EXPLORING LEARNING ASSISTANCE TEACHERS’ NEEDS, SUPPORTS, AND
CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING INFORMATION ABOUT READING INSTRUCTION

by

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive study investigated the needs, supports, and challenges of learning assistance teachers (LATs) in the Canadian provinces of Saskatchewan and British Columbia (BC), as they sought to develop expertise about reading instruction. Interactions were examined between needs, supports, and challenges, and three contextual factors: (1) distance from a major university, (2) provincial use of LAT qualification standards, and (3) LAT teaching experience.

Fifty LATs were interviewed, half of these from the three school districts in each province. Districts were located approximately one, two, or three hours travel distance from a university. Also interviewed were administrators responsible for learning assistance in each district and one education ministry representative from each province with similar responsibility.

The data showed LATs spent at least half of their time on reading instruction, yet many felt unprepared for this task when hired. After employment, almost all accessed formal and informal learning opportunities about reading instruction. They wanted more information about reading assessment and instruction before they were hired, and continuous information afterward regarding areas of individual need and about new research, methods, and materials. The expectation that LATs should be expert teachers was among the most consistent of reported supports. LATs said this expectation could be enhanced by the use of provincial standards of LAT qualification. LATs were most challenged by time, costs, and travel. Variations in distance, application of standards, and LAT experience also impacted learning needs and choices.

One set of study recommendations came from LATs themselves, and another more interpretive list suggested principles, program types, and actions that could also positively impact LAT expertise. These can be used to enhance LAT access to knowledge in these provinces and elsewhere and thus may positively impact the supply of expert teachers for reading support roles.
PREFACE

This study was approved and received certification from The University of British Columbia, Behavioural Research Ethics Board: Minimal Risk Certificate of Approval Number H06-80543
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DEDICATION

To Learning Assistance Teachers:

Exceptional teachers for exceptional students
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The importance of expert teaching for children’s reading development is strongly supported by research (Darling-Hammond, 2000b; Hall & Harding, 2003; International Reading Association or IRA, 2000). It appears especially critical to the progress of struggling readers (Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2000). To develop the knowledge to be most effective, reading teachers need experience and knowledge about reading (Laverick, 2005). Experience is gained by teaching; knowledge about reading may be acquired primarily through formal education and less formal professional development or PD (Anders, Hoffman, & Duffy, 2000; Duffy, 1994; Laverick, 2005).

The number of teachers with expertise in reading instruction varies with time and circumstance. Currently, across North America there is a shortage of teachers for all special education roles (McLesky, Tyler, & Flippin, 2003). In British Columbia (BC) and Saskatchewan, the two study sites, reading support is typically provided by learning assistance teachers or LATs. These school-based special education teachers serve students who struggle with academic tasks but whose needs may be met in regular class placements with additional support (BC Ministry of Education, 2006; Saskatchewan Education, 2002). In the recent past, there has been a shortage of qualified teachers available for employment in special education roles, which includes LATs, in BC (BC Ministry of Education, 1997, Hurd, 2002; Seigel, Lam, & Ladyman, 2000) and in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Education, 2001b, 2007). More teachers with the expertise for learning assistance positions may be needed in these provinces.

Evidence suggests teachers currently working as LATs in BC may want additional knowledge about their tasks (Naylor, 2005: Seigel et al., 2000). In a 1997 survey, BC district administrators and teachers including some LATs reported they wanted LATs to have more
knowledge including how to support children’s literacy development, to meet the LAT qualifications suggested by the ministry, and to be provided with appropriate, accessible PD (BC Ministry of Education, 1997). In Saskatchewan, the review, Educator Supply and Demand to 2011 (Saskatchewan Education, 2007), did not provide exact figures but it interpreted the number of teachers requesting financial support for coursework in special education as an indication that teachers, including LATs, wanted more knowledge relevant to their tasks.

