
Elementary teachers' perceptions of the impact of book studies on their practice and literacy leadership skills

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Meganlyn Norris

*Department of Elementary, Middle Level, Library, and Technologies Education,
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, Kutztown, Pennsylvania, USA, and*

Kelly Doyle

Department of Education, Immaculata University, Immaculata, Pennsylvania, USA

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Abstract

Purpose – This mixed-methods study investigated how participation in book studies impacted future literacy leaders' perceptions of their use of literacy-related instructional practices and literacy leadership skills in facilitating literacy-related professional development.

Design/methodology/approach – Participants included elementary school teachers who were also graduate students at a Teacher Leadership Academy as part of a school-university partnership. Throughout three graduate classes, participants engaged in book study groups, reading professional books related to effective literacy practices. Class sessions included teacher-led discussions of key takeaways, reading the same text and then mixing to converse with others who read different titles. Finally, participants identified a strategy to incorporate and reflect on within their own practices. Following the graduate courses, participants completed a survey that included two demographic questions, 16 Likert scale items, and six open-ended questions.

Findings – Results indicated that participants perceived an increase in their knowledge of literacy research and practice because of their participation in the book study groups, and an increase in their self-efficacy to facilitate literacy-related professional development.

Originality/value – The results showed that the use of book study groups has the potential to impact the leadership of future literacy leaders. This study capitalized on the research-based value of book studies as a professional learning tool, yet extended the framework using a jigsaw book study format. While the sample size is small and not generalizable, the results demonstrate promise and warrant further research.

Keywords Literacy leadership, Professional development, Book studies, Jigsaw, Instructional practices

Paper type Research article

Introduction

“Professional learning for all is the keystone for educational renewal” ([National Association of Professional Development Schools, 2021](#), p. 13), and *practicing* teachers who study pedagogy in collaborative spaces become more effective instructors ([Goodland, 1994](#)). Furthermore, providing dedicated time over a sustained period is critical to this collaborative work, as it ensures that teachers can examine models, connect theory to practice, and reflect on implementation ([Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017](#)).

Yet, in an information age in which hundreds of articles and books are published yearly, keeping abreast of current research can be daunting, especially in literacy instruction. How can school districts ensure that their teachers are continuously learning the best literacy practices in a meaningful way that is relevant, *while also creating* a culture of ownership among the faculty? *One effective framework for such professional learning is the use of book studies*

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(Blanton, Broemmel, & Rigell, 2020; Hales, Hasselquist, & Durr, 2021; Rouech *et al.*, 2022). The purpose of this article is to describe a professional learning approach using book studies with elementary teachers who are participating in a school-university partnership through a Teacher Leadership Academy. The authors will discuss the quantitative and qualitative findings related to the participants' perceptions of their literacy knowledge and their literacy-related leadership skills.

Theoretical framework

Effective change leaders create and share knowledge with others, conduct action research, and promote inquiry among staff members (Fullan, 2022). Facilitating professional learning provides leaders with opportunities to lead change. *Professional development that effectively improves instruction should include* the analysis of instructional practices, collaboration and inquiry, and commitment to continuous improvement (DeWitt, 2020; DuFour *et al.*, 2024). Structured professional learning with collaboration also builds capacity among teachers and encourages the use of interpersonal leadership skills, such as listening and establishing trusting relationships (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Schleifer, Rinehart, & Yanisch, 2017).

Book studies, which can also be referred to as book clubs, inquiry clubs, or literature circles, provide the above-referenced structured professional learning opportunity for teachers and situates the learning in collaboration (Walpole & Beauchat, 2008). Beyond the independent reading portion, teachers engage in dialogic conversation, build common vocabulary, and gain shared meaning (Walpole & Beauchat, 2008). Gardiner, Cumming-Potvin, and Hesterman (2013) found that teachers perceive that book studies impact their instructional practices as well as their collective efficacy and inquiry. Book studies also increase participants' engagement and provide autonomy and collaboration, but do so within a structured framework in which students come prepared with reflections and/or having a leader to facilitate the discussion with recognition that each group member is a co-learner (Bean & Goatley, 2021). Importantly, book studies personalize meaning making opportunities and a greater sense of voice for participants in that they have a choice of books (Walpole & Beauchat, 2008).

