). Through structured activities that required discussing significant life experiences, these school leaders found that dispositions such as respect, concern for others and empowerment had a direct impact on their decisions toward others, yet that
they needed guidance and nurturing to develop these dispositions fully. The aspect of nurturing was relevant to the current study in that I questioned what influenced literacy leaders to orient themselves toward advocacy, in effect, wondering where that desire came from and how did it evolve?

In a study on co-created leadership dispositions, Wasonga and Murphy (2007) stated that “educators today are searching for principles of leadership that would ensure a stable foundation for the steady, ordered progress of academic achievement in the face of rising standards, expectations, competition and accountability” (p. 20). The researchers studied twenty-one teachers who were identified by faculty as aspiring school leaders. Participants responded to questions regarding leadership dispositions including collaborating, active listening, patience, and trust/trustworthiness as identified in previous research by Murphy, Hunt, and Wasonga (2004). Examples of questions pertinent to the current study were: 1) Describe instances where you have witnessed the practice of this disposition in your school; 2) Explain why this disposition is important to a successful leader; 3) Describe instances where the application/practice of this disposition has been especially successful? The authors concluded that dispositions are “potentialities which may be nurtured, cultivated and practiced by leaders in hierarchical organizations” (p. 29).

Therefore, as the above literature indicated, dispositions have the potential to be elicited, taught, and nurtured in others in situations ripe with collaboration and grounded in a common understanding of inclusive leadership. Although not all
leaders feel prepared to advocate, it is becoming increasingly common to be called to
do so through professional standards, especially those involved in literacy.

Advocacy Grounded in Literacy Leaders

In their chapter entitled *Reading Specialists: On Becoming Literacy Leaders*, Wepner and Quatroche (2008) created a conceptual framework of reading personnel based on previous work with educational deans (Wepner, D’Onofrio, & Wilhite, 2003, 2006). The framework identified four leadership dimensions and subsequent characteristics of successful reading personnel: *intellectual, emotional, social and moral*. The moral dimension is most applicable to the concept of advocacy in literacy leaders as defined as ‘a sense of conscience and accountability, and the desire to negotiate energetically for mutually satisfactory solutions to problems and broad social ideas’ (Wepner & Quatroche, 2008, p. 38).

Viewing advocacy in this way leads one to question where that sense of conscience comes from in individuals. Are there particular experiences that literacy leaders have gone through which strengthen an already existing drive to move toward solutions for both common and unique problems encountered in literacy education? Or, do particular experiences serve as building blocks in the creation of a sense of accountability for others that spring forth from the compilation of these experiences?

This moral compass, whether innate and/or nurtured is worth exploring in terms of literacy leadership. As Wepner and Quatroche (2008) point out, reading professionals not only do the right things in their practice, but have the commitment to do the right things as part of their character as a literacy leader. Successful literacy leaders
“believe strongly in working together with others to get the best possible outcomes for both parties” (Wepner & Quatroche, 2008, p. 38). Undoubtedly, a specific within-school leader who has a large responsibility for literacy, and who may also act as a literacy advocate is the librarian or media specialist.

Media specialists do much more than show students how and where to locate resources. They can directly affect student learning through the varied roles they hold. In an effort to transform media specialists’ positions in the Seattle schools, Eisenberg created a professional development program based on three roles that media specialists played in K-12 schools including being reading advocates (Eisenberg, 2004; Minkel, 2002). He stated that because reading proficiency is the number one predictor of student success, media specialists could not afford to follow traditional roles of librarians, such as teacher of library and research skills. Eisenberg (2004) provided three broad categories of reading advocacy actions undertaken by media specialists: 1) formal reading/media activities, such as teaching reading skills 2) resources and facilities provision, such as teaching how to use the library, and 3) informal reading/media activities, such as creating incentive programs. “Clearly, a key role for the library media program and teacher-librarian is to advocate books and reading,” (Eisenberg, 2002, p. 24). This study was the only one reviewed that actually described ways in which advocacy may be demonstrated in literacy leaders, but as indicated, only focused on media specialists.

A study of another group of literacy leaders, central office instructional supervisors, attempted to uncover how they contributed to schools’ efforts in
restructuring instruction. Data revealed that although reading was an area of innovation for supervisors, meaning they addressed it through instructional modifications, no mention of advocacy related to support of principals, teachers or students was found (Huckestein, 2002). Thus, while advocacy is often labeled as a professional responsibility, we still have an incomplete understanding as to how it is situated in the daily actions of literacy leaders (Wepner & Quatroche, 2008; Eisenberg, 2004; Minkel, 2002).

Advocacy Grounded in Acts and Dispositions of Reading Supervisors

The above literature represents a range of studies and commentaries on educational leaders including superintendents, principals, media specialists and teachers; however, much less research exists on the responsibilities, practices and influences of in-school reading supervisors and district reading supervisors. The definitions of these positions vary slightly with the fundamental difference being that district reading supervisors oversee an entire school district’s programs and reading personnel, while in-school supervisors are responsible for reading programs on-site only. Their particular roles, responsibilities, dispositions, and subsequent impacts on student learning form the basis for inquiry in the following studies.

In the 1981-1982 academic year, Fraatz (1987) conducted a study which investigated the delivery of services in elementary reading programs across the United States. In-depth interviews of key education stakeholders including teachers, reading specialists, and district reading supervisors were conducted inquiring into how schools operate to meet the reading needs of diverse populations, especially
students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The data revealed that district reading supervisors primarily engaged in techniques such as bargaining, negotiation, persuading and compromising to influence the use of resources available in public schools, including the reading specialist. This type of influence and power that district reading supervisors exert through the use of negotiation to accomplish the districts’ goals was the basis for achieving district-wide change for diverse groups of students within and outside classrooms (Fraatz, 1987).

Fraatz (1987) drew the conclusion that in order for districts to meet the needs of marginalized students in classrooms, reading specialists needed the support of district supervisors in their negotiations with teachers and principals in communicating their responsibilities as advocates. Reading specialists and literacy coaches needed to be viewed as independent educators whose main goal was to help the child, not merely to help teachers. When reading specialists and coaches were seen as only resource support for teachers, the tendency to replicate biases that existed in the classroom continued, and advocacy efforts for individual students were not realized.

Although dated, Fraatz’s study is relevant to my own in that her conclusions point out the necessity for all education stakeholders to have a better understanding of how reading supervisors define and view advocacy as their dispositions have a direct impact on interactions with school personnel closest to students. Those interactions are influential on student outcomes in terms of who gets what in reading and how.

Two additional studies were reviewed which investigated how student achievement was affected by reading supervisors. Although the results of the
following studies do not have direct relationships to advocacy and dispositions, they are indirectly relevant to my own in that they represent the small breadth and depth of research on district reading supervisors.

Rosser (1980) conducted an empirical study of student achievement in Alabama comparing students who had reading supervisors and those who did not have reading supervisors. Using assessment results from the California Achievement Test, there was no statistically significant difference in reading achievement of second, fourth and sixth graders between students in schools with reading supervisors and without supervisors.

Two years later, Hart (1982) investigated the reading achievement of New York City junior high students in grades seven, eight and nine based on the training and background of the reading supervisor. Reading scores of each school were analyzed over the course of three years in relation to the reading supervisors’ experiences. Results indicated that student achievement was neither positively nor negatively impacted by the fact that the reading supervisor had ever taught reading. However, there was a positive correlation between the reading teachers’ perceptions of the supervisor’s expertise in reading and student achievement.

The results of Hart’s (1982) study indicated that reading supervisors do impact both teachers’ perceptions and ultimately student achievement to some degree, although causality cannot be determined. Even so, the continued study into district reading supervisors’ impact on other components of literacy programs and reading professionals’ work is warranted based on those sparse findings alone. Although
dated, several studies related to dispositions in reading supervisors/coordinates have shown mixed results, with no explicit evidence of advocacy shown.

In 1980, Haggard investigated the role of the administrative reading coordinator as perceived by teachers, principals, coordinators and curriculum directors. Participants were asked to place importance on the following four roles: bringing about change, consulting, working with reading materials and coordinating district programs. They revealed their perceptions of importance on twenty-eight indicators or characteristics of those four roles as exhibited by the reading supervisor. Results showed that principals and teachers placed less value on the role of the reading supervisor than did the curriculum directors. The role of one who brings about change was identified as the least important role of the reading supervisor for all participants (Haggard, 1980); however, no mention of advocacy was included in the study.

Hart’s (1985) inquiry into reading supervisors was a modified replication of Haggard’s study (1980), and was conducted through the use of a survey of 191 elementary coordinators, principals and teachers. The survey asked respondents to prioritize a list of already recognized roles of the coordinator rather than asking respondents to name or describe those roles themselves. The same four roles, originally used by Haggard, were bringing about change, consulting, working with reading materials and coordinating district programs. Additionally, role indicators were included within each of the four roles as a type of subset of responsibilities that were inclusive to that role. Examples of role indicators were help write criteria for evaluation of personnel, help set goals for the school/grade and working with students
in pull-out programs. Of the 32 role indicators used in the study, none referred to advocacy.

A similar study to Hart’s (1985) was conducted by Mack (1990) who investigated supervisors’, principals’ and teachers’ actual and desired roles of the reading supervisor. The main difference in this study as compared to Hart’s was that the respondents generated lists of roles themselves based on their experiences. The investigation yielded a prioritized list of roles of the reading supervisor. Again, no mention of supervisor as advocate was made.

Summary

My exhaustive review of the professional literature yielded very few studies and limited insight related directly or indirectly to the role that advocacy plays in daily work of educational leaders. Nevertheless, we learn from this review that superintendents, principals, and supervisors often see their roles as student-centered and student-driven, and act in ways that reflect inclusiveness and service to others. We also know that leaders often hold particular dispositions indicative of advocacy, yet often these same leaders do not identify themselves as advocates or feel prepared to advocate. Still very little is known about the meanings underlying advocacy and the contextual factors which influence how advocacy is perceived and demonstrated by literacy leaders. The current study explores new and complex facets of advocacy through the personal and professional experiences of district reading supervisors in Virginia public schools.
3. Methodology

Participants and Setting

Participants for the study were five district reading supervisors currently employed in K-12 public schools in Virginia. From my personal experience and knowledge of public schools, I was most interested in the *experiences* that the position of district reading supervisor afforded my inquiry rather than the location, size, or demographics of the district in which the supervisors worked. However, it was necessary to ensure that participants had several common characteristics in order to best answer the research questions. Therefore, I used purposeful selection or sampling to obtain participants for the study (Light, Singer, & Willett, 1990; Maxwell, 2005). According to Maxwell (2005), purposeful sampling “is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten from other choices,” (p. 88). Engaging in research using district reading supervisors provided two benefits to the study: meaningful and diverse perspectives on advocacy *and* deeper insight into their roles within public schools.

Each participant chosen for the study met the following criteria: a) currently employed in a division-wide supervisory reading position in Virginia public schools; b) held that position for at least three years; c) worked directly with reading specialists and/or literacy coaches in a supervisory role; d) had previous K-12
classroom teaching experience. These criteria for inclusion ensured a minimum degree of similarity among participants. The rationale for each criterion follows.

First, I assumed by the title of the position that reading supervisors actually supervised *individuals* responsible for the implementation of reading programs. However, instances where supervisors only *oversee* that particular reading programs are in place in schools could exist, while the actual supervision of reading specialists/coaches fell under the responsibility of the building principal. I verified this point prior to the final selection of participants for the study. All of the participants supervised reading teachers, classroom teachers, reading specialists and/or coaches, yet none were directly responsible for evaluating their performance as this task was the responsibility of the building principals.

Second, participants had at least three years experience in their current supervisory position. Although there is no particular amount of time associated with advocacy, it did seem reasonable that a minimum of three years of full-time job experience in the same position within the same division would allow these leaders to have sufficient breath and depth of literacy experience in order to meaningfully reflect upon their perceptions of advocacy.

Third, participants worked directly with reading specialists and/or literacy coaches in a supervisory, yet non-evaluative role. Each participant worked specifically with reading specialists at the elementary level. Four also worked with reading specialists and/or coaches at the secondary level.
Finally, it was important that all participants had teaching experience in K-12 classrooms regardless of content, in order to contribute a broad spectrum of perspectives to the study. Four of the five participants spent their entire professional careers in the field of education. One participant took a brief two year leave to pursue work in the private sector, but returned to education. Three of the participants’ early teaching careers were in English while two of the participants spent their teaching years in the field of reading and are currently licensed reading specialists. One participant had the additional perspective of previously being both assistant principal and principal at the elementary level.

Two sequential methods for obtaining participants who met the above criteria were used. First, as a literacy leader myself, I had a professional connection to an already established network of reading supervisors who represent K-12 school divisions. Members of this group meet on a regular basis to discuss issues concerning literacy in their respective divisions, network as professionals, and to learn as a community of literacy leaders. I used this group as the pool from which to invite participants to the study as I suspected members would likely meet my already established criteria for participation. Of course, I also considered feasibility of access to potential participants and already established relationships with certain individuals (Maxwell, 2005). I excluded supervisors whom I knew and for whom I had worked. I invited five participants to the study based on conveniently accessing them to gather data.

I obtained verification of names, titles, addresses and email addresses through each school district’s website. I sent a letter via US mail to each reading supervisor
inviting her to participate in the study (Appendix A). The inclusion criteria necessary for participation in the study was clearly outlined in the letter. I asked participants to return an accompanying letter in a postage pre-paid envelope indicating either their intent to participate or not to participate in the study. One potential participant failed to respond to the initial letter within two weeks and received a follow up reminder via email (Appendix B) requesting her to return the intent/decline original letter. Within three weeks of the initial mailing and follow-up email, each of the five supervisors contacted agreed to participate in the study.

A brief background on each participant is described below. Pseudonyms are used and all identifying information has been changed and or deleted to preserve the anonymity of participants. Included with this information is a quotation from the participant indicating why she chose to become a district reading supervisor. I included these quotes to provide introductory context for the reader.

Audrey

Audrey worked in a small urban district with eight schools and approximately 6,500 students. She had over twenty years experience in her district as a reading and English teacher at all levels. “I believe firmly…you have to know when it’s time to stop (teaching) and let fresh new experience come in. I’m a very goal oriented person…so, my next goal was okay, what can you do best, next?”

Charlotte

Charlotte worked in the same district for over thirty years including teaching English at the secondary level. Her rural district had 19 schools and approximately
11,000 students. “I have the opportunity to take a larger view beyond the classroom. I see myself as a troubleshooter…and that pulls a side of me, a talent I think I have that I enjoy tapping into.”

*Kathryn*

Kathryn worked in an urban school district with approximately 20,000 students and 30 schools. She spent over thirty years working as a classroom teacher, reading specialist and adjunct professor. “It may sound crazy but I like, most of the time, having that K-12, the whole umbrella and trying to have a feel for what happens all the way through and make connections.”

*Meredith*

Meredith has been a public school educator for over thirty years working as a teacher, reading specialist and school administrator at both the elementary and secondary levels. The suburban district she worked in had a student population of approximately 57,000 in 73 schools. “This was an opportunity and I believe in being a risk-taker. I kinda had an overview of what this job would be, but it is the opportunity to be an influence over (thousands) of students which is pretty cool.”

*Monique*

Monique worked in a suburban district with 29 schools and approximately 24,000 students. She has over thirty years of teaching experience across all grade levels as a classroom teacher and reading specialist in both public and private schools. “I’m going to see what I can do there. I’m going to prove myself. I’m going to put into
play what I’ve been reading about and doing for years, only I’m going to make it standardized across the county.”

Research Design

To best answer the research questions, I used the systematic design of grounded theory in this study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory was the most suitable design for several reasons. First, grounded theory allowed me to focus on detailed instances of human experiences. This study required participants to articulate specific experiences surrounding their work with students, teachers and colleagues. Capturing the richness embedded in their stories was crucial to understanding how reading supervisors’ perceive and influence advocacy. Second, grounded theory allowed me to incorporate the use of artifacts in the study. The artifacts added an additional layer of data and fostered participants’ deeper reflections and analyses of perceptions of advocacy than those captured through interviews alone.

Third, grounded theory allowed me to analyze data as it was collected, not only through the concrete words spoken by the participants, but by making inferences about the data based on my own experiences as a reading specialist. Using grounded theory permitted me to embrace my personal experiences and beliefs about advocacy to influence how the data were coded, analyzed, and interpreted, rather than attempt to fit data into pre-existing categories or frameworks. Through my experiences as a literacy advocate, I contextualized the data in order to better understand the inter-relationships and connections within and among participants’ perceptions. In a grounded theory design, this background knowledge is understood as having a
positive influence on the study; therefore, my dispositions as a literacy professional assisted not hindered the development of an advocacy theory.

Fourth, a grounded theory design allowed for a constructivist stance throughout the research process. I remained cognizant of the fact that every influence must be considered in light of the context in which it occurred, and with respect to the individuals involved. Constructivism does not aim for a neat ‘package’ of theory to be produced as a result of data analysis; rather, its focus is primarily on the ‘how and why’ of a particular issue or problem (Charmaz, 2006). This orientation is expanded upon in the discussion section of the study.

A final asset to using grounded theory was the fluidity inherent in all stages of the process. This flexible structure allowed me to revise the research questions in light of new and more relevant data as analyses were in progress. Maxwell (2005) explains that rewriting and clarifying research questions while engaged in data analysis often helps avoid “a Type III error-answering the wrong question” (p. 65). This study had three iterations of research questions which were the result of an inductive and interactive research process (Maxwell, 2005).

Data Sources

Three data sources were utilized in this study: interviews, artifacts and memos. I conducted a series of three interviews with each participant to gather data on perceptions of advocacy. The first round of interviews focused on understanding the supervisors’ educational backgrounds and the general design of each district’s literacy model at both the elementary and secondary levels, including the use of reading
specialists and coaches. The second round of interviews explored topics relating to leadership, resistance and influence. In preparation for the final round of interviews, I asked participants to bring an artifact which represented their literacy leadership. Interview questions focused on the issues, beliefs and purposes surrounding the artifact. Additionally, this interview focused on the intrinsic meanings associated with advocacy.