To improve the number of teachers with expertise for particular jobs, more teachers need access to information that builds knowledge related to their job tasks. Research has indicated that to be effective, support for teacher knowledge development in the form of pre and post service education and professional development or PD must suit the context of their work (Basica, 2003; Bolam & McMahon, 2004; Grimmett & D’Amico, 2008). Many agents and agencies in BC and Saskatchewan provide support for teachers to acquire knowledge about reading instruction. Information suited to the specific working contexts in these provinces would help these planners identify appropriate reading-related coursework and PD and arrange supports that enhance access to these for both existing and prospective LATs.

**Background**

LATs need considerable reading expertise. Their students often have one or more reading skill deficits combined with any of a range of learning impediments that affect their need for specialized instruction (BC Ministry of Education, 2006). LATs need general knowledge about both exceptional students and about the processes of reading (Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2000). They also need practical information about how learning to read may be enhanced by any of a large repertoire of instructional strategies and materials researchers have identified as being useful for students with special needs (Wray & Medwell, 1999). Each of these bodies of
knowledge—about exceptional students and about teaching reading—are large and complex. Their interaction is intricate.

**Knowledge for Expertise**

The knowledge required to teach reading has been described by a number of organizations (e.g., Council for Exceptional Children, 2004, 2005; IRA, 2000, 2010a; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2001). The IRA (2000) document describes reading as a complex system of deriving meaning from print that requires learners to develop motivation, comprehension strategies, vocabulary and background information, fluency, decoding strategies, and phonemic awareness and that teachers must be prepared to provide instruction in each of these areas. Rankin-Erickson and Pressley (2000) surveyed 33 primary level special education teachers from across the United States who supervisors characterized as effective. They found these effective reading teachers had a solid understanding of the aspects of language that affect learning to read and the theories and principles of both direct instruction and constructivism. They knew how to implement teaching strategies that reflected differing philosophies of reading acquisition and they had the interpersonal skills to effectively communicate and collaborate about reading with colleagues. Expert reading teachers had specific instructional knowledge about reading including: concepts of print, the alphabetic principle, letter/sound associations, auditory and visual discrimination, decoding skills, phonics and sight words, and development of vocabulary, comprehension strategies, background knowledge, and text elements.

While a broad knowledge of reading instruction would thus appear essential for LAT expertise, no information was found in either BC or Saskatchewan provincial documents specifically about what knowledge about reading instruction LATs needed to possess in those contexts. Though districts in BC are responsible for setting standards of employment
qualification for LATs, the BC provincial level special education policy document delineates the expectation that LATs be able to lead and coordinate instruction for students with varying and possibly overlapping learning impediments within the complexities of subject skill development processes all in relation to the curriculum and in collaboration with other teachers, central office support staff, parents, and their students (BC Ministry of Education, 2006). To accomplish these tasks, the policy document suggests LATs should have skills that include communication and collaboration, teaching and management strategies, evaluation and selection of instructional materials, use of informal and norm-referenced assessment tools, and the ability to develop, implement, and evaluate an IEP (BC Ministry of Education, 2006). Saskatchewan lists particular coursework on similar topics. Though a high proportion of students would be referred to learning assistance programs for problems with reading/literacy (personal experience), neither reading nor literacy is specifically mentioned in either province’s standards for LAT education and experience (BC Ministry of Education, 2006; Saskatchewan Education, 2002).

**Expert Teachers for Special Education**

There is a scarcity of teachers for special education positions across North America (McLeskey et al., 2003). In 2000 the American Association for Employment in Education determined that the most significant shortage of teachers in the United States was in the field of special education. Within that field, the two areas of greatest shortage were teachers for students with learning disabilities and teachers for students with mild to moderate disabilities. Both of these student categories would be served by LATs.

A similar shortage of qualified teachers for all special education positions appears to extend to BC and Saskatchewan. In its 1997 Report on Learning Assistance Services, the BC Ministry of Education found a scarcity of teachers for LAT work across that province. The
ministry in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Education, 2007) also reported a continuing shortage of special education teachers which would include LATs.