Understanding how to bring forth viable changes to an organization through book studies requires change leaders to embrace how adults learn the best. Knowles (1984) shared the adult learning theory of andragogy, the art and science of helping adults learn. This includes the following four principles.

- (1) Involvement: Desire to be included in planning and evaluation
- (2) Experience: Conceptualize, act, approximate, and reflect
- (3) Relevant: Content applies to their practice
- (4) Problem-centered: Apply learning immediately to improve practice (as cited in Yopp, Ludwig, & Rall, n.d.; Knowles, 1984)

Adult learning is maximized within a respectful and safe climate, collaborative inquiry, and empowerment of those who participate (Blanton *et al.*, 2020; Yendol-Hoppey & Dana, 2010). Book studies offer an opportunity for teacher-led collaborative conversations geared towards the problem of practice (Blanton *et al.*, 2020; Hales *et al.*, 2021; Rouech *et al.*, 2022; Yendol-Hoppey & Dana, 2010). Engaging in book studies provides opportunities for teacher leaders to utilize coaching skills to change instructional practices within the Professional Learning Community (Bean & Ippolito, 2016).

Reflection is *also* vital for adult learning. Yendol-Hoppey and Dana (2010) described reflection as playing a critical role in the learning process, enabling educators to explore their actions during and after implementation. Teaching practices change because discussion with peers is the main modality for transforming action, and learning is solidified through not only experience but also reflection, meaning that intentional selection of strategies to implement

into practice and reflect upon is critically increasing effectiveness within the classroom setting (Bean & Ippolito, 2016; Crouch & Cambourne, 2020). *Book studies provide a framework for such reflection.*

Statement of the problem

Book studies have been demonstrated to be an effective professional learning strategy to enhance teacher autonomy, build collective efficacy, and transform practice (Bean & Goatley, 2021; Gardiner *et al.*, 2013; Walpole & Beauchat, 2008). With acknowledgment that new research is being produced rapidly, along with time being a consistent challenge for teachers, the problem arises of how to increase teacher learning so that they continuously use research-based practices despite those time constraints. In this study, the authors capitalized on the book study framework with a slight variation. This book study includes homogeneous discussions focused on a commonly read title, with the addition of a jigsaw framework, referred to also as mixed book study groups, adding discussions with colleagues who had read different books. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of this book study as used in a graduate course.

Site-based coursework and time

A school-university partnership in southeastern Pennsylvania was formed with a focus on developing elementary teachers to be teacher leaders as instructional coaches within a Kindergarten through Grade 4 single school setting. A Teacher Leadership Academy was formed that included a professor in residence who worked in tandem with aspiring teacher leaders who completed three graduate courses focused on improving literacy and instructional coaching practices. Teachers with varying years of experience between 0–20 years participated in three book studies, or one per course, for the first three classes, as part of their site-based coursework to grow their literacy knowledge and leadership capacity as instructional leaders.

Designing opportunities for book studies to occur during class involved using knowledge of the role of reading motivation and interest by providing future teacher leaders with a choice in a text to study with other classmates over the course of a semester. Text selection was driven by the district's goal of increasing effective literacy practices utilized in elementary classrooms across disciplines, meaning that teachers who focused on mathematics or other specialty areas would view literacy as a skill rather than a content area. The professor along with district and school administrators, selected the books based upon relevancy to district goals, practical application, author credibility, and accessibility. In addition to selecting the books, the school district purchased them for the participants. The following is a list of titles participants could potentially read for the book study across three graduate courses.