The three-interview format was purposeful in that it allowed me to establish trust and build relationships in the initial interviews, while subsequent interviews led to further probing and clarification of data. The series format moved the participants and me more deeply into the meanings and representations of advocacy.

The participants were not informed of my interest in their perceptions of advocacy until the third and final interview with each. The design of the study was such that had any participant mentioned the word advocacy prior to the final interview, I would use the interview protocol on hand as well as begin probing deeper into their perspectives on what it meant to be an advocate. There was no intention of deception in this study. Purposefully avoiding advocacy in the first two rounds allowed me to eliminate a certain amount of researcher bias as to my perceptions of advocacy and allowed me to gain a better understanding of the broad range of factors influencing advocacy. Had I started the initial round of interviews with questions specifically addressing advocacy, I may have risked leading participants to recall acts they intentionally labeled as advocacy in order to answer my questions ‘accurately’ and I may not have gathered rich contextualized data. Instead, leading up to discussions of
advocacy by *first* understanding supervisors’ positions, influence and leadership within their districts gave insight into the broad spectrum of the contextual factors influencing advocacy.

I used a semi-structured interview protocol for each round of interviews (Appendices D-F). All participants were asked the same initial questions; however, I probed for deeper responses or explanations of responses for clarification as needed during subsequent interviews. Interviews were audio-recorded with both a digital and micro-tape recorder. The sparse handwritten notes I took throughout the interviews were in case points needed further clarification either during that interview or a subsequent one. Each interview took approximately one hour to complete.

A second data source was gathered and explored within the context of the final interview. In the study’s invitation letter, I asked participants to bring an artifact to the third interview which represented their literacy leadership. I provided no examples or stipulations so as not to lead participants in any way. I gave only a brief description of how we would use the artifact in the context of the interview process. I chose artifacts because one of the foundational aspects of grounded theory is symbolic interactionism which “focuses on the meanings of events to people and the symbols they use to convey that meaning” (Baker et al., 1992, p.1355). Artifacts served as visual prompts for eliciting meanings ascribed to advocacy through leadership. As described in 1969 by Blumer (in Baker et al., 1992), behavior results from “an interpretive process in which people, singly and collectively, guide themselves by defining objects, events and situations they encounter” (p. 1357).
Therefore, the use of artifacts as representations of particular dispositions enabled both the participant and me to come closer to a common understanding of advocacy. Artifacts discussed during the final round of interviews were a program evaluation, Reading Recovery documentation, literacy coursework, district-wide literacy principles and textbook adoption materials.

The third data source was researcher memos. I wrote down thoughts immediately following all interviews in order to capture contextual elements, such as non-verbal forms of communication. Recording my reactions to the interviews in this manner allowed me to begin toying with data immediately which often generated questions and wonderings that I could address in subsequent interviews. Examples of issues included in memos were the physical context of the interview, my style of questioning, thoughts on the openness of the participant, and additional probing ideas. I reflected on the memos prior to subsequent interviews, and also used them as sources of data to glean more insight into the interview data. I also wrote memos throughout the data analysis process to help clarify my thinking and interpretations.

Having multiple sources allowed for triangulation of the data. I used the artifacts to add further depth to the interview data and to provide additional representations of literacy leadership. The researcher memos allowed me to gain perspective and to put each interview into context. The memos written throughout the data analysis process, and well into the writing process, allowed for continuing categorical connections and emerging ideas.

Procedures
Data Collection

Via email, I arranged the first round of interviews at locations and times convenient to participants, requesting private and quiet locations in order to reduce the risk of interruption during interviews. Consent forms were explained and signed prior to beginning the first interview. Subsequent interviews were arranged either at the conclusion of an interview or via email as soon as schedules were confirmed. I made every attempt to keep the participants on the same ‘round’ of interviews so that I could focus my data analysis and interpretation on one particular set of questions. I completed the first round of interviews before starting the second round. However, scheduling conflicts did arise during the second round of interviews and two participants postponed interviews near the end of the second round. This caused overlap into the already-scheduled third round. I did not feel comfortable putting off the other three participants indefinitely until the second interviews were completed as we were moving well into the summer and starting to impose on vacation schedules. I do not feel this overlap affected the data I gathered or its analysis as grounded theory allows for early and on-going analysis of data. Additionally, the intent of the study was to integrate fully all data to construct a theory rather than treat participants as separate cases.

I listened to each audio-recorded interview at least three times: driving home from the interview, driving to the participant’s following interview, and to transcribe. This process enabled me to jot down probes and clarify questions. It was also the
beginning stages of data analysis as each encounter with participants’ responses to interview queries and probes aroused my thinking and questioning about the data.

Data Analysis

Charmaz’s (2006) model of the grounded theory process served as my guide for both data gathering and analysis. In developing grounded theory, data analysis becomes the interplay between researcher and data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This relationship occurs as data collection and analysis happen concurrently, rather than waiting for all the data to be gathered before analysis begins. As a result, participants were asked additional interview questions or probes to reflect the movement toward a particular category needing further exploration. This occurred during interview sessions and via email as well.

Charmaz’s (2006) process begins with initial data collection and coding. Immediately after completing an interview, I took notes about the interview process and listened to the audio-recording while traveling to my next destination. If necessary, I finished listening to the recording the following day. Maxwell (2005) cautions against letting transcriptions go unanalyzed until the data gathering process is complete; therefore, I transcribed the interviews as soon as possible and always prior to that particular participant’s next interview. I read each transcription at least twice and while reading, began my initial coding. These codes were jottings of interpretations; very open with the main purpose of informing the next round of interviews. Proceeding this way helped to ground my thinking in the data and allowed me to ‘get to know’ participants words more fully. As the analysis process
progressed, I was quickly able to connect particular words to the individual who said them in essence organizing their stories in my mind.

After transcribing the first five interviews with initial codes, I entered the documents into NVivo 8, a computer software program designed to assist with organizing, coding, categorizing and analyzing qualitative data (QSR International, 2009). From this point forward, I separated the rounds into three distinct sets of interviews for analysis because each subsequent round of interviews was constructed to delve deeper into participants’ perspectives of advocacy.

I utilized NVivo 8 (QSR International, 2009) to continue and expand upon my initial coding process by organizing each participant’s words into free nodes. I created free nodes for all fifteen transcripts. As Charmaz (2006) recommends, I stayed as close to the data as possible by coding with action words spoken by the participants. I avoided applying them to any preconceived category. Sometimes this took the form of line-by-line coding and sometimes it took the form of incident coding based on the need to keep stories and events contextually relevant (Charmaz, 2006). I was aware that if I took statements out of context, I might run the risk of mis-categorization and misinterpretation as my analysis progressed.

The second phase of coding transcripts was focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). Focused coding “requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense” in order to begin categorization (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). I reviewed data to find the most significant and most frequently occurring free nodes with which to make categories labeling them as tree nodes in NVivo 8. As I moved into the second and
third sets of data, I used constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) inherent in focused coding to return continually to earlier codes, already established categories, and when necessary the original transcripts. Free nodes were linked from each transcript to create tree nodes. This recursive process of negotiating back and forth between newly gathered data and already coded data allowed for expansion of original categories and development of new categories. Again, I paid particular attention to creating descriptive codes as concise and close to the participants’ words as possible.

The final stage of coding was theoretical coding. Theoretical coding allowed me to begin to form hypotheses about the relationships between the categories named during focused coding (Glaser, 1972; Charmaz, 2006). These codes “specify possible relationships between categories and weave the fractured story back together” (Charmaz, 2006, p.63). Rather than ‘fit’ categories into already existing theoretical coding families created by grounded theorists, I assumed a stance urged by Glaser (1978) in that there was no strict criteria for what these codes should depict; rather the codes were subjective and reflected my interpretation of data based on my knowledge of the participants, their contexts and my personal experience.

I used NVivo 8 (QSR International, 2009) to link the focused tree nodes into theoretical categories. Using the constant comparative method as on on-going analysis tool, I went back to the focused codes to discern if I needed to re-code or shift data into different categories in light of the theoretical categories. If necessary, the theoretical codes were developed into different or broader categories with labels
that were either more inclusive and or descriptive to better reflect what I encountered in the data. This method helped ensure that categories were inclusive of the data yet exclusive of each other (Baker et al., 1992).

In addition to coding data, I created a cluster map for each data set. For sets two and three, I continually built on the ideas emanating from the previous set(s). Clustering served as a way to visually represent my thinking and allowed for the iterative process of data analysis to come through as categories were sorted, moved and resorted. Clustering encompassed ideas from all data sources, although interview data was the most significant. I organized the maps into a final visual representation of how I saw the data emerge with regard to dispositions and influences (Figure 1). The cluster map served to promote connections among and between categories, and allowed for creativity in experimenting with relationships between categories. As themes related to advocacy emerged, I drew final conclusions to create a model of advocacy in literacy leaders (Figure 2).

The complex analyses described above provided the opportunity to interpret data using personal experiences and inductive reasoning. I assumed a reflexive stance toward the analyses where I could embed my “interests, positions, and assumptions” (Charmaz, 2006, p.189) to the process in order to assist in making connections within and across data sets.

Validity

A critical component to all research is forethought into measures of validity. Corbin and Strauss (1998) characterize grounded theorist as one who is able to
recognize tendencies toward bias. As this study revolved around aspects of literacy leadership, it was imperative that I reveal initial biases, think about questions that weren’t being addressed, and identify and plan for validity threats which could cloud inductive reasoning and inferences throughout the study.

Two overarching questions guided my thoughts of validity: 1) How could the design characteristics of the study be challenged by another researcher? 2) What role do I as an insider play in establishing validity and managing threats? To frame the thinking about these questions, I developed a matrix with the following categories: threat, strategy and rationale for each strategy (Appendix G). This straightforward visual method organized my thinking about ways in which the study could be questioned from perspectives other than mine. In creating the matrix, the main goal of a grounded theory design was emphasized: the usefulness of a well-integrated, easy to understand and relevant theory (Maxwell, 2005).

As indicated on the matrix, I enlisted the expertise of district reading supervisor as a non-participating ‘insider’ at two critical stages of the study: after I created a draft of my final cluster map and after I created the model of advocacy. During our conversations, we reviewed data, coding methods, and coding categories and talked through the visual representations. I also enlisted the assistance of participants by eliciting their feedback on drafts of Chapter 4, the cluster map and the model of advocacy via email. Additionally, I had an education professor, experienced in using grounded theory, review my data analysis procedures.
Finally as a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge that my beliefs impacted all phases of the research: selection of participants, probes during interviews, memos, responses to and analysis of data. Beliefs cannot and should not be separated out from the qualitative research process itself; rather they add to the validity of the conclusions drawn by serving to inform interpretations.

Limitations

A limitation to this study was that purposeful sampling reduced the pool of potential participants. This was compounded by the fact that there is only one reading supervisor per district. Additionally, for convenience, I chose participants who I could interview face-to-face within reasonable geographic locations. This decreased the participant pool even further.

Importance

Gaining a clear understanding of advocacy from the perspective of district reading supervisors is necessary to understanding the diverse leadership responsibilities they will encounter. Hunt (1998) states that it is an expectation that teacher preparation and professional development programs put social justice and democracy at the core of curriculum. Not doing so prepares teachers who are experts in curriculum content, but lack a full understanding of what matters in education: “the dignity and worth of every child and their right to a high quality education that will lead them to become participating, informed, empowered and active citizens in their democracy” (p. 7). Findings from this study pertaining to dispositions, advocacy and leadership can add to the body of knowledge of appropriate expectations for literacy leaders in public
schools. Additionally, findings may serve to inform literacy curricula in higher education settings ensuring that future literacy leaders enter public schools fully prepared as student advocates.

Results may also further define what it means to be an in-school advocate, and may lead to new understandings on how to transfer that knowledge to political landscapes beyond school settings as new policy directions must clearly take into account the role and power of central office personnel (Marshall & Gerstl-Penin, 2005). Finally, results could potentially equip literacy organizations with data on how to create professional development opportunities for literacy leaders in an effort to advance their particular policy issues, thus strengthening the connection between research and practice.
4. Results

This chapter presents the themes that emerged from the analysis of the three data sources used in the study. I begin by providing examples of *early experiences* which influenced supervisors’ current perceptions of advocacy. Next, I present *extrinsic contextual factors* influencing the district reading supervisors perspectives of advocacy. Sub-themes described are supervisors’ roles, reading professionals’ roles and role convergence: meeting students’ needs. The next theme I present is *intrinsic contextual factors* influencing advocacy with sub-themes of professional dispositions, personal dispositions, disposition convergence: negotiating relationships. Finally, I present the culminating theme: *situated advocacy* in literacy leaders with the sub-themes of inclusiveness, actions and aspirations.

**Early Experiences**

The first theme to emerge from the data was the importance of prior experiences with literacy both in supervisors’ childhoods and early education careers. All participants readily recalled specific experiences which influenced their passion for reading and their continuing interest in pursuing venues where they could make a difference in children’s lives, just as someone had made a difference in theirs. I begin with a vignette provided by each participant that illustrates a disposition toward literacy that was instilled through a meaningful experience or critical incident.
Audrey

I’d have to say my earliest recollection of literacy as a child, probably three or four years old, when reading was certainly the main thing that we did in our house. Television was something that was there although it wasn’t something that we used a lot in our household. I always remember having a television, but I don’t always remember it being on a lot. So even at age three, four, five there were books all around. My father read all the time in the evening instead of the t.v. going. He’d be sitting on the couch with his glasses and he’d be reading. My mother would be reading the paper. So it was a family that said reading was important. Not even so much as education was important but reading was important.

Charlotte

That goes all the way back to my first grade teacher, Mrs. Ott, who created the love of reading. I was lucky enough to, even though I’m old, to have a looping situation. So I had the same first and second grade teacher, and I had the same third and fourth grade teacher. And so you, you really developed a relationship with the people and then their relationship with books. I can remember when we got a new textbook, and I have to close my eyes to think about it because it all comes back, we were taught how to properly handle a brand new textbook. We had to, hold on let me pull one off of the shelf. We had a new book, because there was a reverence for books in my whole life. There was a reverence for books. When we got a new textbook, we had to
open it up like this and then gradually on each side fold it down and crease it so that, I mean, we were really taught from little on up for this reverence.

_Kathryn_

When I started teaching in 1968 it was in Appalachia and I had first graders who had not been to preschool or kindergarten. I realized I didn’t have a clue what I was doing with them. It was very disturbing. I was just following the teachers’ guide step by step, but I knew that I did not understand reading. So the second year I was teaching in January I took a reading course and that got me hooked. So I got my master’s in reading between I guess it was ’70 and ’72... I think I’ve been hooked on reading ever since just loving trying to understand the process. I love diagnosing reading problems when I hear about them. Trying to figure out what’s missing with the student; what’s there, what’s not there. So I think it was my initial experience in teaching.

_Meredith_

My first job was a developmental first grade class... I get the basal reader. I’m very sequential. I’m very, you know, orderly and I’m trying to teach these kids how to read. And they couldn’t get it and I’m trying. I’m following the directions in the basal. So their supervisor for reading, the job that I currently have now, she came down to my first grade classroom and she said, okay, Meredith let me get this group together and let me show you. And I was like, oh, you don’t have to do all of the things like it says in the basal? I mean I really was a fledgling teacher, and so that piqued my interest. I’m a reader. I
wanted to teach my own kids how to read before they started school. I just liked it and you know it’s funny a little bit. I thought, I’d like to be like that person… that came down and helped the teacher. I just like it.

*Monique*

I remember a young man named Joe came in one day. We were doing some work in literature and I gave him a literature book and I said, “Joe, I’m going to come back to you in a couple of minutes, but we are silently reading. Just do me a favor and underline the words that you don’t know.” Poor Joe, he could barely write his name and he was in tenth grade. I mean that was the stopping block for me. I guess I had to be a problem solver my whole career. And I was thrown in situations where I was forced to come to some kind of conclusion like Joe, like working with high school kids, like working with middle school kids. At that time we were all sort of wallowing for an answer.

Each of these stories is unique, yet represents a foundation upon which each participant rests both her professional actions and personal beliefs. Supervisors continue to add layer upon layer of demonstrations of advocacy that are influenced by these early experiences situated in literacy.

**Extrinsic Contextual Factors Influencing Advocacy**

A second theme influencing advocacy was extrinsic contextual factors: supervisors’ roles and reading professionals’ roles. The two roles converged as literacy leaders efforts with their roles were focused on meeting students’ needs.

**Supervisors’ Roles**
A district reading supervisor holds a very unique role in the education system of public schools. Most often, and in all cases in this study, there is only one reading supervisor per district regardless of the size of the district or the number of students enrolled in that district. Additionally, in this study the supervisors were responsible for all aspects of comprehensive literacy education in grades K-12 including textbook adoptions, assessments, and professional development, often referred to as training by participants.

Support

Supervisors considered their main role as one of providing support to teachers, reading professionals and administrators. The support was represented in three main ways: 1) analyzing current situations; 2) bringing people together to build capacity; 3) facilitating and providing on-going and follow-up training.

Analyzing Current Situations. Supervisors related the need to support literacy by first using strategies to understand the current landscape in their districts and in particular buildings. Supervisors often used observation as a strategy for analyzing particular situations to gain an understanding of what was happening in schools. Based on her observation, Monique spoke of her needing to unite the county:

And what was happening in this county was that I would go into classrooms and there was no uniformity of materials. Teachers had bits and pieces of an old, old reading series. And I knew that although many people don’t believe in using basals, I knew the one way we would unite this county was through resources. So we did have the adoption.
Through observations, Audrey analyzed situations needing attention. She stated:

What I saw in the building was not cohesiveness for literacy in the building.