In BC and Saskatchewan, LATs may need more knowledge in order to implement effective reading instruction. LATs in these provinces address the instructional needs of learning disabled students and students who have mild to moderate learning difficulties. Both types of students might be expected to require support in reading; reading disabilities affect at least 80% of the learning disabled population (Lyon, 1995), and students with mild to moderate learning difficulties typically require reading instruction that is more explicit and more intensive than that provided in a general education classroom setting (Baker & Allington, 2003).

Desire for Expertise

The desire of special education teachers, including LATs, for additional knowledge about literacy instruction has been identified in BC (BC Ministry of Education, 1997) and implied in Saskatchewan (Hurd, 2002, Saskatchewan Education, 2007). Naylor (2005) of the BC Teachers’ Federation, in an investigation of two districts in BC, found that with the trend toward inclusion, together with changing provincial policies, LATs had recently found themselves in multiple roles, some of which were new to them. Their new roles could expect them to work with students who are developmentally delayed, hearing or visually impaired, or learning English as an additional language. These special needs had not traditionally been their responsibility. Teachers and their districts now wanted access to more education and PD opportunities for LATs in areas including literacy and its instruction.

Impacts on Number of Expert Teachers

A shortage of teachers in general may be attributed to a number of factors. Encouraging the graduation of enough new teachers for special education positions is important, but the
retention of those teachers after employment has been shown to have an even stronger impact on teacher supply (McLeskey et al., 2003). Retention is a particular issue for new teachers. Ingersoll (2001a) found 50% of new teachers left within five years. McLeskey et al. (2003) reported more special education teachers left teaching than general education teachers, and fewer returned after a leave. These researchers also found that teachers who were not certified to teach special education were three times as likely to leave their teaching positions as fully certified teachers. Therefore McLeskey and colleagues concluded that the use of under qualified and perhaps inexperienced teachers in special education appears to perpetuate the shortage of such teachers.

Other influences also affect the retention rates of general education teachers. Low salaries (Ingersoll, 2001a; Loeb, Darling-Hammond & Luczak, 2005) and poor working conditions (class size, facilities problems, multi-track schools, lack of textbooks) are among those factors, as is student demographics, that is, teaching in schools with low-achieving, low-income, minority students. Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997) found that teacher burn-out in the field of special education was correlated with (unspecified) working condition factors.

**Formal Education**

The number of expert teachers may be increased through providing more teachers with formal coursework in the areas of needed knowledge. However, knowledge about reading instruction may not always be easy to access in pre-service teacher education. Sadowy (2005) in her survey of teacher preparation programs at 49 sites across Canada found almost all (but not all) required at least one class in language arts, reading and reading instruction, or literacy. Sadowy did not present her evidence in terms of individual institutions, but among the institutions she studied, six were located in BC and two in Saskatchewan. She found that across the country, few classes required in teacher education programs were related to literacy or
reading, though components of reading might have been included in courses such as those on special education. Not every university offered advanced courses in reading and reading instruction, either, and among those that did, there was not a wide selection of classes available in every year, and few of these were offered on-line.

Similarly, Botzakis and Malloy (2006) reported that few beginning teachers in Canada felt prepared to teach reading. In fact, in one province (not specified in their report) it was possible to graduate and be certified to teach all grades without ever having taken even one course in reading, reading instruction, or literacy. All the Botzakis and Malloy (2006) respondents reported that a greater focus on teaching literacy was needed in Canadian preservice teacher education. Thus, though there usually are one or more classes focused on literacy/reading in Canadian preservice teacher education programs, access to these courses, including on-line-access, appears to vary a great deal and might be improved by incorporating more effective policies and programs that address the issue of access.