- (1) *Every Child a Super Reader: 7 Strengths for a Lifetime of Independence, Purpose, and Joy* (Allyn & Morell, 2022).
- (2) *Every Kid a Writer: Strategies That Get Everyone Writing* (Boswell, 2021).
- (3) *Start with Joy: Designing Literacy Learning for Student Happiness* (Cunningham, 2019).
- (4) *Unlocking the Power of Classroom Talk: Teaching Kids to Talk with Clarity & Purpose* (Frazin & Wischow, 2020).
- (5) *Reading Above the Fray: Reliable, Research-Based Routines for Developing Decoding Skills* (Lindsey, 2022).
- (6) *Comprehension Connections: Bridges to Strategic Reading* (McGregor, 2007).
- (7) *Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child* (Miller, 2009).

- (8) *Purposeful Play: A Teacher's Guide to Igniting Deep and Joyful Learning Across the Day* (Mraz et al., 2016).
- (9) *A Teacher's Guide to Vocabulary Development Across the Day* (Wright, 2021).
- (10) *Strive-for-Five Conversations: A Framework that Gets Kids Talking to Accelerate Their Language Comprehension and Literacy* (Zucker & Cabell, 2023).

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During in-class collaborative time, three stages of learning occur. First, for this study the teachers selected a title from the district-support list above and developed a reading schedule utilizing specified class meeting times. Approximately 15–20 minutes were set aside in course time meetings across a full semester for teachers to discuss the readings within their book study and collaborate to determine key instructional takeaways that each member recorded in their course notebook.

Second, teachers were assigned a *jigsaw group* by a professor, who ensured that participants were with peers who read different texts and considered promoting vertical alignment between grade levels. *This component extends learning beyond the common text participants read with some of their classmates. The jigsaw feature of this framework provided participants with an opportunity to engage with colleagues who had read a different title, thus further enhancing their professional learning related to yet another aspect of literacy.* Providing 10–15 minutes of course time, the teachers shared their key instructional takeaways from their *jigsaw groups*. Additionally, *jigsaw groups* were encouraged to connect to classroom experiences and record the takeaways.

Immediately following the *jigsaw groups*, the last step was for teachers to consider a strategy to add to their practice by documenting the steps for implementation. Reflection on the entire book study session was encouraged to process learning from the overall session. A notebook was provided for synthesis, analysis, and evaluation (see Table 1 for Book Study Procedures).

Guiding questions

To determine the impact of book studies on changing instructional practices with elementary teachers, specifically in literacy and facilitating professional development, the following questions were examined.

- (1) How does participation in a *book study* impact participants' use of new instructional practices?
- (2) How does participation in a *book study* impact participants' perceptions of their ability to facilitate literacy-related professional development?

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to analyze participants' perceptions of their use of instructional strategies as well as their confidence as related to literacy leadership skills. The use of quantitative and qualitative instruments provides the opportunity to gain a more complete understanding of a topic, capitalizing on the strengths of each methodology (Cresswell & Creswell, 2018). Together, the data complemented each other and allowed the researchers to leverage the strengths of both approaches to interpret participants' experiences and practices related to literacy topics studied in this book study with *jigsaw groups* as described above.

To investigate each of the guiding questions following the participation in the *book study*, seven teachers voluntarily completed a Likert scale survey, followed by open-ended questions (See Appendix A). Nemoto and Beglar (2014) indicated that Likert scale questions enable opinions and beliefs about a topic or issue to be shared with parameters; however, the authors

Table 1. Book study procedures

Component	Description
Choice Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Select a text from the proposed texts based on an area of inquiry ● Find peers reading the same book ● Establish group norms to guide the work together ● Design a schedule for readings and discussions
Read	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Before Reading → Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Jot a goal for this section of reading ● During Reading → Monitor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Read, stop, think, react, repeat ○ Possible thinking stems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I think . . . ■ I wonder . . . ■ This reminds me of . . . ■ I'm realizing . . . ■ I'm noticing . . . ■ Now, I'm thinking . . . ● After Reading → Reflect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What do I understand now that I did not before?
Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discuss the readings and how they will influence your teaching practice and professional development ● Share wonderings/questions that remain
Share	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meet with your mixed book study determined by the professor to ensure a jigsaw of all texts ● Share key ideas from your book study in your mixed book study. Peers should engage in the discussion by sharing their ideas, thoughts, and etc.
Implement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement strategies learned from study groups in practice ● Reflect on implementation based on student learning/engagement and professional development reflections
Reflect	<p>Upon completion of the study group, answer the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What did you learn? ● How has this changed your thinking about your teaching? Usage of this approach for future professional development?