English teachers are dynamic, but everybody is working separately in a part, great social studies teachers, but no connection between social studies and English among any of the content areas really in term of literacy.

Similarly, Kathryn used a program evaluation and observation data as ways to analyze particular situations prior to moving ahead with any decisions. She told of an experience where she both taught with and observed teachers, not only to assist in student learning, but to gain a better understanding of the types of support systems she needed to put in place for that particular school. She said:

If you go into a school like gangbusters and you make everybody mad at you, from the beginning, it’s unlikely it’s going to turn around, but if you get in there and evaluate the situation. I worked in middle school a lot this year and there some things in there that really need to be changed, but I’m not sure it will happen or not, but the best way to get in there was to work with the teachers, observe the teacher, two classes once a week, I did that from January through April. I was physically in the school doing something, hopefully, that benefited the student and the teacher, and I think was sort of the lay of the land to see if I could make any in-roads in other ways. I did make some in-roads with other teachers and found out what was really going on and not going on because I was there. While I was there, I was there as an advocate.
for the students and more of a help to work with this class, not out to get anybody, not out to expose anybody, but kind of gathering my own information about what’s not going on there.

In addition to their personal observations, supervisors relied on assistance from others to determine strategies for support. Monique spoke of an experience occurring early in her supervisory position where she brought in two colleagues from a neighboring district to provide training using a professional book as the basis. From their observations and interactions with teachers, Monique was able to begin thinking about a course of direction for the district. She said:

I remember having lunch with these two women and them saying to me, telling me that they wanted to be credible in the course so they showed the teachers all of the books that were in their professional libraries, and the teachers asked them two questions. Who paid for the books and did your school district give you time to read them? And of course, their response was 1) the books came out of their own money because they were professionals, and 2) they did the reading on their own because they were professionals. And the thing that stopped me in my tracks as a supervisor was one of them looked at me and said, “Monique, your teachers don’t read.” And so I turned that around and said, “Okay, what do I do about it?”

Supervisors also relied on the assistance from other teachers, professionals and stakeholders in order to analyze current situations needing attention. Kathryn said:
When things aren’t going well somewhere one of my techniques is to say, okay, I’m going to wait a couple of days and I’m going to send a message out to all of the reading teachers and I’m going to say, “Are you having any difficulties with novel selection or any difficulties with teachers following the writing curriculum?” But I won’t tell them where it came from. Then I get and gather ideas and then I can kind of work my way through dealing with that particular problem.

Similarly, Amanda’s work at a faculty meeting provided a forum for her to analyze the current landscape of the school. She realized that offering more support to teachers was necessary. She said:

We divided into department team, subject areas, social studies teams, fine arts, and music team. What we asked them to do is visually depict what their conception of what literacy is…and what we learned from those posters and concept maps was that everybody has a clear definition of it. It’s just not a unified effort. I probably have one of the best conceptual representations from industrial arts. They really had a good handle on the significance of literacy and the part of those students in very clear kind of way. Maybe it’s because they are kind of visual in industrial arts. That part was really good. During it, we discussed it and they presented it and it worked out beautifully, but where do we go from that point?
On a more individual level, supervisors often observed teachers and reading professionals in instances where they were not performing their jobs as required. Supervisors were called upon to offer support and to strategize appropriate plans of action. Charlotte said:

So sometimes what we do is serve on …teams where we go in to observe a teacher who is in trouble and try to suggest things that will be helpful. And sometimes the teacher is devoted to becoming better and figures it out with our help and gets better. Many times the…team is sort of the last resort and it’s a process of helping the teacher decide that teaching is not the place for her to be. That it’s not a good fit for them. And that’s an awful awful job. I hate that part, but you get through it and you do it because you’re thinking about the kids. If the teacher isn’t somebody that would be good enough for my own children then she’s not good enough for anybody else’s children. And so you have to make some of the hard decisions sometimes. It’s not fun.

Meredith shared a similar experience of offering support to a struggling reading specialist. She said:

I have a teacher on a plan of assistance, so I made 26 visits to the school between December and February…A reading specialist not performing effectively. So that was quite comprehensive. Trying to work with this teacher. Trying to provide support, staff development, observe, feedback, that kind of thing to the teacher.
These examples showed supervisors using their roles to determine the direction in which literacy needs to move in their districts with an emphasis on providing support for students and teachers. After this initial period of determining what is needed, supervisors discussed forums for bringing people together in various ways in order to forge ahead with necessary next steps. Often, supervisors acted as facilitators to foster professional knowledge and growth in others in an effort to build capacity within their districts.

*Building Capacity.* All of the participants used committee work, faculty meetings and reading professionals’ meeting as venues for building professional knowledge. These structures provided supportive environments in which teachers communicated literacy initiatives, solved problems and sought to increase their content knowledge expertise. Data from supervisors’ perspectives showed that building capacity in teachers was necessary in order to meet the literacy goals in particular buildings and in the overall district. Audrey said:

> There is a certain passion for literacy and I have to find the vehicle to make it happen. This (literacy) committee was a way that it would happen; people would come, so now you are working with department coordinators and they don’t feel threatened because we are all equals. We are all sitting there talking about literacy and what we can do; hopefully something else will come out of it, something big.
Charlotte spoke of her needing to bring people together early on in her career in order to convey the message that the groups were working as one team in order to meet the needs of students. She stated:

There were two separate councils before I took this job. I really saw this as an opportunity to pull people together and not have, at the secondary level the reading people sometimes feel marginalized and I wanted to say by the way I handled this, that we’re working together for the same goals with the same children and we need to have a common vision of how that’s going to work.

So again I meet quarterly with them.

Monique realized early in her supervisor role that bringing people together, united in literacy efforts, was an important part of her job. She stated:

When I came to this school district there was nothing that united teachers. Nothing. Instruction was kids come in, they have a book, they read silently and the teacher asks them questions. That was no instruction. So I needed something to unite all the elementary schools and I needed something that was systemic that we could work with.

Supervisors worked with reading professionals in many different capacities and relied on them for support in classrooms. Building capacity helped to ensure that they were continuing to strengthen both content knowledge and leadership skills in conjunction with the supervisors. When discussing her meetings with the reading specialists in her district, Charlotte said this about her role as a facilitator in building capacity:
And you know, that’s kinda like how we build this collegial group because there is about fifteen of us when the elementary people are together. So it is small enough that we know each other…it’s a real powerful little sisterhood. And it’s important for them to get together. I love working with them. I’ve learned so much from the elementary reading specialists. Those Friday mornings when I get up and it’s going to be ‘meet with the reading specialists day,’ I’m really jazzed because I enjoy, well they have such deep conversations. And it’s important for them to get together, and I didn’t mention this earlier, especially for the ones who are the only reading specialist in the building. They have no peer in the building. They have to get together. Share their problems, and trials and tribulations with somebody else who understands the walk. So, part of what I do is provide the venue for that…We have to get together to do that.

Monique also expressed the value of bringing the reading specialists together in order to support their efforts and to provide an outlet for them to build capacity with one another.

They really, really, really want to deconstruct the reading process. They really want to share ideas of what they’re doing with each other and kids they are working with and somebody says, yeah I’m having a problem with this and somebody says well, have you tried that? And so we just have these rich discussions.
Audrey not only facilitated reading specialist meetings, but also used them as a way to initiate conversations with her supervisor, the deputy superintendent. She said:

We have meetings where all the reading specialists come, and at that time we discuss what’s happening in the buildings. I take that information back and give it to our deputy superintendent or we work out whatever it is that we need to do.

Supervisors acted as agents and brokers of knowledge rather than the ones who provided the knowledge in their efforts to build capacity. In discussing her work with reading specialists and her own lack of content knowledge in particular areas of literacy, Charlotte readily garnered outside assistance. She stated:

If something comes up in the reading specialists’ meeting and I don’t understand, I don’t try to fake it. I say, you know what, I don’t know the answer to that, but let’s call (Mary) and there’s a phone in the room and I do it right then and I put her on speaker phone. Well, they think that’s kinda cool and it doesn’t matter if the answer to the question came out of my head or somebody else’s head. If I can help facilitate that, then I feel like I’ve done my job.

Acting as facilitators as well, administrators in Audrey’s district worked in conjunction with a local university developing cohorts of teachers to join their reading specialist preparation program. Her district used these cohorts as ways to build a broader knowledge base in literacy; classroom teachers obtained reading
specialist endorsements, yet still remained classroom teachers. In expressing her belief that these cohorts build capacity in teachers, she asked:

One reading specialist generally in a building with a thousand students, how could that person ever possibly be as effective as he or she could be? But if we build our capacity with designated leaders that have reading specialist licenses, isn’t that more effective?

*Facilitating and Providing Training.* District reading supervisors’ roles included providing the right training at the right time to the right audience. Supervisors viewed professional development and training (used interchangeably by participants) as a type of support for rooting literacy within each school and district-wide. Audrey stated how important professional development was to her role. She said:

I do a great deal of professional development in my job that generally requires the approval of upper administration. Usually those ideas are generated from my mind. I do countless workshops all the time. A lot of it has to do with literacy. A huge aspect to what I did and what I continue to do. That’s just training. That also includes follow-up training.

Monique reinforced the integral role that professional development plays in her position. She stated:

Training is a big part of my job too. Obviously it has to be. Organizing and sometimes I even do the training myself. When I introduced or am introducing a course I do the first one myself and then I have my potential facilitators there with me and then they carry on the course when I move on to another
course. I still do some training. I like to get in there and scrapple with teachers.

Charlotte’s viewpoint represented an additional consideration in professional development which entailed being proactive in the planning process. Supervisors were in positions where they had to forecast training needs based on current trends and issues. Charlotte explained:

I plan a lot of staff development for reading specialists, English teachers and elementary classroom teachers. In the past two weeks I’ve tried to finalize the plans for next year because we’ll be sending out a staff development catalog. Some of those things I teach and some I just facilitate.

In many districts, the range of topics covered under professional development varied as to the needs of the teachers and goals for the students. This was demonstrated as to the wide array of offerings put-forth for educators by the supervisors. Both Meredith and Kathryn were responsible for professional development for preschool teachers. In addition, Kathryn’s district differentiated between elementary and secondary teachers based on needs. She said,

We do a lot of professional development for secondary in a totally different way from elementary. This year every grade level had two half-day workshops and they were focused on writing in one way or another. And next year we’re going to do it a little bit differently with professional development groups and we’ll probably have six topics. So they will meet seven or eight
hours during the course of the year for professional development, most of it being after school.

To ensure that a textbook adoption was initiated successfully, Monique designed a support system to provide teachers with multiple opportunities for fully understanding the new textbook series. She stated:

We give our teachers as much support as we can. When we had our adoption, we did things like we made sure every teacher had the books by May to take home over the summer, the teachers’ editions. When they came back to school, we had large training in the summer on the philosophy of the book and on the instructional framework, and what scaffolding instruction is and so forth. Then when they came back to school, we had a consultant in every school for at least one morning to answer questions. And so we continually provide support for our teachers.

Most training occurred in house, but occasionally, supervisors called upon outside professionals or allowed teachers and reading professionals to attend conferences. Providing teachers with professional development opportunities did more than just boost their knowledge base, it set the stage for teachers’ thoughtful decision-making as Monique explained:

What I also did was empowered teachers to be part of the decision making. And that’s where I started to get my ground swell. That’s where I started to take teachers to conferences, and spent a lot of money on professional development to bring people here and just say this is who we are as a
community. I’ve always told teachers, “Your job is to make those decisions in the classroom, that’s what you’re paid for. Those minute decisions were you have to decide A or B. You have to be equipped with all of the information that you can have to make those decisions.”

Supervisors also provided specific training for reading professionals based on their work with adult learners. Monique stated:

We’ve done a lot of training in terms of how you speak to teachers. We’ve done teachers as readers groups and how to work with people who don’t think like you. We had two of the trainers from New Jersey to train our coaches. And we send them to all kinds of training in literacy just to keep them on the cusp. We just finished training all of our reading specialists and all of our Title One reading specialists…and they are going to turn it around and train their staff next year in guided reading procedures.

Professional development also involved conversations with administrators as well. “In terms of leadership,” Monique stated, “my role was to train principals too, to bring them along slowly in terms of what they should be looking for in their classrooms.” Similarly, when Audrey spoke with the deputy superintendent, he determined that cohort participants had priority for receiving training on a new initiative. Audrey explained:

This year for the curriculum writing teams, the first people be considered it’s like you’ll get a star for this for the literacy cohort people, so what seems to be happening is these people were trained and our deputy superintendent isn’t
going to let that go. What’s going to happen is those people will be developed and given the opportunity to work on that team whether it happens to be curriculum or whatever it is, writing because they have been trained and they understand the investments have been made in these people. Now what they have to do is work in that capacity whatever they have been chosen to do to continue to promote literacy.

In addition to the multiple ways of offering professional development, supervisors discussed the importance of offering follow-up training as another supportive piece. Audrey said:

The follow-up piece which I think is as critical as the professional development piece because you can’t just let it go. That has to be, I think, a really well thought-out plan. There has to be a calendar for it and there has to be a follow through to do it. So I think that was a leadership piece that took place last year and continues this year in terms of we had a plan, it was implemented and teachers are doing it. There were walk-through observations that were the focus of the afterpiece and then those that weren’t doing it well got more encouragement, more observations. But not long involved observations with a checklist of things people don’t do. You can walk into a classroom and in ten minutes see really clearly what is going and not.

Monique relayed the necessity to continue with follow-up training based on the history of unsuccessful trainings in the past. She explained:
And we did training in scaffolded instruction. Well, our teachers had been so accustomed to going to DWPD (district-wide professional development) and coming back and making no impact on them. So they took this scaffolding very, this twenty hours of instruction, very lightly…Well, we had teachers come back and they hadn’t even opened the shrink-wrap. So, here we are again. So, I said, alright, we’ll provide one level of support. This is what we’re going to do. We had, Houghton Mifflin is our series and they had a representative, actually she was a former teacher that was one of their consultants, and she was in each school for a whole day based on a schedule, and teachers were able to bring individual questions to her so she could help them. In addition to that we had after school specials going on to help teachers.

**Accountability**

In addition to support, district reading supervisors used accountability as an influential factor in determining their roles, their tasks, how those tasks were played out, and how to situate the responsibilities imposed on educators and administrators. The two ways that supervisors held teachers and reading professionals accountable were through data, and by grounding the accountability in supervisors’ professional responsibility for bringing change to district.

*Data-Driven Accountability.* All participants spoke of the increased use of data as part of their responsibilities. The data were in various forms, including data from assessments such as Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL), Phonological Awareness
Literacy Screening (PALS), Developmental Reading Assessment® (DRA), and anecdotal data from observations. The purpose of using data was always connected back to students, often mediated through teachers. For example, Audrey discussed her responsibility as a supervisor for facilitating the use of data. She stated:

Most of our teachers, prior to the arrival of our new deputy superintendent and superintendent, had not heard really of how to administer a DRA properly or knew or understood that guided reading was a good practice or understood a center concept. So I do a lot with the DRA. I do an awful lot with PALS as well. So aligning that, coordinating that, going in as needed to give workshops for facilitators or even our reading specialists that come in that are new. We don’t have that built in program for them yet. So I work with PALS assessment, with DRA assessment. We are an assessment driven division. We also have an assessment called API: academic progress indicator. So I’m looking at API data and I am working with teachers to identify how that data compares to the DRA data or the PALS data. Then we’re working on how we identify strengths and weaknesses of students.

Responsibility for obtaining data included providing assessments, but also in creating assessments. Charlotte expressed:

I’m in charge of all our PALS testing. I’m in charge of the Gates MacGinitie reading testing. I’m in charge of something called Keys for Success for the kids who need to graduate and haven’t passed the writing. I organize and write
all the prompts for the writing benchmarks and gather all the materials. It’s a lot.

Monique spoke of her responsibility to bring assessment to the district in order to help teachers gain an understanding of student progress. She stated:

We do more testing than you ever would imagine. My job here in elementary school was to bring assessment into the picture. We had no assessments that our teachers gave that were county-wide that would tell them where children are and how they are progressing. I was appalled because I asked teachers, “When you sat down to meet with parents at conferences, what do you tell them without any support, without any documentation? How could you tell a student was improving?” But that was our big push: changing what was happening in the classroom, changing the assessments to inform instruction, and making our teachers more accountable for moving students along.

Supervisors spoke of the challenges associated with data and assessments including getting teachers to understand their value. Audrey stated:

It’s very difficult to get fifth and sixth grade teachers to assess all of their students. It’s an on-going battle for them to really understand that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages of the time spent. There’s always an argument about how much time it takes to do the assessment. Our deputy superintendent, we have just put our (fist on the table) you’ve got to do the assessment. Period. And you have to use the data to inform instruction.
Even knowing the benefits of using data, supervisors still experienced challenges in convincing teachers that assessments were beneficial for students if used and interpreted properly. Monique expressed:

The problem is that we still have some opposition coming in our assessment program. We still have a few teachers who really believe that a good teacher knows what a kid knows and can do and really doesn’t need an outside assessment. I think a good teacher to an extent can tell me, but unfortunately what the good teacher can’t tell me because that teacher is usually coaching that child all the time, is what a child knows and can do independently. I told them my goal here is for you to be able to pinpoint what every child in your class can know and do at that period of time. So, we started working with a whole battery of assessments.