**Professional Development**

In addition to preservice education, professional development or PD has also been shown to improve teacher expertise both in general and in relation to reading instruction in particular (Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, & Rodriguez, 2005). As with formal education, effective PD may be based on a range of theoretical perspectives (Feiman-Nemser, 1990) and achieved through a variety of models (Kennedy, 2005). Ingvarson, Meiers, and Beavis (2005) found that across types of PD programs, (a) content, (b) active learning, and (c) follow-up on knowledge with a professional community positively impacted teachers’ perception of program efficacy.

Also across PD types, the benefits of teacher collaborative involvement in PD planning and in a professional community of practice have been repeatedly shown to improve student
outcomes including reading achievement (Cordingley, Bell, Evans, & Firth, 2005; Cordingley, Bell, Rundell, Evans, 2003). Teachers in BC have used various forms of such collaboration (Erickson & Brandes, 1998) particularly as they sought new learning in response to changes in their teaching context (Grimmett & D’Amico, 2008).

**Challenges in Teacher Learning**

Researchers have delineated a range of challenges associated with attempts to offer reading instruction courses. Botzakis and Malloy (2006) found that support for teacher knowledge development in literacy and reading was uneven across Canadian school districts and provinces. One set of challenges occurs around teacher experience. For adult learners, experience has been shown to differentially impact their learning needs. Livingstone (1999, 2001) found that Canadian adults prioritize different forms of learning through the course of their working lives. Young workers devote much time to both formal course participation and informal learning, while the relative importance of courses diminishes as middle-aged adults accumulate knowledge. Older employees participate less in formal courses but continue to be active informal learners as well as valuable tutors for younger workers. Canadian adult workers including teachers participating in work-related learning were more than twice as likely to learn through informal means (Livingstone, 2001). Also, the proportion of those involved in informal learning increased with age. Grimmett and D’Amico (2008) found the PD approaches used by teachers in Vancouver, BC, altered as a result of changes over time in the policies affecting the context of their work, and their preferred PD approaches were also altered by teachers’ past experiences. Learning offerings designed to positively impact the quantity of teachers who are expert in reading instruction must be adapted to their previous teaching experience.
Although no literature was found that addressed this issue, distance might be expected to impact access to education and PD about reading for those working far from major education facilities. Those working at farther distances may have increased or different needs for knowledge about reading compared to those nearer to universities, their challenges might differ, and the type of formal and informal learning methods they prefer might be different. No research was found which explored relationships between distance and sources of formal coursework.

**Policies to Increase the Number of Expert Teachers**

Most conditions adversely impacting expert teacher quantity could be improved through policy changes according to Ingersoll and Smith (2003). McLeskey et al. (2003) suggest the use of policies that encourage the hiring of qualified teachers and/or support the development of their expertise after employment help to break the cycle of the hiring of teachers whose subsequent leaving may be related to a lack of expertise. These authors, however, found little empirical data about which policies are most effective and cost effective for this purpose, and in which contexts the varying policies might work best. Information is needed about what works to attract or create expert teachers for special education and what supportive policies and programs keep them there. This study attempts to uncover such information, especially as it relates to knowledge about the teaching and learning of reading.

Governments and districts have tried a range of such policies and associated programs. Their focus is often on attracting more teachers into the field, but another set of policies addresses teacher retention with various incentives and supports intended to increase the expertise of teachers already in place (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Commonly used incentives for both attracting teachers and for improving the knowledge of those already employed appear to fall into several categories: direct or indirect monetary rewards, greater access to leadership
roles, increased access to jobs, more desirable job placements, better contracts, and the use of standards of teacher education and experience (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards [NBPTS], 2005).

**Policies around Standards**

Both Saskatchewan and BC use standards of education and experience for special education teachers. Policies regarding standards can operate as both an incentive and a support and they may be applied in various ways at any level of an education system. Applying teacher qualification standards appears to favourably impact both the quality of general instruction in schools (Vandevoort, Amrein-Beardsley, & Berliner, 2004) and the quality of literacy and reading instruction in particular (Laverick, 2005).