Source(s): Authors' own work

recommend that a questionnaire or survey needs to be accompanied with another data source such as open-ended questions. According to [Albudaiwi \(2017\)](#), open-ended questions in qualitative research provide a more comprehensive view of the content being explored as they allow participants to share more of their perceptions.

Upon submission of the surveys, the quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented using mean scores along with the number and percent of participants ranking specific responses to each question. Qualitative data were analyzed through qualitative coding ([Cresswell & Creswell, 2018](#)). Open-ended responses were analyzed to identify phrases, words, and ideas that related to each research question and coded accordingly by research questions one and two. After initial coding, data were grouped by related codes into themes within each research question, allowing the themes to emerge inductively. Themes are addressed in the Results and Discussion sections that follow.

Participants were asked to complete a survey that included two demographic questions, 16 Likert scale items, and six open-ended questions. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the lead author's university.

Results

Implementing new instructional practices

Participants responded to survey items regarding their use of specific instructional strategies following their participation in the book study. Strategies included: (1) motivating readers and

writers, (2) engaging learners in collaborative conversations, (3) using interactive read-alouds, (4) establishing identities as readers and writers, and (5) increasing opportunities for independent reading and writing. Teachers also responded to open-ended questions asking them to describe specific practices they implemented, explain why they did so, and reflect on their perceptions of how the book study influenced or validated their use of these instructional strategies. A summary of the results is provided in Table 2. Note that Table 2 provides mean scores, which provide a useful snapshot of teachers' perceptions. Likert scale survey responses were converted to a number on a scale of 1–5, as follows: Strongly Agreed (5.0), Agreed (4.0), Neutral (3.0), Disagreed (2.0), and Strongly Disagreed (1.0). Mean scores are reported below in the Results and Discussion sections. However, due to a small sample size, data should be interpreted as informational rather than generalizable or statistically significant.

Motivating readers. All participants either “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” that they began implementing strategies related to motivating readers as a result of their participation in the Book Study, with a mean score of 4.43. Kindergarten teachers reported the highest adoption rate (4.5). A Grade 3 teacher identified the use of an interest survey to motivate readers and elaborated that “giving students books that they enjoy will help them become more interested in reading and makes the students feel special and like they belong when a teacher gives them a book that they actually enjoy.” The teacher emphasized the importance of “setting a focus for their reading/writing so students have something to do/look for when reading/writing,” which she identified as critical to increasing reading motivation.

Collaborative conversations. Teachers reported strong implementation of collaborative conversation strategies (4.29) with the highest use among teachers with 0–5 years of experience and Kindergarten teachers (both 4.5). One Kindergarten teacher indicated that she “implemented the *Strive for Five* conversations” which has “helped students’ comprehension and pushes students to think beyond what they are used to” and contributed to students “wanting to share their thoughts during read alouds” (Zucker & Cabell, 2023). Furthermore, a Grade 4 teacher noted how collaborative conversations allowed her students “to prolong conversations by at least five shares between the two partners” in math and science. She also implemented sentence starters to increase students’ use of academic vocabulary.

Motivating writers. Participants reported an increased use of strategies to motivate writers (4.14). Teachers with 0–5 and 15–20 years of experience reported the highest implementation of strategies for motivating writers (4.5), while teachers with 11–15 years reported the lowest (3.67). Grade 4 teachers scored highest (4.33) followed by Kindergarten teachers (4.0).