Audrey spoke of data challenges as well when she provided the following vignette:

So they’re giving the DRA, these teachers, three times per year. That conversation never stops and it’s always negative. Why do I have to do this? It’s a 45 minute per student test. It takes so much time away from students. I had that conversation with a teacher on Friday. We’ve been in situations where we’re meeting with the deputy superintendent, with me, with the teacher, with the principal. The conversation continues. We have tried to make some sort of, well, instead of using the eighth grade topping out, let’s take an SOL score. If they have scored in the pass advanced, then you don’t have to it at mid-year, but you need that data. But the complaint is that you’re getting
API data and the middle school is getting very good at API data analysis and you’re doing DRA and you’re doing benchmark assessments. The general feeling is that you’re doing too many assessments. I really do believe if we could see how teachers are using some of this data in their instruction, then we might be able to work it a little bit differently. But I think first you have to send the message that gathering the data is critical if you are going to make any impact with students. So, yes, a lot of resistance to the assessment piece more than anything else, more than literacy practices. And I think that’s because they’re required to do the assessments, they’re not required to do the literacy practices. Sometimes you just don’t know what happens when the door closes.

Change. The data showed that a second way that supervisors used their roles to hold teachers accountable is through their perceptions of change within the district in which they work. Monique spoke of being hired to bring change to the school community when she said, “We made no bones about the fact that I was brought here to institute change. We all knew that up front and I didn’t make any bones about that in the interviews.” Much of the data pointed to supervisors forming a fundamental understanding of their roles as change agents related to textbooks, training and teaching. Kathryn spoke of the challenges of rallying support for the new textbook series. She explained:

We are only in the second year of new textbooks…All the changes that are involved and it’s been very good but it’s also been getting people to change is
not easy. So we had all new materials and getting the teachers to use the new materials has been in some cases like a breech birth. And there are some places where (the series) is still not unwrapped. In most places it’s being used but you have to have principal support to really make sure the materials are being used with fidelity. So that’s been an ongoing struggle. After two years I know where those spots are, where it’s not being used. So next year I plan on taking that on. Get in those schools. Observe. In terms of leadership, I want to stay on that (series) and find it. I really don’t want the teachers to get away with not teaching. I want them to teach. They are here to do a job and the job is to instruct students and instruct them well and I want that to be happening and provide an education for the kids.

Charlotte expressed a similar concern over bringing everyone on board with a new textbook adoption.

Now, this reading adoption was very different and it’s going to upset some of the teachers, but I had a committee of 32 people who went through it systematically. I added up the collective hours we spent on that project and it was over 1000 hours. They picked the right series. It’s a new series, not a basal…So they will struggle a little bit in implementing this because it’s a sea change. Hopefully, the principals will understand from the meeting we had last week. So the next big challenge is the implementation and I’m planning the staff development and those kinds of things. It will be, I mean, the people will have their little voodoo dolls burning me in effigy or whatever because
this series does not have a basal. But there are ones for whom change is scary, you know?

In Kathryn’s district, the initiation of a new a vocabulary and spelling program proved to be a difficult change as it required teachers to devote additional time to training. Kathryn said:

This year we moved word study, the UVA model, which is K-5. This year we included grade six, and put it in grade six reading, and not English. So we’ve had staff development all during the year in word study. And some of them have gone kicking and screaming. I think ten of eleven are doing it and doing it fairly well. So that’s been big.

Much of the change that supervisors instituted within their districts was related to teaching reading. Kathryn described the outcome of a study she conducted into the elementary language arts program which then provided the foundation and necessity for instituting change. She said:

We found three, four and five (grade level) teachers, many were teaching novels but the kids were just reading. They were doing very little questioning. They weren’t expanding on it or anything, and they weren’t doing word study or spelling or anything like that. That’s changed for the most part. We’ve really been working on that. It’s a very long process but it was worth it.

Monique also shared similar sentiments related to changing the way reading was conducted in her district. She explained:
When I investigated, it was called pick-up reading. Anybody in the middle school could teach the reading class. A math teacher, a science and then the writing was taught by an English teacher. That was the language arts. That I knew I had to stop. Right away. The coming of the SOLs and the impact of the SOLs and No Child (NCLB) helped me stop that because the issue was how do you expect a math teacher to teach a course in reading and when he’s not going to prepare, he has no vested interest, and he knows he may not have to do it next year? That was an organizational aspect we had to eliminate.

Monique also described a situation that occurred early in her career as supervisor in which she was confronted by a teacher about using trade books to teach reading. After several rounds of back-and-forth Q &A with the teacher (in front of hundreds of others) as to why she was using a particular book, what strategies was she teaching, what were the students getting out of the book besides the story, Monique ended the discussion by helping the teacher understand that changing the way reading was taught in the district was good for students. Additionally, she would provide support, yet hold teachers accountable for the change. She said to the teacher:

“My point is that book is just a vehicle. It’s the skills and the strategies that we directly teach our children to apply that’s instruction. What you’re doing is assigning. And in this school district you’re going to learn the difference between teaching and assigning. Because what you’re doing right now is assigning and your children aren’t learning. They’re learning about the story in the trade book and that’s about it.” “But,” and I said, “and the other thing
you’re going to learn is you’re going to reach a point in this school district when I can walk up to you and I can ask, tell me what this child can do in literacy and tell me what this child needs to learn? And you’re going to be able to do that for every one of your children and you’re going to have proof of it.” So, that’s it.

Supervisors spoke of challenges related to change and needing to move districts forward. This resulted in having to satisfy numerous stakeholders in the process.

Charlotte said:

The board had some questions about the adoption. The question that I anticipated was, ‘Why does this cost so much money?’ but apparently they don’t have context on what it is supposed to cost. This is a relatively new board, so that was not an issue. Their issue was that they had heard from a couple of disgruntled teachers who wanted the other programs to be chosen out of the final two. They wanted to know what I was going to do to bring those teachers on board. I talked about the training plan and quickly typed up a little something to show them what plan it was going to be. The teachers are still not fine with it since we last talked, which was last Monday. One teacher tendered her resignation, citing the adoption of the new reading series as the reason. That could be bogus and she could have been bothered about something else as well and just wanted to get that last lick. In this economy, if she thinks she can get a job somewhere else, God bless her.
Similarly, Audrey provided a vignette in which she faced challenge in accountability with both data and change related to assessment. She enacted her role as supervisor for the sake of preserving the validity of the data. She stated:

Recently we had an incident with someone changing a form for data analysis and this became an issue between a principal and me. My decision was that they needed to do the whole DRA all over again, because they changed the form and the data wasn’t recorded properly. And if you’re going to send that message, you’re skewing your data and that’s okay, then what’s the point of gathering data? So, generally I don’t make an issue out of things but I thought this was important enough to make an issue out of things. So, that situation definitely influenced the decisions I was making because it went to the next level. How did it get there? I took it to the next level. I don’t like to make enemies with anyone, but this was a matter of someone was allowed in the building to change a form and then it became an issue between the principal and me. So, here’s how it ended. The deputy superintendent was very diplomatic. No one was right and no one was wrong. They didn’t have to redo their data, but they did have to reconfigure the form to the way it used to be. It’s diplomatic. It’s a political decision and I probably knew that it was going to be a political decision, but my message was sent out that you just don’t arbitrarily do that. It skews data. She sent me the message that, the principal did, that they’re working just as hard as everybody else and if it was a mistake
then we have to be crystal clear about what we’re doing in messages that are sent which I thought was ridiculous, but anyway, anyway.

Finally, each supervisor spoke of how long it takes change to happen, but that if goals were set, teachers supported on the way to that goal, and teachers were held accountable to that goal, then change could have positive effects on the literacy lives of children. Monique stated:

I used to say…you change a person’s beliefs first, and then their actions follow. Well, there was a Showers’ study done where they said no. With many people they change their actions and their beliefs follow. We have people that would step right in, the ten-percenters or the twenty-percenters and they would say yes, I believe that and I’m going to do that. There are others that you will have to set a dead line for and tell them no is not an option, you will, by a certain date, I will be able to see guided reading, small group instruction in your classroom, but I will provide as much support as you need as long as you are moving forward. Once they go through these actions and then they start seeing some success with their children, then they start believing.

Audrey summed up how accountability was slowing changing perspectives. She stated:

Prior to their (superintendent and deputy superintendent) arrival… we had very little in place in our schools system in terms of any kind of uniform assessment, curriculum, and programs. It was hit or miss. The teachers had a curriculum, but they did what they wanted to do. When the new leadership
arrived, little by little, things were put into place that created a really solid foundation for assessing and for curriculum development and for good solid teaching. This is one of those things that I think has really made teachers understand that literacy is critical in all areas from K-12

Reading Professionals’ Roles

Reading specialists, reading teachers and literacy coaches were the three different terms supervisors used most frequently to represent the literacy leaders in their schools. Title One teacher and reading facilitator were used less frequently. I have combined all of these titles into the term reading professionals for ease of use.

Support

The roles and responsibilities that the reading professionals played varied from school to school, even within a particular district. This was due to the fact that principals in every school were permitted to decide how the reading professionals’ time and talents were distributed. The main theme that emerged from the data regarding reading professionals’ roles was one of support. This support was identified in three ways: supporting supervisors, supporting principals and supporting teachers.

Supporting Supervisors. District supervisors spoke of reading professionals as being more than teachers with a particular expertise. They spoke of them in terms of being the link between the supervisor’s goals for literacy within schools and the school staff’s potential for meeting those goals. Reading professionals were responsible for more than teaching teachers or teaching reading. Their positions were elevated to ones of literacy leadership in the eyes of the supervisors. When speaking
of the reading professionals in her district, Meredith said, “They’re really the conduit for information from me out to staff. So if we do any staff development, my hope is that they’re going to take that out and share that information.”

In her description of reading professionals, Monique elaborated on their supportive roles even further and said:

They are more than just conduits for me. I can’t be in every building and the questions that I’m asked as a district person… I can’t answer these little day to day questions that are site specific. The reading specialist does that. I have to address those broad questions across the school district. Yes, I see they’re well respected and I always give them the first opportunity to go to a conference. The first opportunity if they want to attend a Reading Rockets taping or something like that, yeah, I give them, they get priority… I feel one of my strongest accomplishments has been the role of the reading specialist in the school and elevating that position to one of literacy leader in the school.

Audrey similarly spoke of a reciprocal supportive relationship with reading professional when she said:

When they have a problem with something or they are resistant to an idea, they’ll generally come and they’ll say something to me like I don’t think this is the best idea or how could this possibly work or this isn’t based on any research and then we’ll sit and we’ll talk to it.

Charlotte commented on how she relied on reading specialists. She explained:
So that first year I was in the job, I spent a lot of time building relationships and I know exactly which elementary reading specialists I can count on for their advice. The experienced ones, the ones that have recently come out of a strong program at UVA and know their stuff.

Supporting Principals. “If someone needs a follow up on a center activity or a guided reading activity they’re going to do it because their principal asks them to.” This simple statement made by Audrey exemplified supervisors’ overall understandings of reading professionals’ supportive roles. They worked under the guidelines of the principals because the principals were the people ultimately running the schools. Meredith said:

We’re not a site based school division; however, we have a superintendent who really promotes the principal making decisions. So I say here’s what I want you to do. But, the principal runs the school. I don’t. However, I do make it my business and it’s the business of the reading specialist, too.

Charlotte spoke of principals perceiving reading specialists as leaders. She stated, “Different principals see the role of the reading specialist differently but most of them see their reading specialists as literacy leaders. Partners in doing that (leading literacy efforts).”

Monique spoke of the benefits of having reading professionals who worked in conjunction with the principals. She said:

We train them (reading professionals) in the principles of literacy and that type of thinking and then we said to principals, look you have people in your
building who are experts, who are knowledgeable. They are more important than just pulling kids. So once they started doing courses, once the principals started looking to them for advice, once they started working in classroom shoulder to shoulder with teachers and principals saw what flexible roles they had, that’s when the principal elevated them. And when the principal elevates you, the rest of the building does too. They are very close to the principal. The principals do see them as literacy leaders and that’s because we’ve refined our reading specialists in terms of attrition.

Similarly, Kathryn stated:

Some of them are just very innovative and work like this (fingers crossed) with the principals. They are just teammates and some principals…say you tell me what you want to do and come back and sit down with me and we’ll look at it.

Meredith described how specialists support principals by keeping them informed. She stated:

They go in once a week for maybe five to ten minutes for once every two weeks for a longer period of time. They catch the principal up on what they’ve been doing, but it’s not a tattletale session, it’s I’m working with grade three and we are progressing on. It’s not well so-and-so won’t let me in. It’s nothing like that. They spend a year developing trust.
Interestingly, Audrey conveyed her perspective that principals might not have a clear understanding of how reading professionals can be supportive, especially if the principal is not knowledgeable in literacy. She stated:

Quite frankly, I’m not sure that all the principals know what a reading specialist does on a day to day basis unless the principal is grounded in early literacy, and I’m talking about elementary school. Most aren’t. Most aren’t. We have one in our division that is and she has a very different relationship with her reading specialists than the other buildings. And her scores are phenomenal in literacy as a matter of fact. So, why do I think that this is taking place? I think that people need clear cut guidelines of what their responsibilities are. It’s very hard to do with a reading specialist because everything’s related to literacy.

Even though principals didn’t necessarily know the minute details of a reading professional’s position, supervisors felt that the two parties sought and worked toward respectful relationships with one another.

Supporting Teachers. Reading professionals provided various types of support to teachers. Data revealed that most provided teaching assistance by pushing into classrooms to co-teach, model or work with small groups. Some used small group pull-out instruction to meet the needs of struggling readers. Still others do more, as Charlotte stated, “…are able, depending on their schedules, to do a little push in and a little bit of coaching.”
Beyond working with students, reading professionals conducted professional development, administered assessments and facilitated data-analysis groups. Adding another facet to their roles, Kathryn stated:

They sort of work politically within the school making sure everything is going well and that the third grade teachers are working together and that they are working out the politics of working together…They keep on top of what materials teachers need. They make sure they get to the right people.

When discussing the reading professionals in her district, Monique elaborated on the fact that they were ultimately in place to assist teachers in meeting the needs of students. She said:

In order to be a literacy coach in this school system, you had to have been a reading specialist and you have to have this level of respect from the reading teachers. Teachers may say, I don’t necessary agree with what she says, but I know that she knows what she is talking about. That level of respect has to be there. I don’t have the time to hire high maintenance people. I can only hire people who come to us with a sound knowledge base, a sound foundation and are willing to grow, grow, and grow. …There (pointing out the door), out there everyday. That’s their sole reason for existing in schools. They are there to help the teachers help the children.

Meredith discussed the fact that no concrete model exists for reading professionals to follow; however, in their close work with teachers, reading specialists needed to be
adept at building relationships if they wanted to be considered the literacy leader within the school. Meredith said:

There is not a particular model for a reading specialist. Of course it’s changed over the years, more toward the coaching kind of thing, so I think building relationships is exceedingly important because you can know a lot, but the classroom teacher who is with 28 kids or 125 kids really doesn’t care. So you’ve got to really bend over backwards. How can I work with you?

Audrey summed up the supportive role that reading professionals play on a daily basis within schools. She said:

Just incredible responsibilities. Just huge, huge. It is absolutely huge what they do, and anyone that says that they don’t work is foolish. Because they don't have students, sometimes that is part of the overall assumption for those teachers that they’re not working hard enough because they don’t have any students.

Role Convergence: Meeting Students’ Needs

District reading supervisors and reading professionals have unique roles within individual schools and throughout districts. These extrinsic roles have been influenced by prior experiences with literacy, and are factors which ultimately affect how literacy leaders perceive and demonstrate advocacy. The data in this study
indicated a single way that these two roles intertwined: through the shared responsibility of meeting the needs of students.

*Supervisors Meeting Students’ Needs*

Both district supervisors and reading professionals shared the commonality of being in positions which provided an educational service to students. Supervisors, while often not directly working with students, felt that through their work with various education personnel, they had the ultimate responsibility for the literacy education of all students in their districts.

Meredith discussed her work with the school board as she attempted to keep Reading Recovery in the district. Their question of ‘worth’ was related to the cost of funding the program, while Meredith’s view on ‘worth’ was related to the value of the program to each individual child. She said:

I presented to the school board in 1997 because the school board was questioning if the Reading Recovery was worth it or not. So, I told them what Reading Recovery intervention was like and after describing my training to them then I asked myself why would I need a year of training? After all, I have a doctorate in reading. The answer is that there is not prescribed formula for meeting the needs of each student. The teacher needs to be trained to make on the spot decisions about the most productive way to teach the child to accelerate its progress in literacy.

Just as supervisors were strategic in the way they analyzed situations before offering avenues of support, the data demonstrated that they were similarly strategic
when it came to meeting the needs of students. With students failing the state’s standardized tests, Monique designed a course specifically to meet the needs of a particular student population. She hoped the effort would assist them in getting over the assessment barrier. She said:

We have children that fail the SOL test. We cannot just let them go onto high school without any type of attention. So what we did was we developed a course called English Nine Literature and Literacy. And the requirements of the course are that you are in a class of fifteen or less. The principals have assigned what we consider to be the most creative, best English teachers of ninth grade to that course. The teacher teaches the English SOL, the curriculum map, but teaches explicit reading strategies which we call our comprehension strategies…They are melded with in that course.

Charlotte created a similar program in her district to meet the needs of at-risk students. Her thoughts went beyond the realm of reading, acknowledging social issues that might hinder the students’ overall ability to perform. Having an understanding that education transcends textbooks showed a genuine concern for the students’ interests and needs. She said:

We also have a ninth grade transition program at each of the high schools for kids that are at-risk for a variety of reasons. Some of them are fine readers and you know, have no social skills, and they’re going to get eaten alive and they’re going to be the victims of bullies or whatever. So it’s a mixture of
kids, but for the ones that are in that transition program the large number of
them have some reading issues.

In this era of accountability, supervisors were willing to look past test scores in
order to provide students with the instruction and materials necessary for them to
reach their full potential. Kathryn stated:

We know that there is a whole lot more beyond the SOL, so even if the kids
are doing well on the SOL, there is so much more than that and to teach
students in writing. We know that it’s a really, really good program and that
they would be much better writers if the teachers use it as oppose to letting
them slide by with creative writing and a occasional response to reading. I feel
very strongly that there needs to be consistency across schools when you have
a curriculum and material to support that curriculum. Even though teachers in
schools need flexibility to make some choices, they still need to say that if you
went to public schools, you learned, and this is what you learned. So that is
why I keep at it.