Applying such standards is thought to increase the quantity of expert teachers by enhancing the professional status of the teaching role. Their implementation and the resulting improved perception of the role appears to both encourage more teachers to seek the expertise required to meet the standards and get the jobs to which they apply but also appears to positively affect teacher retention (Connelly & Rosenberg, 2003; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997). O’Shay, Hammitte, Mainzer, and Crutchfield (2000) state, “Without quality, no profession can expect to attract or retain well-prepared and qualified individuals. Central to quality in any profession is the profession’s willingness to establish and abide by a set of…professional standards,” (p. 72). The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) (1989) reported using this reasoning as they considered the use of a national certification program for American teachers. They felt that by using such standards teacher education institutions would be more likely to set policies that ensured teacher access to courses related to standards, and schools would be
encouraged to hire only qualified teachers even if they had to pay more, and to support further formal education of both existing and new teachers, at least until they could meet the standards.

Teacher education qualifications have been found to be positively related to student achievement. Rankin-Erickson and Pressley (2000) reported that both the qualifications of the expert reading teachers they studied and the achievement of their students were better than average. Similarly, Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig (2005) in reviewing the records of a large sample of teachers of grade four in Houston, Texas, found their qualifications in terms of education and/or certification were positively related to the achievement of their students. Feng and Sass (2009) in the United States demonstrated that general education teachers with certification in special education, typically acquired after completing 30 hours or more of coursework in this area, secured higher reading scores for their students with disabilities than certified teachers without this preparation, and teachers certified only in special education secured stronger scores in reading than their colleagues with less preparation. The literature shows that encouraging teachers to achieve further education will have a positive impact on student achievement in reading.

However, while standards have several advantages in encouraging teachers to develop expertise, teachers may be discouraged from attempting to meet standards and may also be denied access to the positions affected. Some experts (e.g., Goodman, 2007) and some teachers and their unions (personal experience) appear to be opposed to the use of standards for this reason, though there appears little published research on the issue.

Standards may be implemented in a variety of ways. The United States implemented standards at the federal level (NBPTS, 2001) while Canada, with responsibility for education lying at the provincial level, would apply those standards, when they are used, at either the
district level, at the provincial level (as in Saskatchewan), or at some combination of district and provincial levels (as in BC). Relevant to LATs, the International Reading Association, among other agents and agencies, has published a set of standards for specialist teachers of reading (2010a) and the Council for Exceptional Children has done the same for special education teachers (2004). BC (BC Ministry of Education, 2006) and Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Education, 2002) have each created similar sets of standards of expertise and experience at the provincial level that apply to LATs. These are used as guidelines in BC, where there is no penalty for districts which do not follow them, but they are mandatory in Saskatchewan, where financial penalties are imposed upon districts which use unqualified LATs.

**Problem**

The importance of teacher knowledge about reading instruction for regular students is documented; its value for students who struggle to learn to read is critical. The skill set required by those who teach reading and literacy has also been well documented, as has the additional knowledge that is considered essential to effectively instruct students who struggle with reading. Research has also shown that education and continuing PD can positively impact the quantity of teachers with expertise for particular positions. In BC and Saskatchewan, there appears a current shortage of LATs, those special education teachers who address the reading development needs of students with mild to moderate learning difficulties and who are likely to require support for their reading skill development. Even among employed LATs there appears a desire for further knowledge about their tasks. To arrange effective supports to meet teacher knowledge needs and to positively impact the number of expert teachers for LAT positions in BC and Saskatchewan, direct evidence of LAT needs, challenges, and preferred supports is required. Information is also
needed specifically about distance from formal education opportunities, the use of standards, and LAT experience as these contextual variables impact LAT needs, challenges, and supports.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this exploratory study was to ask LATs in BC and Saskatchewan about their need for knowledge about reading instruction and about what would help them gain any desired expertise in reading instruction. The study also investigated factors in LAT working contexts that impacted LATs’ needs for knowledge or enhanced or challenged their access to desired education and PD experiences. Interviews with a sample of LATs in both provinces were the main source of data. A study premise was that LATs themselves could best provide a window on their needs and on policies and programs that offered affordances and constraints as they sought to develop expertise in reading instruction. Teacher reports contribute a perspective often missing from previous contemporary debates on these issues. Additional data from district staff and ministry informants were used to explore details of context and to clarify the intent and application of the policies and programs the LATs mentioned.