Table 2. Increase in use of instructional strategies

New instructional strategy goal	Reported increased level of use (Mean)
Motivating Readers	4.43
Collaborative Conversations	4.29
Motivating Writers	4.14
Opportunities for Independent Reading	4.14
Building Student Identities as Readers	4.0
Opportunities for Independent Writing	3.71
Building Student Identities as Writers	3.57
Interactive Read Alouds	3.57

Note(s): $N = 7$
Source(s): Authors’ own work

Independent readers

Participants reported increasing opportunities for independent reading. With a mean score of 4.14, all teachers with 0–5 years strongly agreed that they have increased such opportunities. Teachers with 11–15 years of experience reported the next highest score (4.0), while those with 15–20 years of experience reported the lowest scores (3.00). Kindergarten teachers reported the highest use (4.5). Qualitatively, teachers espoused the benefits of the additional independent reading opportunities. One teacher reported that she “enjoyed teaching more than before” as she watched her students “blossom into more well-rounded readers.” Another shared that the additional independent reading time allowed her to “learn more about my students as readers and writers.” She elaborated that students benefit by being exposed to different writing styles, genres, and authors “more this year than any year before.”

These findings demonstrate that book studies spark curiosity and teachers’ willingness to increase their use of new instructional strategies to enhance their literacy practices. Additionally, both Likert scale responses and teachers’ open-ended testimony show their perceptions of how these practices positively influence student motivation and achievement.

Facilitating literacy-related professional development. Participants rated their perceived ability to facilitate literacy-related professional development using Likert scale and open-ended questions. Likert scale items assessed participants’ increased understanding of literacy research, effective instructional practices, as well as the development of skills related to communication, teamwork, and self-efficacy. Open-ended questions inquired about how sharing strategies with colleagues influenced participants’ perceived knowledge of professional learning development. A summary of the results is provided in Table 3. Note that Table 3 provides mean scores as informational snapshots of participant perceptions. Given the small sample size, these means should not be interpreted as statistically significant or generalizable.

Highest confidence: research and analysis of instruction; teamwork/collaboration. Participants reported the strongest confidence in three literacy-related professional development concepts: knowledge of literacy research and instructional practices, development of teamwork and collaboration skills, and the ability to help colleagues analyze their own instructional practices. Each of these practices scored 4.71 out of 5.0. Every participant “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” with statements that they had improved their knowledge of or abilities in these concepts. There was a slight variation in results based on experience level. Participants with 0–5 years of experience consistently “Strongly Agreed” with these statements, whereas those with 11–20 years of experience reported that they either

Table 3. Increased confidence or ability related to facilitating literacy-related professional development

Facilitating professional development concept	Reported increased ability/Confidence (Mean)
Knowledge of literacy research	4.71
Knowledge of effective instructional practices	4.71
Knowledge of effective communication skills	4.71
Teamwork	4.71
Confidence in building literacy-related capacity among colleagues	4.43
Confidence in ability to collaborate related to instructional practices	4.71
Will be able to focus colleagues on student achievement in literacy	4.57
Will be able to deliver content in clear, concise manner	4.57

Note(s): N = 7

Source(s): Authors’ own work

“Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” averaging 4.5. Mean scores were nearly identical across grade levels. Finally, all participants either “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed,” with all statements, indicating growth in each concept or skill.

Several participants reported that the jigsaw group component of the book study specifically increased their knowledge of instructional practices. One indicated that she “learned a lot of great information/strategies from the other books” she had not read. Another noted that being required to discuss her book with others forced her to “become more knowledgeable in the content of the book” she read so that she could “teach her colleagues new things.”

Student achievement. Two concepts averaged 4.57: focusing colleagues on literacy-related student achievement and delivering information in a clear and concise manner. All respondents “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” that they *are* able to do so because of their participation in the *book study*. One participant reported that the framework of the *book study* discussions helped her “make sure that the points are presented in a concise manner and ensure that the strategies” are explained simply and with precision.