Supervisors were cognizant of using data to inform their decisions about
instruction and materials with the end result being meeting students’ needs. Audrey’s
vignette demonstrated a commitment to all students regardless of background. As was
typical for all participants, Audrey had working knowledge about the population’s
needs in each particular school and in the district overall. She said:

Again, we have a very high ESOL population and we have to be very specific
about what it is these children need because it’s not working just making these
guesses. So our plan is, through all of this data we’ve got to get specific and that’s the best way that we can do it through that analysis.

Reading Professionals Meeting Students’ Needs

Supervisors expected that reading professionals were doing all they could to meet the needs of students’ in their schools. Just as the data showed how varied reading professionals’ roles were, it also showed that they used different techniques to make certain they were providing students with learning environments and learning tasks designed to target specific needs. Supervisors also ensured that structures were in place to hold reading professionals accountable for their tasks. Monique explained:

Because I want the reading specialist in the school to be able to tell me who’s performing, who isn’t performing, why aren’t those kids performing and who’s doing something about it and what’s being done. And that’s a predetermined meeting and so before that even happens, and they have a form they have to complete, a data review form, they have to meet with the principal and generally the assistant principal and they have to go through all of this. So the principal hears through the reading specialist, test results and what’s happening to address those children, what interventions are occurring.

Some reading specialists worked directly with students to meet their needs. Supervisors described scenarios where reading professionals taught both year-long courses and short-term pull-out programs based on the needs of students and desires of principals with regard to scheduling and prioritizing. Monique described one such
course, being quite strategic in planning who taught it and for how long, and more importantly, she described how the students’ skills were supported in other settings.

She explained:

The reading specialist there teaches a (reading comprehension) course… to all of the sixth graders. So we believe that in that school those children come from probably our most disadvantaged homes and they are our most at risk children so before they go any further in middle school we want to make sure that they have a strong foothold in the metacognitive strategies. So she teaches those throughout the school year to them. It’s a course. They meet 45 minutes every other day. So she does no pull-out the whole year but what’s unique about that school, and you have to look at the personnel of the school too. Their English staff is very strong in reading so those children who would have normally gone out to the reading specialist in seven and eighth grades, they are working in the classroom with a very adept teacher who understands literature and understands the reading process.

Supervisors were cognizant of issues that took time away from students. For example, Meredith said, “I don’t want to see planning time during the middle of the day. There are students in need and there are things you can be doing, so it’s the principal that makes the decision. It can be frustrating.” Charlotte added similar sentiments when she discovered that one of the reading professionals had playground duty, she said, “What the heck is your principal giving you playground for? You could be planning, or you know, doing more reading.”
Intrinsic Contextual Factors Influencing Advocacy

The third overall theme to emerge from the data was intrinsic contextual factors influencing advocacy. There were two categories inherent to literacy leaders as they discussed their roles and efforts with students: professional dispositions and personal dispositions. Professional dispositions were the beliefs and attitudes that supervisors perceived as necessary to their positions and reading professionals’ as well. Professional dispositions were described as being visible and directly linked to and embedded in performance. On the other hand, personal dispositions were those internal beliefs and attitudes that literacy leaders brought with them to their positions, which in turn, influenced their professional dispositions.

I discussed and analyzed dispositions as two distinct categories, but often the lines between the two were extremely intertwined and blurred, not just for the supervisors, but for myself as researcher. This tapestry of dispositions reflected the complexities associated with all the intrinsic matter brought to leadership positions.

As supervisors expressed their perceptions of dispositions necessary for literacy leadership, they spoke of how relationships were then positioned and negotiated in order to achieve their literacy goals for the district. These goals were explicitly tied to students and teachers, and ultimately linked back to the extrinsic factors of meeting students’ needs. Advocacy was then demonstrated as supervisors engaged in actions to ensure that students’ needs were met.

*Professional Dispositions*
Data related to professional dispositions were separated into two categories: dispositions held by supervisors about themselves and dispositions held by reading professionals as perceived by supervisors. Supervisors’ dispositions revolved around having a guiding philosophy while within reading professionals, the data showed two sub-categories of knowledge and leadership.

**Supervisors’ Professional Dispositions**

Supervisors expressed professional dispositions that were related to having a strong philosophy about working toward district goals and doing what was in the best interest of students. However, supervisors described individual and unique dispositions necessary to achieving those goals.

*Guiding Philosophy.* Kathryn spoke of her philosophy in terms of not giving in to others when she felt she was on the right track toward a goal especially when supported by peers. She stated:

> Probably because I am stubborn and I know that I will dig my heels in about things that I think are right and I know that other people around me agree that this is the right way to do something or the best way to do something in this case. If I was out on a limb by myself, I may say, nah it’s not that important. If it was just me, I would reconsider. There’s a bit of stubbornness too, that I guess that I really don’t like real mavericks, I think they are hurting the kids. It’s a disservice to our kids when teachers will let them slide.
Kathryn’s commitment to students was evident in her determination to do what’s right for students in the end. Her subtle comment about ‘disservice to kids’ demonstrates an advocacy orientation toward her work as supervisor.

Monique also spoke of having a goal and not giving up on it even though it may take years for it to be realized. She expressed her disposition in this way:

So, what we’ve really done is we’ve standardized procedures, materials, and resources across the county. So that we really do have a county culture. And we’ve done that K-12. That role of unifying the teachers, establishing a county philosophy and a county way of thinking and doing and procedures and guidelines and empowering teachers to make decisions. The issue has been now, what do we do with our teachers who are hesitant? Well, my position in terms of leadership is that you set a goal and you realize it’s going to take us quite a few years to get to that goal. It’s going to take us quite a few years to change the culture of this school district and each school to a guided reading culture.

Other supervisors spoke of achieving goals in terms of attitude. Audrey felt that having a positive attitude helped her carry out the responsibilities of her position. She stated:

I’ll do anything I can in a positive way to do it. And it’s always, it’s always, on a positive note. If someone doesn’t email me, I’ll positively respond again. I won’t do something silly like forward the email again with a question mark or a sad face. I’ll do something to follow up on that. My job is to get the job
done and I’ll do anything I can to get it done. I usually do. Very seldom do I not get it done, but then I’m constantly on it.

Charlotte believed that in order for her to achieve goals, the strength to persevere was most important. She said:

Oh, number one would probably be perseverance. Doing anything with reading you don’t get instant results, so it has to be somebody that is in it for the long haul and will accept the baby steps as signs of progress and keep pushing…Perseverance and that love of kids in advocating for literacy within that building and that political thing outside of the building when you want to pull the parents and pull in the community. There’s just self-confidence and empowerment. That’s what it takes, I think. I honestly think almost anybody can do it, except people that are so painfully shy. You got to be somebody that’s outgoing. People that are shy may have another type of role in a very quiet behind the scenes kind of way. You have to be a promoter.

Meredith held a disposition that was related to the moral issue of schooling and providing as much information to parents as possible. In working with preschool registration she stated:

I think about preschoolers. That’s at the top of my list right now because we have over 260 applicants who are preschoolers and we are trying to get to these families…so, morally I think the more education we can give to our parents and understand in terms of schools. The only time you can control is when the students are in schools.
Reading Professionals’ Dispositions

Supervisors had very strong feelings on the dispositions necessary for reading professionals to be successful in their jobs. This included knowledge and leadership capabilities.

Knowledge. By far, the most prominent sub-category was knowledge as each supervisor felt adamant that reading professionals come to their positions firmly grounded in the understanding of reading processes, skills and strategies. Meredith described the type of knowledge she looked for during the hiring process. She said:

When I am interviewing somebody, I really, I want to know that you are current in terms of reading research, demonstrate a commitment. I think that you have to be knowledgeable; we are talking about the instructional day, and from what I know that there are about 4 hours and 40 minutes of instruction. I’m looking for that depth of knowledge. At least what I think is a depth of knowledge, in terms of finding somebody.

Monique continued on with an even richer description of what constituted knowledge of reading in potential hires. She stated:

First of all they better know reading. They better know the reading process. They better know what scaffolded instruction is. They better have an explanation of what guided reading is, what shared reading is, the value of independent reading, a framework for instruction in the classroom, a framework for delivery. Yes, they have to know the information at their fingertips. And my first question is, “Can you explain the role of the cueing
systems in the reading process?” And if they can’t explain that and expand
that then I know they are not grounded in our philosophy of reading.

Kathryn emphasized the intersection of various components of literacy when
describing what she looks for in a reading professional. She explained:

Really understanding reading, writing, word study, how they fit together, the
importance of language with all that. Now we have some superb reading
teachers. We really really do, so I expect the reading knowledge to be there.
To me that is a given. Good people skills, so that they can really work with
teachers and not have barriers put up. And then a great knowledge of literacy
and be up-to-date and not be stuck in 1982.

Even though Charlotte did not actually hire reading professionals, she felt it was
imperative that she be present in interviews, especially after a principal purposefully
excluded her from an interview. She explained:

I sort of put my little foot down and said you know what? I at least need to be
present for a screening of these people. Hire whomever you want, but I want
some input here because principals do a very good job but sometimes they
don’t have all of the technical knowledge. You know I don’t have a lot, but
over seven years I have learned some stuff. I can ask some questions of a
reading specialist to see what the depth of their knowledge is.

Regardless of who actually hired them, supervisors agreed that reading
professionals’ lack of current content knowledge had adverse effects on students,
teachers, and sometimes even district programs since reading professionals were
highly visible in their service to others. Audrey described a situation where a reading professional lacked current knowledge in reading which led to a detrimental effect on a district program. She said:

I’m sitting here thinking about successful reading specialists that we have in our division compared to what I would perceive, what I would call unsuccessful and I think staying current in your field is critical. So, I would say that folks that have recently received, have taken classes in reading are probably going to be more successful than someone that hasn’t had a reading class in the past fifteen or twenty years. No question about that in my mind. I don’t think age is a factor, but I do think that renewing that license is clearly a factor because what you can learn in reading changes significantly. One of the reading specialists that hasn’t taken a class in over twenty years, has not implemented programs with efficacy, and I think it’s because she simply doesn’t believe in it. Now, if she had maybe done some research or some reading. She’s been trained in it, on what brain-based intervention can do. I think she would have a clearer understanding on where we’re going with that. So, I think you need to be updated in your field. That’s not just literacy; that’s everybody that teaches.

The data revealed that supervisors held philosophies about what makes a good reading professional. They relied upon their experiences to decide fairly quickly whether or not an individual was suited to work in their district. Monique explained:
We know what we’re looking for. We want high caliber people and we are up front in terms of what we expect them to do. Generally with us, we hire from within. They are all very seasoned and accomplished and they are not high maintenance. I can’t have high maintenance literacy coaches. In fact generally when we interview, if they can’t answer the first question the interview is over.

Similarly, Meredith told of an experience hiring someone that really wasn’t prepared for the job, but that she needed to hire a reading specialist quickly. In hindsight, she learned the importance of having a solid knowledge base in reading. Meredith explained:

I’ve heard it said and I believe it to be true is, you can tell in a very very short time is this somebody that’s going to be worth it or is this somebody who’s wasting my time? I think a little bit of it is the gut kind of thing from experience. And I like to know people have had varied experiences. I mean when I was a new principal, I hired somebody who had gone through five years of college and gotten licensed as a reading specialist with a master’s in Pennsylvania. And she couldn’t in Virginia because you have to have the three years of classroom experience. I was all in a tizzy. I thought, I’ve got to hire this reading specialist. She was terrible. But it wasn’t really her fault. She had no grasp of what a second grade child should be doing or a fourth grade child should be doing. So luckily I put her on the December list which means is a warning; you may not get a contract next year and luckily she took a job
someplace else because I really liked her but she didn’t have the depth of knowledge.

Leadership. In discussing necessary dispositions for reading professionals, supervisors expressed the need for them to have leadership skills. For Monique, this meant being comfortable to take risks as she said:

I also look for people who aren’t afraid to be leaders. Who aren’t afraid to take a chance; somebody who’s willing to step up to the plate. I don’t want shallow people who use the terms and don’t know what it looks like when you implement it.

For Kathryn, leadership was much more about being organized and trustworthy in order to build respect among colleagues. She explained:

Leadership skills, very important. And most of them have it but you find that if a person isn’t well organized and have leadership skills and then at the teacher level other teachers won’t respect them. So I think that having leadership skills is very very important in a school. If they are always a losing everything and always late to meetings, late to teach a class, late to pick up kids they are going to lose the respect of the teachers in the building and they are not going to be able to do much of anything.

Meredith’s comment reinforced the connection between knowledge and leadership when she said, “I think in terms of leadership: having a knowledge base, participating in the training, supporting other people. I’m looking for somebody who wants to learn and wants to collaborate.” Her statement expresses an orientation toward advocacy as
leadership behaviors and collaboration are aligned with providing the best possible outcomes for others (Wepner & Quatroche, 2008; Wepner, et al., 2006, 2003). In this statement, Meredith is getting to the foundation of what advocacy looks like in literacy leaders.

Personal Dispositions

Within the following vignettes, participants used the word advocate and advocacy for the first time during interviews in response to my questions about considering themselves and reading professionals as advocates. The complexities associated with the meanings and influences behind those terms began to play out as participants spoke directly about advocacy beliefs. Three categories of personal dispositions emerged from the data: passion, purpose and internal drive. Supervisors felt these were characteristics literacy leaders needed to possess in order to be successful in their jobs.

Passion.

Supervisors spoke of passion as requisite for being a literacy advocate. This passion revolved around reading, teaching and students. Audrey expressed passion in this way:

I think passion is related to what you do; it’s needed for everybody in every walk of life in every occupation. I think you need to set goals and be passionate about it. I think you need to love what you do and if you don’t love what you do obviously you can’t be passionate about it. So in answer to that specific part of your question, be it literacy or math or anything, I think you
can’t ever do anything extremely well unless you’re passionate about it. Some people are more passionate than others obviously and there are a lot of reasons for that, but I think you need it, yes. I think by virtue of the fact that I have a passion for reading and writing and a lot of students and have been a teacher for the most of my life, yes, I say that I would absolutely, yes that I support literacy and advocate for literacy.

Meredith also spoke of passion as necessary for both reading specialists and classroom teachers. She said:

A passion would need to be in place. A knowledge base. A relationship, so that you could reach out to people. I hope the reading specialists that I hire have the passion, if they don’t act like they have the passion, then I’m not interested in them coming to (this county). If they don’t have the knowledge, then I’m not interested in them coming here either. You either have the passion or don’t…You have to have talent, but you have to also have a passion. I see that with people that I hire, regardless of whether they are reading specialist or classroom teachers, you’ve got to have passion for what you do and you’ve got to have some talent and you certainly have to have knowledge.

Purpose
Supervisors suggested that having purpose regarding literacy was a necessary disposition for literacy leaders. Charlotte spoke of having the purpose of empowering students by modeling, teaching and mentoring students. She said:

You’ve got to empower kids to do what you can do yourself so they can do it. You can, you can almost teach somebody sometimes to do something that you can’t do yourself. I call that the Michael Jordan thing. Somebody had to be able to coach Michael Jordan even though they couldn’t do Michael Jordan. I know he’s an old example, but name any virtuoso at anything. There’s still somebody who mentors them and helps them bring out the best in them. Gives them whatever feedback they need developmentally to make it to the next level, make it to the next level. And when you have a virtuoso student like that, and that happens, you have to be careful. You have to make sure that you don’t get jealous of that kid and stifle what they’re trying to do. So you have to open the doors. You have to give them, particularly when you’re working with children in poverty, you have to make sure that your expectations for them are every bit as high as they are for everybody else. That you show them worlds that they didn’t imagine and help them get there. That’s what, that’s what my teachers did for me.

Purpose for Monique was expressed in terms of having a moral imperative related to her work, a societal obligation to provide literacy education to all. She said:
I’ll give you an excellent example. We have a guided reading initiative going on right now and we did a train the trainer model. One of the questions that is being brought back to us is that our children are doing well on the SOL test, so why do we have to change what we are doing and work with children in small guided reading groups? The real answer to that is, we can’t judge ourselves based on the SOL scores because our SOL is minimum basic skills and we really can’t say that that is developing literacy. We, as human beings, have this obligation to the next generation of children to take them to their highest level of literacy. They need a standard, yes, but we also have that obligation as human beings in continuation of society and continuation of intellectual growth to address them as human beings and learners and just to keep them on that road of curiosity and development. It’s much more than the SOL test. Literacy is the foundation of everything. If you don’t feel this is your heart, then we don’t want you to teach for us.

For Audrey, having a purpose was related to goal setting. She perceived having goals as necessary to doing what you love to do. She said:

So first it was set goals and the second thing was, no one told me this, but I have to think about that came about, you’re happier when you’re doing what you like doing. Isn’t it great to have an occupation where you’re happy all the time, most of the time? Because you like what you’re doing. That was just a figure it out thing, I think. But all that stems from setting goals, but I don’t think that most people don’t set goals for things they don’t like. They set goals
for things they want to achieve and then they realize that if they achieve those
goals they’re really happy so let’s pursue more of what you’re happy about.
That stems from childhood and the impact that my education, my upbringing
had on me.

*Internal Drive*

Supervisors perceived that the desire, push and drive to be a literacy leader and
advocate came from inside oneself. Factors such as upbringing and education played
a part in forming this drive; however, supervisors stated that there was something else
more elusive that came from within empowering literacy leadership. Monique
expressed it as having to do with conscience. She said:

> Just like everybody else, there are good, bad, and poor teachers. There are
> excellent teachers and there are poor teachers and they really don’t advocate
> for anything, but themselves. It’s almost like some people are born with more
> of a conscience than others. They just have this instinct to be part of
> something, to be self-filled, to be driven.