The study first explored the provincial working context of LATs in the two provinces. Provincial contexts were compared at the outset to establish that they were sufficiently similar to allow LATs to be grouped together rather than managing their information as a comparative study between provinces. This initial examination ascertained that LATs in both places could be considered to work in generally similar provincial demographic contexts and under generally similar funding support for education and that their LAT role addressed similar student support. Thus LATs were treated as a single group when addressing the main study questions about needs, supports, and challenges.
While provincial education systems might be generally comparable, some factors differentially impact LAT work. Three of these contextual factors received particular focus in this exploration: distance from a university offering post degree or graduate courses about reading, varying provincial use of standards of education and experience for LATs, and varying LAT experience. Information was noted about possible patterns involving these factors and LATs reported reading knowledge needs, supports, and challenges. Such information would help decision-makers who might wish to apply study information to their own contexts.

Study data is intended to extend and clarify information received from previous work in these contexts in that it is more current. It also relates specifically to knowledge about reading instruction, and it comes from LATs themselves; both are perspectives lacking in existing research. The results enabled more specific recommendations to be made to support the setting of effective and efficient education and PD supports to enhance the availability of expert teachers for LAT roles in BC and Saskatchewan. The recommendations may inform similar planning elsewhere.

With these considerations in mind the following questions were addressed:

**About needs for knowledge about reading instruction:**

1. What are the tasks of LATs regarding the education needs of students who struggle with reading?
2. Do LATs feel their education and experiences have prepared them to meet the expectations of their jobs in relation to reading instruction?
3. What are LATs perceived needs, if any, with regard to education and professional development about reading instruction?
About supports:
4. What supports do LATs use and want to help them acquire further knowledge about reading instruction?

About challenges:
5. What are the challenges LATs encounter in accessing desired knowledge about reading instruction?

About contextual factors:
6. What are the patterns of interaction, if any, between LATs’ reported needs, supports and challenges, and three factors of context:
   a. distance from a full service university
   b. provincial use of LAT standards of qualification as guidelines or as requirements
   c. length of teaching experience in an LAT position

Method Overview
An exploratory descriptive study was undertaken to investigate the questions about LAT needs and access to knowledge about reading instruction in BC and Saskatchewan. First, information was collected from published sources including provincial and district websites to establish the provincial level context for the teachers’ work and to begin to explore the affordances and constraints they experienced. Next, interviews with LATs asked about their needs for knowledge about reading instruction and about what supported and challenged them and what further supports they would like as they attempted to acquire reading knowledge. Further interviews with the LATs’ district administrators and with education ministry informants clarified and validated the teachers’ reports. Additional document data gave further clarification
and validation. Secondary source data were gathered following references the teachers and the other informants had made.

To organize the data from multiple sources, the collected reports from initial contextual research and from primary informants and secondary sources were sorted and lightly edited into a single document, the Case Record. From this record a summary description of reported needs, supports, and challenges was developed. Tallies of relevant LAT interview responses together with their descriptive information further explored any patterns between LAT education and PD choices and LAT reported reading instruction needs, supports, and challenges, and three factors of context in particular: (1) distance from a major university, (2) provincial use of standards as guidelines or requirements, and (3) LAT years of experience. The analysis and interpretation proceeded from the Case Record with reference to the original data if necessary.