Collaboration related to instructional practices. Participants showed slightly less confidence collaborating with colleagues about instructional practices (4.43). Despite the relatively lower score, one participant indicated that the *jigsaw groups* increased her “confidence in speaking” about professional topics, and in *her ability to “present information effectively to colleagues.”* She explained that prior to the *jigsaw groups*, she would “sit back and let others share their thoughts” but she now “shares ideas to help my team.” Another participant directly attributes this confidence to “the knowledge building” she experienced in this group. No differences arose based on years of experience or professional roles.

These results indicate that participation in the *book study* increased participants’ *perceived* knowledge of literacy research and instructional practices. Furthermore, *participants reported* increased confidence in their ability to facilitate effective, evidence-based literacy-related professional development.

Discussion

While the small sample size in this study was identified as a clear limitation, *meaningful* trends emerged from the data. *Participants reported increased use of instructional practices studied via the book study format, as well as increased confidence levels for collaborating with and delivering professional development to their colleagues as related to student achievement and best practices for literacy instruction.*

Implementing new instructional practices

Participants reported an increased use of research-based instructional practices based on their participation in the book study. Practices with the highest increase include those related to motivation and engagement, along with collaborative conversations and language development. Participants also noted improved student outcomes and cross-curricular applications as related to these instructional practices.

Motivation and engagement. Participants indicated using new instructional strategies *directly attributable to the book study*, especially those related to motivating readers. Two key professional texts informed this shift: *Start With Joy: Designing Literacy Learning For Student Happiness* (Cunningham, 2019) encouraged teachers to incorporate connection and choice into literacy experiences, while *Every Child A Super Reader: 7 Strengths For A Lifetime Of Independence, Purpose, And Joy* (Allyn & Morrell, 2022) emphasized the importance of choice, independent reading time, and teachers modeling reading behaviors to build classroom communities. Toste, Didion, Peng, Filderman, and McClelland (2020) reported that motivation is related to reading, and that teachers should engage in such independent reading practices themselves. *One teacher indicated that students’ motivation increased as she began*

implementing “the time for explicit independent reading time and . . .giving students books that they enjoy.”

Collaborative conversations and language development. Most participants indicated adopting instructional practices related to collaborative conversations, which were designed to develop students’ speaking and listening skills and deepen their comprehension. The framework drew on two primary texts. *Unlocking The Power of Classroom Talk: Teaching Kids to Talk With Clarity & Purpose* (Frazin & Wischow, 2020) explores practical strategies to promote student-generated discussions for interpreting text, building ideas, clarifying questions, and analyzing text. *Strive-For-Five Conversations: A Framework That Gets Kids Talking to Accelerate Their Language Comprehension and Literacy* (Zucker & Cabell, 2023) provides a framework for developing students’ oral language proficiency, leading to improved reading comprehension. *This oral language development through Collaborative Conversations was noted in ELA “especially during read-alouds,” but also in “content areas such as math and science.”*

Student outcomes and cross-curricular application. Qualitative analysis of participants’ responses to open-ended questions reinforced the quantitative data regarding increased use of effective literacy practices. Two noteworthy themes emerged in the open-ended data: attributing the use of literacy practices to improved student achievement and the use of literacy practices across content areas. Teachers “created more purposeful opportunities for conversations” which they view as directly contributing to “improved comprehension” and an increase in students’ use of “academic vocabulary” in content areas. As a result, several teachers reported a positive “change in students’ thinking and speaking during text-related conversations.” Classroom teachers noted the value of incorporating strategies in other content areas, especially science and mathematics. The use of “table talk” and “anchor charts” was utilized by multiple teachers in science, while “anchor charts posted” in the math classroom “helped students access their prior knowledge.

Facilitating literacy-related professional development

Participants also reported an increase in their knowledge of best practices related to literacy and instruction, as well as an increased confidence in their abilities to provide literacy-related professional development skills. Participants attribute these increases to their participation in the book study.