Audrey described advocacy in terms of it being a driving force behind an issue.
She said:

> I think you could be taught how to advocate on a superficial level, but that
> would more of having awareness for it. I think having a distinction between
> intrinsic and extrinsic says it all. I think when you have a love for something,
> somehow it comes from within and it is a driving force and nothing will get in
its way. Now that might be a little bit powerful and forceful, but I believe that with everything. If you were truly motivated to do something, be it literacy or gymnastics or good basketball player or whatever it happens to be, it’s a driving force that comes from within. I would say that passion comes from within, and that what I can do is direct and I can expose and I can show the advantages for, but the passion comes from within. It’s like motivating your children. It needs to come from within and you can guide and you can direct and you can talk about goal setting and all of that, but I think somehow it comes from within.

In their statements above, both Audrey and Monique speak of advocacy as coming from some internal place inside, yet, they also spoke of childhood influences and education. It appears that there may be multiple facets to how one perceives the roots and subsequent manifestations of advocacy.

Finally, data previously discussed showed that literacy leaders were strategic and analytic in situations where problems needed to be solved or decisions made. Monique spoke of the desire to be a problem solver as coming from within a person and similar to Audrey’s explanation of drive, although she raised it to a higher level. She described it as this:

I think that there are people out there who are problem solvers. There are people out there who have this drive to be part of something bigger than them, so you would advocate for a lot of things. When you are part of this thing that
is bigger than yourself and you are so meshed in it sometimes you don’t see beyond. I think that there are people that are born with the consciousness of contributing to something bigger than them in this world.

**Disposition Convergence: Negotiating and Positioning Relationships**

The third theme coming out of the data on intrinsic contextual factors data was negotiating and positioning relationships. This was the point at which professional and personal dispositions merged. Supervisors gave numerous examples of how they established and worked through relationships with others in order to achieve their goals. In doing so, it was very evident that there was a connection between their dispositions and how they approached relationships, particularly with principals. As established above, professional and personal beliefs are woven together. Thus, this intricate interplay of dispositions held by supervisors influenced how they approached and maneuvered through relationships. For example, Charlotte spoke of a potential conflict between a reading professional and a principal as a relationship she needed to negotiate. It was critical to respect certain boundaries in order to preserve the individual relationships she had with each person. She said:

So now I know that I’ve got to watch, you know, what’s going on over there. I wasn’t aware that there was a problem and it just may be it’s the end of the year. Everybody’s nerves are frayed. Or it could be the beginning of something big I’m looking at. So at some point maybe I’m going to have to be a mediator because they will, when I said rock and a hard place, sometimes reading specialists will say to their principals, “Well Charlotte said,” you
know? Then other times, you know, it goes the other way so I have to watch what Charlotte says because I don’t want it, you know, if you don’t get your way with mom, go to dad. But all, all of us shape those decisions in different ways in different buildings.

Monique spoke about negotiating relationships by using leverage to nudge principals toward the use of guided reading throughout her district. Gaining the support from principals with whom she had already established positive relationships provided a starting point from which to then approach principals who may take issue with fully implementing guided reading in the district. In order to better understand the meaning Monique placed on the term leverage, I asked her to elaborate and clarify. She provided the following illustration:

For an example, I was talking to…my boss. I was telling him that I was going to request a meeting with each middle school principal to meet them individually. I was going to discuss six items, the upcoming school year and any kinds of concerns that they may have about their staff this year because we had teachers on a call back list who may be reassigned to teach English, but who never taught English before or reassigned to a grade that they have never taught before, so what can I do to support you? There were five other issues and then (the superintendent) said, “You know who you should start with first, don’t you?” I said, “Yeah.” I built my leverage with those people who were going to support me, then when I go to the person that is going to be the least to support me and he asks me, “Who’s on your side here?” I can say,
so and so, so and so, and etc. In this instance, I have to start with the people that I know that will support me in building that leverage.

This leverage represented the interplay between already held dispositions related to setting goals and needing the support of others to get those goals accomplished. Supervisors capitalized on unique facets of particular relationships to move their districts’ agendas forward. Monique further explained:

It’s the give and take and what do I have built up? What’s my leverage with principals when I go out to meet with them? Well, if you want me to work with you, then you’re asking me to come in and model for your teachers, my leverage there is I want you to make sure you go into those classrooms and you look for those things that modeled. That’s leverage.

Meredith took a proactive stance in building up leverage with principals so that when the time came to push an agenda forward, she had the backing of the principals. She related it to me in this way:

I meet every single new principal. I make appointments with them when they come to (this county). Part of it, you know, is like a face-to-face, get to know you, tell me what are your thoughts about literacy, and what do you see as the role of the reading specialist, give them information and try to build a relationship because I think that is so critical because a lot of times things come up and I have to figure out, okay, if I’m working with this principal, okay, here is how I might approach him. If I’m working with this principal, I
can just say, look this is what we’re going to do and the person will be fine with it. So the principals run the schools.

Kathryn related a similar scenario regarding the writing program used in the district. She needed to visit schools to monitor the program’s effectiveness and implementation, carrying with her the underlying disposition that this program benefited students. However, Kathryn had to position herself carefully in relationship with principals. She said:

I don’t really have to let them know I’m coming, but it’s really much better for good will if you let them know you’re coming. I think it’s better to make friends along the way and build rapport as opposed to coming in as gangbusters and say, “I know you’re fourth grade teachers aren’t using (the program) and I’m going to come in and look that over…” Sometimes when I have a leadership issue like that I would do something like this: I would put it in (the newsletter) or communicate with the principals in some way that I’m very interested in observing fourth and fifth grade writing with the program…and I will be visiting schools. And ask them or their lead teachers to send me the school schedules so they’re aware that I’m looking for this. Sometimes that’s enough to make them look around and see. Fourth grade teachers are you using it? You know, how are you doing it? So give them a heads up that I’m coming and then sort of. One time…I went to a couple of schools first where I knew they were doing it, doing well so I could say I had been there. Then I started going to the schools where I knew it wasn’t
happening so they wouldn’t feel particularly picked on. I try to figure out a strategy. In the end what I want to do is make it work, not make enemies.

Supervisors also considered how merely acting on particular decisions potentially affected their relationships with principals. Even though they held a particular disposition toward an issue, they often navigated between benefit and cost asking themselves questions such as, ‘Is this worth it for me? Is this benefit to students more important than the cost to me?’ For example, when faced with a situation where a reading specialist was assigned duties unrelated to reading, Charlotte decided not to act on the issue. She said:

(She) could be planning, or you know, doing more reading. But I knew if I said that to her, that e-mail would get forwarded to the principal and then you know, you might have a broken relationship there so you have to you know when to hold back on that.

In this instance, Charlotte did not want to risk the leverage she already had built up in her relationship with the principal. Similarly in the vignette below, Audrey described how having the title of literacy leader played into how she negotiated relationships and how she supported programs even if those programs didn’t necessarily align with her personal dispositions. She explained:

As a literacy leader in the division, simply because of the title piece, I need to support what might happen. That doesn’t happen very often. It only happened once when there was a real big disagreement about what was going to go in place and what I believed should go in place. I expressed my opinion and it
was received and it was completely decided (without me) and it wouldn’t have mattered any way. To save integrity, you say it in a nice tone of voice and you say what you think and you back it up with any literature that you may have read and they can make a choice. You can do that. I think the point that I’m making is, that if you are going to be in the division and really support literacy, even if you don’t believe that right programs are maybe in place you need to support the effort because it can’t be that someone disagrees with it.

You have to 100%, so I think that part of whole picture is you have to go for it 100% and believe in what you are doing. If it had been that bad, Tamie, then I would have quit my job, but it wasn’t that bad. Do you know what I mean? If the issue had been that parasitic, but I don’t think anyone is going to put something into place that is that bad.

Monique provided additional insights into how supervisors positioned themselves to help control situations they perceived were in the best interests of students and teachers. In essence, supervisors displayed a somewhat political orientation on issues they wholeheartedly believed in which affected how they engaged in relationships. Monique told me that she couldn’t be a supervisor without being political. She explained:

You know when I was younger I used to say I’m the woman in front of the man, but I realized that the real power is the woman behind the scenes. Because I can change and manipulate and control things before anyone even
knows. And maybe manipulate isn’t a good word, but you get it. Is it manipulating in a positive way? It is. To make sure that the outcome is what you want it to be. There are some things that I will forge ahead and do, and some things that I will step back and I know they’re not going to work, and politically I let them die because for me to step in and say, “It’s not going to work,” it would be, “It was killed because Monique didn’t like it.” I want it to kill itself to show that it was ineffective. You learn that. That’s a difficult thing you learn as a leader, as a supervisor. And you can only learn that through time and experience.

As district reading supervisors positioned themselves and negotiated relationships with others, they were also positioning themselves to assume a more obvious advocacy stance. As a result of their work building relationships, participants were poised to continue to take action with the intent of meeting students’ literacy needs. However, this is not to suggest a one-way link between relationships and advocacy. Negotiating and positioning, as with all the other factors explored thus far, are interconnected.

Situated Advocacy in Literacy Leaders

The factors discussed above were presented separately but of course, in actual context, occur simultaneously in a reciprocal relationship: each extrinsic factor contributing in some way to each intrinsic factor and vice versa. At this point, the data showed an intersection of extrinsic and intrinsic contextual factors. The
association between and among factors was interpreted as advocacy in literacy leaders.

Referring back to the concept of advocacy as being outcome oriented, supervisors provided many examples of how their work was an outcome-based effort and when asked, all considered themselves as literacy advocates. Each had a somewhat different view of what it means to be an advocate, but at the very least, supervisors felt that as literacy leaders, they worked to bring literacy to the forefront of instructional issues, the end result of which was to make a difference in students’ lives. The three sub-themes related to advocacy were inclusiveness, action and aspiration.

Inclusiveness

As supervisors discussed advocacy, each expressed the fact that they were in service to all stakeholders in their districts including students, teachers, administrators, parents and community members. The title of their positions alone made them feel responsible for the literacy growth of all students; however, their perceptions of advocacy were revealed in how they worked to include others in supporting literacy. For example, Charlotte expressed the various ways she attempted to meet the literacy needs in her district. She explained:

I think that I mentioned in earlier interviews that I am responsible for (thousands) of kids learning how to read. Accepting that sense of responsibility is part of my advocacy for providing materials, supplies, professional development and things that will support literacy from
kindergarten to 12\textsuperscript{th} grade. I see myself as an advocate for students. I advocate for my program with my peers here and I think they understand with AYP. Sometimes I have to speak up and say we could incorporate what you want to do with reading; we don’t have to give up the reading to do what you want to do, kind of thing. I see myself advocating for the reading specialists and working with them; structuring their time, talking with the principal if I feel like the reading specialist is not being used well or too much time is being taken out of the classroom. I see myself as an advocate for teachers; they may not all see that because part of my advocacy tends to be on what they may view or what they need or not need. I work with the communities in parent-involved activities. I think I talked about the family literacy night last time. Advocate with parents that they read to their children and get the kids involved in reading over the summer. I work with the Rotary Club; they have a project that they give back. I advocate for that kind of thing. Donated books to the homeless shelter through Title I. I gave some books last week to the free clinic, so the kids would have something to read while they are in the waiting room. All very little things, but I hope they add up to something worth while.

Kathryn’s view of advocacy was also inclusive in providing for the needs of all students and teachers. She also explained how teachers advocate for themselves and their schools. She said:
I would say, first of all, advocate means nurture, looking out for the well-being of the students and their educational needs to make sure that they are getting the best education that you can provide. In my job, I have to also be an advocate for teachers, reading teachers, English teachers, and advocate for them if they are in a position where they are being treated unfairly, if they aren’t getting the resources they need. Well, within their schools, I think they advocate for students. They definitely vocally advocate for their schools when they need things.

Similarly, Meredith’s efforts included a myriad of stakeholders. She explained:

I think as an advocate, I work with the principals a lot because it’s the principal that runs the school, not me, even though I’m the supervisor for reading. Also, by having materials for teachers to use, by doing some kind of professional development within our means, going out and talking to the community. I think all of those things are indicative of being an advocate for literacy.

Monique conveyed inclusiveness as she expressed the desire for her coaches to be visible advocates rather than herself. One way she accomplished this was ensuring coaches were placed in positions where others could witness their work. Monique said:

An advocate is more than just a supporter. An advocate is someone that is out front. I don’t like to be out front. I like to be in the background because I feel
when my literacy coaches, we just did a word study video, when the literacy coaches are in charge of that word study video, they’re up front. I didn’t even want to be in the video, but I had to be because my boss told me I had to be. I advocate by pushing them out front.

Inclusiveness for Audrey was apparent in the way she spoke of her role in the development of the reading specialist cohort program: a cooperative effort between administration and faculty at a local university. She felt that the reading specialist cohort program not only prepared better classroom teachers, but built capacity in the district to meet the literacy demands of a high population of second-language learners by recruiting as many teachers as possible into the program. Audrey felt her efforts in developing potential literacy leaders had far-reaching effects. She said.

I’ll have 60-some certified reading specialists in our system who are still teaching, just in their classes teaching with an enhanced understanding of the reading process. It’s an incredible process. In addition to that we have people who have been through the cohort, that are teaching that have reading licenses and Tamie, my first thought, about three years ago, was these people are going to be running out of our school system to go get jobs as reading specialists in other districts. They’re not. It has enhanced their understanding. They stay here. Is it because it’s a tight economy? I don’t think so. I think they love what they do. And they become leaders in their buildings.

*Actions*
The data revealed that not only do supervisors perceive they are advocates for literacy, their actions convey those sentiments as well. Participants provided accounts of experiences in schools where actions could easily be labeled as advocating, and the outcomes were clearly intended to provide for the good of students’ literacy development or teacher growth. In other words, the actions were service-oriented and the supervisors were acting as advocates for a cause beyond themselves. Just as the data showed historical evidence of advocacy, it also showed more recent evidence, strengthening the position that advocacy is a culmination of extrinsic and intrinsic factors reflected in a myriad of literacy leaders’ actions.

In her first interview, Charlotte spoke of a group of students she worked with once a year to help prepare them for the state’s standardized assessment, a requirement for graduation. In that conversation, she referenced making rice krispie treats for those students and showed me a picture of the class. In a follow up interview, I asked her what that action of making treats represented to her. She elaborated with the following:

That’s part of a larger part of my job of event planning. You know, having the right materials, the right people in the right place at the right time. All of that. I could almost be a wedding planner for the kinds of things that you have to do. So the rice krispie treats were something that just sort of evolved. I guess the other part of that is I want to motivate those kids because you saw the picture. These are the kids that everybody’s given up on. Not everybody, but
they may feel that everybody’s given up on them. Their backs are against the wall. They really want to graduate but they don’t have a lot of confidence in themselves. So I went in and I talked to them a little bit. I tell them you know, I know you’re going to work very hard and you know, I’m going to make rice krispie treats for you for test day. You’re going to make something for us? I mean, that’s not an experience that they have. So I try to motivate them to do that and it’s a little thing. It’s me staying connected with kids more than anything else. It’s probably a selfish thing. It’s probably a selfish thing.

Charlotte’s vignette provided an example of advocacy and service leadership; she felt in service to those students for their sake, but realized when serving others, the leader is often rewarded as well (Greenleaf, 1977).

Kathryn supplied an action-oriented perspective toward advocacy with an example of how structure within a school-day was an integral component for preserving instructional time for teachers and students. She explained:

A good example is a school that does a lot of switching at grade level. There is so much transition time lost. To be an advocate for students and teachers, talking to the principal about I don’t think we need to teach word study, reading, and writing separately and have the kids move from one class to another in third grade all the time because there’s so much transition time lost. I feel like I’m being an advocate for the students and some of the teachers who don’t want that happening. If there is a teacher in place there that is not
doing a good job of moving the kids around, it’s not going to solve that problem.

Audrey spoke of her actions related to advocacy in a more personal capacity. She relayed that although she didn’t advocate for literacy in a public sense, she did, however, consider herself an advocate in her personal life. She said:

I do advocate for it (literacy) in my own way…first of all, I am in a Ph.D. program… and I am literacy major. So, the reason I did that was to give my own current position more validity and more validity meant that unfortunately in our society sometimes, if you have the right credentials you are perceived to be a more validated person. So with that credential perhaps getting the word out about literacy might stick more with people and might be more validating, a more creditable source. That would be one way that I would tell you that I would work toward advocacy.

In our final interview, I asked Monique that although she never used the word advocate in our conversations, did she consider herself an advocate? She emphatically summed up how advocacy was a crucial and integral part of all her actions as a district reading supervisor. She explained:

Oh my God, yes! Yes! In everything we do. I don’t know if I told you this, but one of the jokes in this school system is that on my tomb it will say, I stopped round robin reading in (the district’s) schools. It’s everything to me. Literacy just opens the world to a child. How could I not want that? How could I not
want that for our children? I want it so strongly; it can bring me to tears. It’s when I go home and I’m reading my professional books. It’s when I’m underlining and making notes and I think about retirement and what I’m going to do in retirement and how I’m going to contribute to literacy in retirement? You’ve got to make your mark in this world. You’ve got to get out there and take your bite and leave your mark and all of that. It’s all I do; it’s everything for me. It’s more than just a job. It’s more than a career. It’s a vocation. So, I guess if I didn’t use the word, maybe because psychologically it’s there in my actions.

**Aspirations**

Advocacy beliefs, efforts and actions culminated in two ways for district reading supervisors: in their desire to further enhance stakeholders’ understandings of literacy, and to truly make a difference in the lives of others. For Kathryn, aspiring to change the way teachers thought about literacy was related to content area teachers who often struggled with how literacy is situated within their particular classrooms. She desired to help content teachers through the use of curricular resources and professional development activities. She explained:

The people down the hall that I work with, they are working on a grade six reading science combination to help science teachers understand how to incorporate reading strategies into science. That’ll let the reading teachers know what’s going on, too. So by fall, after a long drawn out process, we’ll
have a reading science notebook and do workshops to help the teachers use them.