**Definition of Key Terms**

1. **Learning Assistance Teachers or LATs**: those teachers who offer support services to students who have mild to moderate difficulties in learning and behaviour and who struggle to develop academic skills, yet remain in their regular class (BC Ministry of Education, 2006).

2. **Professional Development or PD**: the acquisition of knowledge, understanding, or skill related to teaching but not leading to a formal university degree or formal teaching certification. It may be undertaken by teachers over the course of their career and usually, but not exclusively, while they are in service. It may also be referred to as continuing professional development or CPD.
3. **Teacher Education or Education**: formal education usually undertaken through a teacher education facility such as a university or college and usually leading to an undergraduate or graduate degree or to official teaching qualification.

4. **Full-service University**: universities which offer formal coursework about reading instruction at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

**Significance of the Study**

The information in this study describes the learning needs and the supports and impediments that enable or impede teacher access to education and PD about reading instruction, and it presents recommendations to enhance access to such opportunities as suggested by LATs and/or developed from their information. This description of needs and the accompanying recommendations will form a resource for those concerned with the construction of guided and sustained education and PD with the intention of improving the number of expert LATs in BC and Saskatchewan. Those concerned include teacher education institutions, provincial and district school systems including school trustees and their associations, teachers federations and unions, teacher and parent interest groups, community organizations, and any others with responsibility and interest in making policy decisions about, and providing practical pre and post service support for teacher access to education and PD about reading instruction.

While the study focused on LATs and their knowledge of reading instruction, some of the information developed may be more generally useful in relation to supporting the development of expert teachers in other instructional areas. And though the study examined teachers only in BC and Saskatchewan, there will be information from these two contexts that may usefully be applied in similar contexts elsewhere. In the final analysis, information from this study serves those who attempt to create policies and programs that increase the number of teachers with
expertise about reading and its instruction and who can deliver the best education support service possible for students who struggle with reading.

While the study is intended to offer insight into circumstances in the contexts examined, it is not intended as a firm basis for education and PD decision-making. In particular, it does not provide proof of causal relationships between the comments of teachers and their administrators and factors in their working contexts. Those using study results must make their own judgments about what might be usefully further investigated and applied in their own situations.

**Overview of the Thesis**

The report of this exploratory study is organized in five chapters of which this is the first. Chapter II contains a review of literature related to the study. It includes sections on the importance of teacher expertise for student development in reading, on the knowledge required for expertise in reading instruction, and on how such expertise might be developed. The quantity of expert teachers for BC and Saskatchewan learning assistance positions is reviewed along with literature about how number of expert teachers available may be favourably impacted. A final section examines related literature specifically about BC and Saskatchewan contexts. Chapter III describes the methodology of the study including a summary of the contextual information that might offer provincial level affordances and constraints to teachers seeking further knowledge about reading instruction. Chapter IV presents the analysis of the data in relation to each of the study questions using both summaries and excerpts from the interviews and tables of tallies of LAT responses. Chapter V interprets the teachers’ needs, supports, and challenges, and their recommendations, and it makes further recommendations about what might offer support and mitigate constraints as LATs attempt to gain expertise in teaching reading. Finally, suggestions are made about directions worthy of future investigation.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To situate this study within the context of existing research, several areas of literature were examined. The focus of the review was teacher knowledge about reading instruction for special needs students and teacher access to that knowledge. The chapter begins by discussing teachers’ needs, particularly the importance of teacher knowledge for student achievement. Next, the roles of LATs in BC and Saskatchewan were considered, along with the knowledge about reading instruction their tasks might require. When considering LATs’ supports and challenges, literature was reviewed about the development of teacher knowledge through education, professional development, and experience. The availability of expert teachers for and in special education positions offered further opportunity to examine LAT supports and challenges, as teachers in districts with fewer expert teachers might have different needs and be experiencing particular challenges, while areas with a better supply might have softened impediments, perhaps through policies such as the use of standards of expertise. Finally the review examined literature relating to LATs in Saskatchewan and BC and their needs, supports, and challenges with respect to knowledge about reading instruction.