Enhanced literacy knowledge and instructional Expertise. An analysis of quantitative data revealed that participants’ knowledge of literacy research and instructional practices, development of teamwork and collaboration skills, and confidence in helping colleagues analyze their own instructional practices were deemed to be the most significant. The theme of increased literacy knowledge and increased confidence in collaboration skills also manifested through a qualitative analysis of open-ended responses. Participants indicated specifically that the jigsaw groups framework “helped [them] better understand” the content of the professional texts and increased their understanding of literacy knowledge and practices. The framework allowed participants to “gain knowledge from multiple sources at one time.”

Confidence and collaborative skills. Participants credit the discussion component of the book study with “building confidence” in understanding the literacy topics and also in terms of working with colleagues to “implement” strategies in the classroom. Furthermore, the opportunity to engage in discussions with grade-level peers as well as those in different grade levels enhanced participants’ learning related to new literacy skills and strategies. One participant went so far as to say that “discussing our learning and our reading” was “the most valuable part” of the framework and directly contributed to “increased confidence” in their literacy knowledge and ability to “collaborate with colleagues” in her setting. *Another participant also indicated the book study helped her “build confidence in what I am speaking about and confidence within my job.”*

Relationship to prior research

Participants reported increased knowledge of literacy research and corresponding instructional practices through *the book study*, which directly correlates with high levels of collaboration, discussion building, and the intentional implementation of new instructional practices (Crouch & Cambourne, 2020; Schleifer *et al.*, 2017). Considerations within the framework adhered to adult learning principles, including a safe climate and opportunities for experiential learning and reflection (Bean & Ippolito, 2016). Moreover, all participants agreed that teamwork and collaboration skills, along with improved confidence in supporting colleagues in the analysis of instruction practices, were a result of participation in the *book study*. This coincides with Schleifer *et al.* (2017) who shared that collaborative professional learning leads to better teaching. These results are further substantiated by the fact that professional development incorporating an analysis of instructional practices is effective, which in this case increases participants' *perceptions of their* improved abilities to help colleagues conduct such analyses (DeWitt, 2020; DuFour *et al.*, 2024).

Implications and recommendations

The results of this study have practical implications for teacher professional development. Book studies are an established professional learning framework (Blanton *et al.*, 2020; Hales *et al.*, 2021; Rouech *et al.*, 2022). This study extends that framework by incorporating the jigsaw group element, where participants discuss texts they have not personally read. Participants indicated that book discussions enhanced their professional knowledge of literacy instructional strategies and increased their confidence in providing literacy-related professional development to their colleagues. Therefore, we recommend putting book studies into practice. In school-university partnership schools and beyond, the use of book studies could be applied to literacy professional development and extended to other professional development topics. The jigsaw group component was well-received by participants.

Due to the relatively small sample size in this current study, we recommend further research using a larger sample to strengthen the ability to generalize the findings. We also recommend exploring the application of book studies to additional professional development topics based on district needs.

The design of *book studies* was intentional, utilizing a variation of the jigsaw method proven to be effective with students in K-12 (Hattie, 2023) as well as incorporating analysis of instructional practices, collaboration, building capacity among teachers, and developing leadership skills related to communication and teamwork (DeWitt, 2020; DuFour *et al.*, 2024).

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal the positive impact of participation in *book studies* on the development of participating future literacy leaders. Through collaborative engagement with diverse texts, participants reported growth in both their literacy knowledge base and leadership skills, particularly in the context of facilitating literacy-related professional development. While this study included a small sample size, these results suggest that *book studies* focused on literacy-related instructional practices can serve as powerful professional learning communities. *They extend the solid research base on the use of book studies in professional development. However, the addition of the jigsaw component not only deepens content knowledge but also cultivates the confidence and competencies necessary for leading and impacting instructional changes.*

Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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Corresponding author

Meganlyn Norris can be contacted at: mnorris@kutztown.edu