Audrey spoke of enhancing an understanding of literacy by partnering with a literacy website to help teachers access resources particular to their specific content areas. She said:

We had made an attempt to align ourselves with this…literacy website that had a six month free trial with it where teachers could go and access whatever they needed about literacy. So we made it colorful bookmarks on the pad and presented at the faculty meeting to promote literacy. This was phenomenal. I think that is what I was thinking of in terms of this is a really a unified effort that has made impact in terms of developing awareness, a true awareness about what literacy is and how it should be delivered and how it is important across the content areas.

In addition to enhancing knowledge of literacy, data showed that supervisors saw their overall efforts as ones that impacted the literacy lives of others. Their influence on literacy was effective in terms of changing student’s lives and teachers’ instructional repertoires. Each spoke of believing that they made a difference in the life of a student, teacher, principal and / or community. As service leaders, they linked this difference to advocacy. For example, Audrey said:

I have to tell you that the people that are on this committee, they come to these meetings and sit for an hour and then they are off to a class here or
something else there. They are really dedicated human beings. It is a great
group of people and I am very proud of this effort because I think it can make
a difference, I really do, so we’ll see. We will all try to make a difference.

For Meredith, aspiring to make a difference was related to making specific
changes as deemed necessary by the situation. Change required educating others as to
how they could make more impact on student learning. She stated:

But in terms of making a difference, I think the things like in the past reading
specialists weren’t supposed to work with English Language Learners or
special education students. And I said, why not? Why not? Making a
difference in saying go into the classrooms and do the push-in kind of model.
There’s nothing magical about thirty minutes a day. Be flexible in your
schedule. They used to have a schedule and they got it in September. I collect
it in September and I tell them mostly that if I come to your school I want to
know where you are, but I also look at their use of time because I’m very
interested in time on task. You get planning and you get lunch but your
planning doesn’t need to be in the middle of the day. We used to be a very
basal oriented county, but you know things have changed. Who knew about
leveled books? So I think educating the community, educating reading
specialists, the staff; I think that’s an opportunity to make a difference.

Finally, Charlotte described her beliefs about where the desire to make a
difference comes from. While several supervisors spoke of it being modeled,
Charlotte hinted that it may be an intrinsic trait of a literacy leader, regardless of their title or training. These somewhat contradictory statements further highlight that influences of advocacy are intertwined and difficult to identify explicitly. Again, the data showed a blurring of the lines between professional and personal dispositions as presented in earlier findings. She explained:

Advocacy comes out of this sense that what you do can make a difference, so you have to feel somewhat empowered. There’s strength of character that doesn’t exist in everyone. There are plenty of people that enjoy reading, but would never step up in doing anything because they don’t need to or they don’t feel as individuals that what they do would make a difference. There are literacy volunteers that work with struggling adults to try help them become functional in literacy. They aren’t necessarily teachers, but those people that want to help. They’ve got political action accountability in their body that says; yes I need to do this. Some of our advocates are very quiet, one-on-one. Some of them are, let’s get an organization going, let’s join the IRA, etc. I think though, a lot of people understand that if you want to make a difference in the world you move people. Education is the key to that and reading is the key to educational progress. Reading is fundamental; it’s more than a slogan. It’s having a good role model, being encouraged to join the organization where someone is involved. It goes back to how people are born into religion. Some are born into it, some just find it as children, some find it later on in life and some never find it.
Summary of Findings

The following themes evolved from the data: past experiences, extrinsic contextual factors influencing advocacy, intrinsic contextual factors influencing advocacy, and advocacy in literacy leaders. The results are represented visually in Figure 1: Situated Advocacy in Literacy Leaders. Each theme is summarized below. I make reference back to the research questions to elaborate on how the findings informed my inquiry into perceptions of advocacy. Research questions were: 1) What professional and personal experiences influenced district reading supervisors’ perceptions of advocacy?; 2) What professional and personal dispositions influenced district reading supervisors’ perceptions of advocacy?; 3) What does advocacy look like in the work of literacy leaders?
Early Experiences

Early experiences informed the first research question in that district reading supervisors described personal and professional experiences which contributed to their current perceptions of advocacy. Personal experiences related to family and childhood relationships with teachers instilled a love of reading and books in participants. Instructional experiences, particularly with struggling readers, led to an increased desire to learn more about teaching reading and contributed to their perceptions of keeping students’ literacy needs at the center of their subsequent work as district reading supervisors.

Participants’ vivid recollections of persons and events influenced how they viewed learning, and how and why they advocated for the literacy development of students as practicing teachers and then later as district reading supervisors. Their interactions with students, reading specialists, coaches, teachers and administrators as part of their professional roles influenced how they interpreted advocacy. Participants leveraged both experience and knowledge to put students’ literacy needs at the center of all their decisions.

Extrinsic Contextual Factors

Extrinsic factors were defined as those inherent to the professional roles assumed by district reading supervisor and reading professionals. Three factors provided additional insight into the first research question. First, the most prevalent factor associated with roles was providing support for others including teachers, principals and students. Results indicated that supervisors were very strategic in their approach
to providing support to others. They evaluated the situation, the stakeholders involved, and the possible ramifications before creating a plan to move them toward desired outcomes. Supervisors used their responsibility to provide training to teachers and reading professionals as opportunities for furthering the literacy goals in their districts. Furthermore, supervisors expressed that their efforts in supporting and training ultimately served to build capacity within teachers so as to further enhance understandings and pedagogical knowledge of literacy.

Second, results indicated that supervisors perceived that providing support was insufficient without holding others accountable for literacy within buildings and throughout districts. This accountability came in the form of using data to drive literacy decisions, as well as using their positions to bring change to literacy programs.

Finally, from the perspective of supervisors, their roles and the roles of reading professionals converged to a common purpose of meeting students’ needs. From the data, it was apparent that supervisors perceived that the ultimate role of any literacy leader was to provide instruction, resources, support and environments in which students could meet their full potential. Inherent in meeting these needs, supervisors demonstrated advocacy. If meeting students’ needs was the final outcome for all, then each purposeful maneuver within a role had an element of advocacy associated with it based on how I defined advocacy in my clarification of terms. These findings informed both the first and third research question.
Also informing the third research question was the finding that although supervisors did not always make their dispositions explicitly known to others by what they said, in all cases they felt their outward actions reflected a responsibility for the literacy growth of all students within their districts. Letting even one student falter was not an option for the participants; therefore, they were fully committed to providing the support and resources to fulfill their commitments to students, teachers, administrators and parents. Advocacy was apparent in participants’ commitment and subsequent action.

_Intrinsic Contextual Factors_

Results informed the second research question in that reading supervisors held specific professional and personal dispositions which oriented them toward a disposition of advocacy. Professional dispositions were defined as those that were directly necessary for the position of literacy leader. From the perspective of supervisor, reading professionals needed to possess depth of knowledge associated with literacy and qualities indicative of leadership. The supervisors themselves indicated that having a guiding philosophy which influenced professional decisions was necessary for their positions. Supervisors’ perceptions of personal dispositions were defined as internal characteristics of self. These included passion, purpose and internal drive. These identified dispositions helped inform the second research question along with the finding that both professional and personal dispositions came together at a common point as supervisors positioned and negotiated relationships with others. The dispositions determined how they built and maintained their
relationships. Therefore, there was a direct connection across the extrinsic and intrinsic contextual factors linking the ways that supervisors approached relationships with meeting students’ needs furthering and deepening an understanding of advocacy. 

*Advocacy in Literacy Leaders*

Intrinsic and extrinsic contextual factors influenced supervisors’ perceptions of advocacy and converged in the advocacy situated in particular contexts, thus informing the third research question. This was evidenced by data which showed supervisors’ efforts to be inclusive of all students. Their current actions and aspirations to make a difference in the literacy lives of others reflected an overall orientation toward advocacy in their work as district reading supervisors.
5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that contribute to district reading supervisors’ perceptions of advocacy. Results of the research demonstrated that perceptions of advocacy were intricately woven between extrinsic contextual factors and intrinsic contextual factors associated with being a literacy leader in public schools. Understanding the complexities of these factors was necessary to better understand the dispositions that literacy leaders held and how those dispositions were reflected in the actions they exhibited.

Assuming a Constructivist Stance

When thinking about how the findings of this study contribute to building a substantive theory of advocacy in literacy leaders, I remind the reader of the constructivist position I’ve taken throughout this research process. In doing so, I fully understand that the results of this study are situated within the context of each participant’s particular reality of self and influence (Maxwell, 2005). Additionally, approaching the discussion via a constructivist framework ensured that my analyses addressed each initial research question as fully as possible.

To set the context for the following discussion, it is critical to note that no participant used the word ‘advocacy’ during the first two rounds of interviews. As detailed in the research design and third interview protocol, I mentioned the word
‘advocacy’ in order to elicit participants’ perceptions of its meanings. Neither I, nor any participant used the word ‘disposition’ during the interviewing. Instead, I chose to prompt the participants by using the terms ‘beliefs’ and ‘attitudes’ in an effort to be as clear as possible in our discussions; thus, avoiding any misinterpretation of the term ‘disposition.’ It is within this frame of reference that I discuss the findings and implications of the current study of advocacy.

Addressing the ‘What’ in Advocacy

From the data, it was clear that experience played a large part in supervisors’ orientation toward advocacy: from early childhood, to beginning teaching, to pursuing advanced knowledge in literacy. The experience of valuing reading and books from an early age instilled a disposition of desire to infuse that value in others. Supervisors had role models such as teachers, family members and scholars who, through high expectation, motivated them to continue to pursue knowledge about literacy. Loving books and learning seemed to set the stage for later work as teachers, leaders and advocates for literacy.

Supervisors’ experiences with struggling students in their early teaching careers provided realization of the complexities of learning to read. All participants reflected on the fact that they just didn’t know what to do with struggling readers. Rather than give up on these students or pass students along by blaming external factors such as high poverty, poor parenting or previous teachers, supervisors became problem solvers. They asked for assistance from knowledgeable others, found resources on their own and engaged in further study of reading through graduate coursework. They
emphasized continuous learning for themselves and all education professionals working with students.

Expectations and experiences inherent to the role of supervisor oriented participants toward a disposition of advocacy. They were determined to provide quality literacy programs for students and professional development for teachers based on student data and need. Supervisors felt responsible for students even though they had very little contact with them. Their experiences as classroom teachers provided them with the insider knowledge of ‘having been there’ and being able to ‘walk the walk’ with both teachers and administrators. Supervisors were willing to do whatever it took to demonstrate their credibility, and their programs’ validity. In order to do so, supervisors needed a certain amount of professional freedom to make independent decisions, yet consistently relied on the opinions of other central office staff to help guide their decision-making processes.

Often, from the perspective of teachers, central office staff can be viewed as “the evil they” (as Charlotte expressed during an interview) randomly making decisions in isolation without regard to the effects on teachers, and leaving them feeling as if they have little or no voice within schools. In light of this, districts should make every effort to unite school-based and central office staff when making literacy decisions, both seemingly small and large as every decision affects someone somewhere.

Addressing the ‘How’ in Advocacy

District reading supervisors demonstrated advocacy in a variety of ways, in a variety of situations. First, supervisors enacted advocacy through the concrete
outcome-oriented activities for which they were responsible. Supervisors were able to bring people together both physically and mentally by building capacity for change. This occurred during purposeful professional development, staff meetings, reading professional meetings and the creation of a cohort, often needing to convince principals that meetings were productive and necessary to move literacy goals forward. While on the surface, this may seem both obvious and trite, school boards and superintendents should not have to be convinced that bringing people together is necessary; it’s the first step in getting anything accomplished in a district. Supervisors need to have the professional freedom and physical space to actually address stakeholders. Funds, locations, and scheduling are logistical issues needing pro-active district-wide attention to move a district’s vision forward.

Second, district reading supervisors were committed to supporting others and demonstrated advocacy by holding teachers, reading professionals and principals accountable for implementing literacy programs with fidelity. This accountability involved not only gathering data in an efficient and valid manner, but using that data to guide the literacy instruction within classrooms. Too often in schools, teachers are trained in a particular method or program, but receive no follow-up support, nor repercussion for failure to perform. This is not to say that supervisors encouraged a ‘big brother’ stance or possessed an ‘us against them’ mentality. Rather, they felt extremely dedicated to the programs and instructional methods they had in place and would support all teachers in their growth during implementation. However, they
were not willing to back down if teachers or reading professionals failed to perform because the literacy growth of students always over-rove teachers’ desires.

The third way that supervisors demonstrated a disposition toward advocacy was in the strategic manner they worked their role responsibilities and their relationships with others. Each participant spoke of having a strategy repository for handling particular people or certain scenarios; they would choose the strategy that had the best fit to accomplish the goal. Supervisors used their career experience and role responsibilities as credible foundations for negotiating with stakeholders. According to participants, negotiations always had the intended outcome of doing what’s best for students and teachers, though not necessarily what was the easiest or most convenient.

School boards and superintendents would be wise not to overlook the power inherent in one’s ability to build positive relationships. Effective schools often have a united faculty that truly understands and works toward a common goal of literacy for all (Guth & Pettengill, 2005). Supervisors can act as the thread that unites and holds relationships together as they have the requisite knowledge and capacity to do so. Districts need to acknowledge the fact that supervisors can successfully position themselves to move goals forward if given the time, funds and resources.

Addressing the ‘Why’ in Advocacy

Why do supervisors do what they do? First, each participant truly believed that literacy can substantially and literally change lives. They wanted to instill this belief in teachers and students, just as someone had done for them. Second, supervisors felt
that their career experiences sufficiently prepared them for the challenges and opportunities faced in the position. They believed that their knowledge in literacy provided them with a foundation for steering the direction of literacy in their respective districts. If a situation arose where they felt they lacked sufficient knowledge, they were confident in knowing how to find the answers, often relying on district reading professionals, in-district colleagues, out-of-district peers, or contacts in professional organizations for guidance. Third, each participant believed that she was ultimately, and both indirectly and directly, responsible for the literacy growth of students. As literacy leaders, this responsibility was not taken lightly. Supervisors were steadfast via strategizing and removing barriers in order to reach goals. Finally, supervisors felt that everything they did had a sole purpose: to make a difference in the literacy lives of students by meeting their learning needs.

Building a Substantive Theory of Advocacy

As this study demonstrated, advocacy among these literacy leaders is a very tenuous and intricately woven design of dispositions, experiences, strategies, actions, and goals all being influenced and guided by students’ needs. Based on findings, I’ve created a theory of advocacy in literacy leaders: Substantive Theory of Advocacy in Literacy Leaders (Figure 2). To clarify the figure, the solid arrows flowing out of the box labeled personal and professional dispositions represent the influence that dispositions had on each facet of supervisors’ orientation toward meeting students’ needs. The returning dashed lines represent the flexible and malleable nature of those dispositions; within a particular contextual factor, dispositions are changed in one
way or another based on the interactions within that context. Those changes may take the form of strengthened dispositions, weakened dispositions, or possibly new dispositions incorporated into one’s existing conceptual framework of advocacy. Visually representing dispositions in this manner extends the study’s findings to suggest that dispositions influence literacy leaders’ perceptions, beliefs and actions toward advocacy and in return, those dispositions are to some extent modified while meeting students’ needs.

The larger arrows on Figure 2 represent the interconnectedness of each of the factors relating to advocacy. Displaying advocacy as such highlights the fact that it is neither linear nor sequential. Factors interplay with one another as advocates draw on many personal and professional experiences, resources and intended outcomes while engaged in advocacy.
Advocacy: Action Through Service

Personal and Professional Dispositions

Intended Literacy Goal

Students’ Literacy Needs

Personal and Professional Experiences

Strategic Use of Resources and Relationships

Figure 2

SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF ADVOCACY IN LITERACY LEADERS
In developing a theory of advocacy grounded in the data from my study, I recognized that advocacy was first and foremost driven by students’ literacy needs, thus my positioning needs at the center of the theory. Literacy leaders ultimately kept students central to all decisions and subsequent actions. This connects to McAloon’s (1994) definition of advocate in that district reading supervisors provided the necessary supports to teachers and administrators in order to advance programs and promote students’ literacy skills. If a particular training method, instructional technique or data instrument didn’t ultimately address students’ needs, then supervisors would not advocate for it. In fact, they may even advocate against it depending on their beliefs regarding the particular issue.

As illustrated in Figure 2. Substantive Theory of Advocacy in Literacy Leaders, dispositions impacted all facets of advocacy in literacy leaders. In the case of district reading supervisors, each held dispositions that influenced their professional and personal lives (Branson, 2007). In my theory of advocacy, dispositions are inherent in all factors of literacy leadership. Similar to Johnson and Uline’s (2005) findings, district reading supervisors engendered particular dispositions and expected reading specialists and coaches to hold similar ones, particularly those related to knowledge, purpose and passion.

Theoharis and Causton-Theoharis (2002) suggested although education leaders held certain dispositions, specific inclusive dispositions could be modeled and taught to others. Although my study did reveal evidence that some supervisors perceived dispositions in these ways, a more crucial component to my theory is that dispositions
can be changed through interactions which focus on meeting students’ needs. Literacy leaders may come into a situation with a particular set of beliefs and attitudes, but even without explicit modeling or teaching, may leave with a subtly different disposition toward an issue. In fact, my theory suggests that a change in one’s disposition may only be evident through action.

However, dispositions guided every decision and ultimate action, regardless of whether the action was visible to others or behind the scenes. Therefore, dispositions were inherent to every context of leadership and had overwhelming influence over whether or not a goal was ever reached. For example, if a supervisor’s disposition was that of apathy toward an intended goal, then that goal was less likely to be realized. On the other hand, if a supervisor held a strong disposition of worth toward an intended goal, then it was more likely be pursued.

Similar to Bredeson’s (2004) notion of principals as creators of structures that provide students access to learning opportunities, my findings revealed that district reading supervisors also created structures to impact learning. District reading supervisors had very specific literacy goals for schools, districts and individuals for which they directly and indirectly advocated. In doing so, literacy leaders demonstrated their dispositions toward a particular issue. They acted as creators through their strategic maneuvering through relationships and use of resources to meet students’ needs. The intended goal was always simultaneously student-centered and district-driven.
Fraatz (1987) found that district reading supervisors used strategies such as bargaining, negotiating and persuading to influence the use of resources to meet district goals. However, my study extends Fraatz’s (1987) findings in that participants’ dispositions played a large role in how they negotiated with others to meet the needs of individual students as well as larger district goals. Additionally, results from my study suggest that district reading supervisors position themselves with particular individuals differently depending on previous experiences with individuals. In doing so, district reading supervisors often enlisted the support of superintendents, teacher, and reading professionals to ensure that bargaining and negotiating of resources took place.

The final component to a theory of advocacy in literacy leaders was the action itself. This action was either visible to others through explicit communication and deed such as leading professional development, or was invisible behind the scenes action such as planning and organizing textbook adoption procedures. District supervisors viewed action through change: integral to their role and to moving the district forward. This is counter to Haggard’s (1980) study where the role of the reading supervisor as change-agent was viewed as least important from the perspective of supervisors, principals and teachers. In my study, supervisors perceived that achieving district-wide change was possible by holding others accountable.

The need for accountability was also discussed by Wepner and Quatroche (2008) but they did not determine where that sense of accountability came from in reading
professionals. My study suggests that holding others accountable not only ensures change, but eventually ensures that supervisors are able to make a difference in the lives of students. Both of these views of accountability are inherent to servant leadership where leaders create a culture of accountability in order to make sure the others’ high priority needs are met (Sipe & Frick, 2009; Greenleaf, 1977).

My theory of advocacy expands the notion of servant leadership and applies it to literacy leaders’ advocacy efforts as action through service to others. Alston (2005) discussed superintendents as service leaders who intended to make a difference in schools. This was true of district reading supervisors in my study as they perceived that their purpose was ultimately about meeting the needs of all students through their daily work; they truly believed that what they did influenced the literacy lives of children in the district. District reading supervisors led through service and served through leading. Those beliefs and subsequent actions are reflective of advocacy.

Implications

This theory of advocacy in literacy leaders has several direct implications for education stakeholders including reading specialists and coaches, teacher educators, supervisors, and school-based administrators. Implications are described in relation to the factors developed in the theory.

Implications Surrounding Students’ Literacy Needs and Districts’ Literacy Goals

School-based administrators are ultimately responsible for the instruction and learning that takes place in their buildings. They are not alone, however, in that literacy leaders often feel that same sense of responsibility or disposition. As Audrey
expressed in an interview, ‘Some principals have no idea what the reading specialist does on a daily basis. They only communicate when there is a problem.” This seems suggestive of unhealthy trend in schools. Administrators, teachers and students would benefit by elevating the role that reading professionals play in schools. Licensed reading specialists and trained coaches have the potential to influence classroom instruction through the support they provide to teachers. Administrators need to fully understand the array of potential that reading professionals can bring to the school if given the opportunity.

Additionally, this study has implications on the hiring and evaluation of reading professionals. As supervisors conveyed, reading professionals are most often hired by principals. This study recognizes the importance of personal and professional dispositions as influencing the decisions made by reading professionals. Administrators should be aware that reading professionals bring not only their dispositions to the job, but their prior experiences as well.

Administrators may be able to capitalize on this information by bringing it to the forefront during the interview process, ensuring that literacy visions, beliefs and attitudes align. It would benefit administrators to understand the advocacy component of a reading professional’s position in order to provide consistent and necessary support. My data argue for the necessity of administrators and reading professionals to establish a reciprocal relationship in meeting the needs of students.

Results of the study also indicated that supervisors’ had differences of opinions on whether or not reading specialists and coaches could be taught how to be literacy
advocates or shown how to advocate through modeling. Some felt there were internal factors that related to childhood experiences and expectations. In light of this, administrators may need to consider supporting professional development opportunities for reading specialists and coaches to continue to expand their knowledge base on strategies for becoming the literacy leader and literacy advocate within a school. Additionally, as models of advocacy, district reading supervisors may benefit from learning advocacy strategies as well.

**Implications Surrounding Personal and Professional Experiences**

The findings from my study indicated intricate relationships between reading professionals personal and professional experiences. All supervisors in this study held regular meetings with their reading professionals; however, from my personal knowledge, this is not the norm in most districts. Purposeful meetings with reading professionals have the capacity to provide a safe and confidential setting in which the issues of leadership, and professional and personal experiences could be addressed. Supervisors may be in the best position to facilitate these discussions to help reading specialists and coaches realize underlying dispositions influencing their daily decisions. Providing time for such conversations would potentially help reading specialists and coaches clarify their own roles within schools. Additionally, such conversations could unearth dispositions that go unnoticed and unvoiced, yet still inform the way that school-based literacy leaders approach, interact with, and support school-based staff while advocating for students’ literacy needs.

**Implications Surrounding Strategic Use of Resources**

143
Reading specialist, literacy coaches and district reading supervisors are undoubtedly valuable resources in any public school. In order to use these resources effectively, teacher educators and administrators need to understand their complex roles. In my first interview with Meredith, I asked her about the attitudes and behaviors she looks for in reading specialists and she replied:

I think one of the challenges being a reading specialist, and I found this myself and this will be good if you teach college, nobody in my experience ever teaches you how to be a reading specialist. They tell you the content, diagnosis and correction, testing, all this sort of thing. But, I’ve been a reading specialist in two or three places…The job is never the same. There is not a particular model for a reading specialist.

If considering Meredith’s viewpoint outside the context of the study, it exemplifies the need for teacher educators to look beyond the inclusion of literacy in coursework. Having a fundamental knowledge base in literacy is requisite but insufficient as illustrated by the complex roles that both district reading supervisors and reading professionals face each day, as well as the multifaceted dispositions intrinsic and unique to each individual. Conversely, when Meredith’s statement is viewed within the context of the findings presented, one could argue that it may not even be possible to teach someone to be a reading specialist because the roles are so contextualized and vary from school to school, district to district.

However, it may be beneficial if teacher educators examined the content of courses to ensure that they reflect the actual demands of the positions while still working
within the guidelines of state licensure requirements. For example, course content that teaches students how to work with adults could be discussed as findings from the study demonstrated the importance of positioning and negotiating relationships, as well as working to support others. Course content might also include topics such as understanding adult learning styles, effective collaboration, and engaging in appropriate communication techniques. Advocating for literacy needs of students is dependent on having effective ‘human’ resources within schools.

*Implications Surrounding Dispositions*

Literacy leaders need opportunities to unearth their attitudes and beliefs about working as leaders in service to others: teachers, administrators, supervisors, and students. As evidenced throughout the study, dispositions have wide-reaching effects on perceptions and demonstrations of advocacy.

Furthermore, leadership dispositions need to be explicitly brought to the forefront of reading professional preparation programs and district-wide professional development programs. Pre-service and in-service educators may benefit from experiential learning opportunities designed to explore their own dispositions as well as those of others, including practitioners upon whose longevity in the field could be capitalized. These findings strongly suggest that teacher educators would be remiss in fully preparing literacy leaders, including district reading supervisors, if intrinsic beliefs are not allowed to be explored, deconstructed and critiqued as advocacy is influenced by dispositions.

*Implications Surrounding Advocacy as Action through Service*
Results of my study show that literacy leaders bring personal philosophies about literacy and learning to their positions. Returning back to data, Monique said:

The reason for this school district to move into guided reading is that literacy is much more than an SOL test score. We have to be able to look at our children and look at our parents with the moral imperative that we have worked with the child to help that child reach his full capacity in literacy. And you can’t do that unless you know the child. And you can’t do that if you’re not assessing and working in small groups with children at their instructional level. So as a leader you have to recognize what are profitable end products for you and why you do them and how you lead people to your level of thinking. And to have people trust you that you’ll provide as much support as they need as long as they continue to grow.

Monique’s words remind us that supervisors and reading specialists need to understand that their positions are ones of service. Part of that service is an orientation toward advocating for school-based and district literacy goals. Additional advocacy may also come in the form of providing for a particular child’s literacy needs such as pursuing support from special educators, a strategy intense reading class or leveled texts in content classes. Literacy leaders should have full understanding that these efforts are all components of their positions.

Having an orientation toward service does not necessarily mean that supervisors and reading professionals should cater to the whims of teachers and principals. On the contrary, the data of the investigation support the notion that holding a position of
service should be thought of as one of power. Literacy leaders have the capacity to influence the direction of schools and districts. The first step is to understand how this influence can be used to benefit teachers and ultimately students.

Future Research

The lack of research on advocacy in public schools needs to be remedied. This study indicates that literacy leaders do in fact advocate for teachers, students, and programs; however, as illustrated there are many complex factors encompassing advocacy yet to be explored.

In an email indicating her agreement to participate in this study, Charlotte stated, “No one has ever wanted to know anything about my job, so of course I’ll participate.” This statement exemplifies the need for future research on the complex roles and responsibilities of district reading supervisors. From this study, questions warranting further exploration include: How do supervisors construct their identities? How do supervisors handle resistance to their advocacy efforts? What constitutes an effective district reading supervisor? How do supervisors work with principals to meet students’ literacy needs?

This study also points to the need for additional research with central office personnel in general. Individuals serving in leadership capacities at district or central offices are more than just conduits relaying information between superintendents and school-based administrators. They often both influence and make educational policies. Their insider views of education are reflected in the ways they situate and negotiate relationships, interact with school boards, and promote particular agendas.
Each of these areas warrants further study if public schools are to fully profit from the wealth of human capital in central office positions.

Finally, based on the results of this study, continuing research into whether or not higher education institutions can actually ‘teach’ someone to be a literacy advocate is worth exploring. If advocacy is teachable and is in the best interest of the students, it seems reasonable that this line of research should be expanded.

Final Thoughts

After spending months analyzing participants’ words, one quote in particular, gathered in the initial round of interviews, stuck with me throughout the entire research process. It exemplifies the overall feeling I received from participants: a deep desire to change the literacy lives of children through their work. Monique said:

When I worked in (the private sector), to quibble about a parking spot, to quibble about where the office was located, I thought that was all silly. I mean, in the end, what does it all mean? And so, I felt the values there were somewhat artificial. And then I think in the end, I always wonder, now what are they going to put on my headstone? I made bread? I made a lot of money? On my headstone, I want them to put, she taught me to read. That’s all I want, and to know that reading opens up the world to children.

My hope is that through this study, I have opened up new avenues of thinking about what it means to be a district reading supervisor: a literacy leader dedicated to making a positive difference in the professional lives of educators and in the personal lives of children.
APPENDIX A

Invitation to Participate in Study

April 16, 2009

Dear Ms. (Prospective Research Participant’s Name)

I hope this letter finds you well. I am currently a doctoral candidate at George Mason University in the College of Education and Human Development. I have recently completed my coursework toward a Ph.D. in Education with an emphasis in literacy and policy, and I am now completing the dissertation requirements for the degree.

*I am writing to invite you to participate in my dissertation research study.* The purpose of my study is to explore the complexities of the roles and responsibilities of literacy leaders in public schools.

The criteria for participating in the study are: 1) *currently employed in a division-wide supervisory reading position in a Virginia public school*; 2) *held your current position for at least 3 years*; 3) *work directly with reading specialists and/or literacy coaches in a supervisory capacity*; 4) *have previous K-12 classroom teaching experience*.

The research process involves *participating in a series of three interviews* which would take approximately one hour each. The location and time of each interview would be arranged to accommodate your schedule. Additionally, you will be asked to bring to the final interview one artifact of your work that represents your experience as a literacy leader. This detail will be discussed in greater length in follow-up communication if you agree to participate in the study.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and confidential. All data collected will be kept completely confidential as no personal information will be linked to your responses. Please indicate your intent to participate in the study by returning the attached form in the self-addressed stamped envelope within one week upon receipt of this invitation letter.

Thank you so much for your consideration in providing your unique and valuable perspective to the field of literacy leadership. If you have questions or would like additional information pertaining to the study, please don’t hesitate to contact me at the above phone number or via email at tprattfa@gmu.edu. You may also contact Dr. William Brozo, faculty advisor for the study at wbrozo@gmu.edu if you have additional questions. I look forward to hearing from you soon.
Sincerely,
Tamie Pratt-Fartro
Doctoral Candidate
George Mason University
Appendix B

Intent to Participate

Date: ________________________________

Name: _______________________________

Title: ________________________________

District: ______________________________

Please check one of the following and return the form in the enclosed envelope.

_____ No, I do not intend on participating in the dissertation research study.

_____ Yes, I intend on participating in the dissertation research study.

Email Address: _________________________________________

Daytime Phone #: _______________________________________

Evening Phone #: _______________________________________

151
Follow-up Email

Dear (Prospective Research Participant’s Name),

I hope this note finds you well. I am currently a doctoral candidate at George Mason University in the College of Education and Human Development. I recently sent you a letter asking for your participation in my dissertation research study on literacy leaders. I have not yet received the form indicating your intent to/not to participate.

If you are considering participating or and would like additional information, please contact me via email at tprattfa@gmu.edu or by phone at (540)371-0047. You may also contact Dr. William Brozo, faculty advisor to the study at wbrozo@gmu.edu or by phone at (703)933-3894.

I appreciate your support in lending your perspective to research on literacy leadership in public schools. I look forward to hearing from you.

Tamie Pratt-Fartro
Doctoral Candidate
George Mason University
Appendix D

Protocol for Initial Interview

1. Tell me about your work experience prior to this position.

2. What influenced your decision to focus on literacy in your career?

3. Describe what influenced your decision to accept the position of reading supervisor.

4. What are some of your roles and responsibilities as reading supervisor?

5. Tell me about the reading specialists/literacy coaches you supervise.

6. What are the roles and responsibilities of reading specialists/literacy coaches?

7. What behaviors and attitudes do you believe that reading specialists/literacy coaches should possess?
Appendix E

Protocol for Second Interview

1. What events or people in your past have shaped your thinking about literacy?

2. Tell me about a particular event in which you demonstrated leadership with regard to literacy?

3. Can you think of a particular time when you’ve had resistance to your leadership efforts? How did you deal with that resistance?

4. Do you believe you have influence on the literacy lives of anyone in school community? If so, who in particular and what does your influence look like?

5. Do you believe you have influence on the professional lives of anyone in school community? If so, who in particular and what does your influence look like?

6. Do you believe that the reading specialists/literacy coaches you work with influence anyone in the school community? If so, who in particular and what does that influence look like?

7. Do you feel that anyone influences the daily decisions you make at work? If so, who in particular and how?

8. Do you feel that anyone influences the daily decisions that reading specialists/literacy coaches make? If so, who in particular and how?
Appendix F

Protocol for Third Interview

1. Tell me about the artifact you brought with you today.

2. What does the artifact represent to you as a literacy leader?

3. Why did you choose this particular artifact?

4. The word ‘advocate’ is often used in reference to literacy. How would you define that term?

5. Do you consider yourself an advocate? If so, how?

6. Do you consider the reading specialists/literacy coaches you work with to be advocates? If so, how?

7. What contributes or leads to someone being an ‘advocate’ for literacy?
## APPENDIX G

### Validity Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Validity Threat</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Rationale for Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No time spent observing reading supervisors in settings conducive to demonstrating advocacy</td>
<td>Collect other forms of data during interview (artifact)</td>
<td>Gathering other forms of data during the interview (artifact) offers an opportunity to demonstrate advocacy in a different way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear definition of advocacy while interviewing</td>
<td>Remind participants that I’m developing a definition based on their experiences.</td>
<td>That’s the whole point of the research and the lit. review supports varied definitions but unclear demonstration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of rich interview data</td>
<td>Verbatim transcription of interviews by me</td>
<td>Experience transcribing has shown me the value of constantly thinking about data as I transcribe and supports constant comparative method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to gather rich data</td>
<td>Descriptive note taking during interviews; audio recordings</td>
<td>Detailed notes and recordings to ensure I’m relying on more concrete data rather than only my interpretations of them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misinterpretation of interview data</td>
<td>Respondent validation</td>
<td>Consulting with participants during analyses will ensure that I’m interpreting their thoughts/actions from their perspective perhaps with a visual conceptual framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher bias in interpreting in data analysis and conclusions</td>
<td>Enlisting the assistance of reading supervisor as insider</td>
<td>As a reading specialist my experiences will influence the ways in interpret the data and conclusions drawn from them; consulting another ‘insider’ will help verify my conclusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory that is not well integrated, easy to understand, relevant and explains advocacy</td>
<td>Enlisting the assistance of reading supervisor as insider</td>
<td>As a reading specialist my experiences will influence the ways in interpret the data and conclusions drawn from them; consulting another ‘insider’ will help verify my findings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


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National Governors Association (2006). *Middle grades literacy forum.* Retrieved on November 25, 2008, from http://www.nga.org/portal/site/nga/menuitem.9123e83a1f6786440ddcbeebe501010a0/?vgnextoid=174b183f1760f000VgnVCM1000001a01010aRCRD


CURRICULUM VITAE

Tamie Lynn Pratt-Fartro is an instructor of literacy and teacher education at the University of Mary Washington’s College of Education in Fredericksburg, Virginia. She began her teaching career in Stafford, Virginia as a fifth grade teacher and also worked as an elementary and middle school reading specialist and coach. Tamie earned a Master’s degree in education from Virginia Tech and a Bachelor of Science from Michigan State University. Her research interests include adolescent literacy, literacy leadership, literacy coaching and education policy.