Reading Teacher Expertise

Research indicates that teacher expertise makes a difference for students learning to read (International Reading Association, 2000; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Such expertise is especially critical for students who struggle with reading (Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2000). Fortunately, the qualities of highly effective reading teachers and the knowledge they require have been identified (Hall & Harding, 2003; Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2000). In a position paper on excellent reading teachers, the International Reading Association (IRA) (2000) indicated the beneficial effects of expert teaching:
Teachers make a difference. There is a growing body of evidence that documents teacher effects on children’s reading achievement scores. Teacher effectiveness—which can be measured as scores on teacher proficiency tests, past records of students’ improved scores, teachers’ level of education, type of appointment (tenured, probationary, substitute), and years of experience—is strongly correlated with children’s reading achievement. Moreover, teachers have strong effects on children’s motivation to read. (p. 1)

Teaching expertise in terms of education and qualifications impacts student achievement. The review commissioned by the United States Department of Education (Wilson et al., 2001) conducted a meta-analysis of 57 peer-reviewed studies that were published after 1980. Results of the meta-analysis indicated that positive relationships were found between teacher education and qualifications and student achievement. These results were consistent across studies, even when using different units of analysis, such as different measures of teacher preparation, and when studies controlled for students’ socioeconomic status (SES) and prior academic performance. Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002) compared 109 pairs of teachers, one group with university certification and another of uncertified teachers and Teach for America Teachers (the latter are required to take only one course before job placement). Students who learned with under-certified teachers demonstrated approximately 20% less academic growth per year compared to students who had instruction from university-certified teachers. Darling-Hammond (2000b) examined data from an American 50-state survey of policies, state case study analyses, the 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Surveys, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Her analysis indicated that measures of teacher preparation and certification were the strongest
correlates of student achievement in reading, both before and after controlling for student poverty and language status.

Researchers have suggested that the association between teacher education and expertise tends to be specific to subject matter (Brownell, Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2005). For example, in an International Reading Association sponsored study, students whose teachers were well prepared by an increased educational focus upon literacy to teach reading effectively made greater literacy achievement gains than did students taught by beginning teachers without that education (Flint et al., 2001).

Rankin-Erickson and Pressley (2000) explored the relationship between teacher expertise and student achievement with 31 elementary level special education teachers of various specialties from 13 different states. The teachers were judged as exceptional by their central office coordinators because of the extraordinary reading achievements made by their learning disabled students. Qualities among these teachers differed appreciably from those of less expert teachers in similar jobs (Vaughn, Moody, & Schumm, 1998). Results of the research indicate that expert teachers appear to share important expert knowledge about reading instruction that has a positive influence on their students’ reading achievement.

**Knowledge for Teaching Expertise**

What knowledge do expert teachers have that contributes to positive gains in students’ achievement in reading? Wray and Medwell (1999) report that there is some disagreement on the definition of effective reading behaviours, and hence the outcome measures used to evaluate those behaviours has invalidated older research. This problem has been solved by integrating the two previously dominant views of the reading process into a more refined and balanced approach (Stahl, 1998), which has drawn empirical support (IRA, 1999; National Reading Panel, 2000;
Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Mistretta, & Echevarria, 1998, 2002). According to Rumlehart (1994), the earlier skills based definition, rooted in behaviourism, viewed reading as a process of obtaining meaning from print using a set of directly taught skills. The subsequent constructivist approach viewed reading as focused on bringing meaning to print in a holistic fashion, scaffolded by interactions with others as emphasized by the Whole Language instructional model (Goodman, 1994). The new approach uses effective methodologies from both perspectives at once and has proven particularly helpful in teaching struggling readers (Pressley, 2002). A combination of outcome measures from both perspectives can now be used to define desirable literacy behaviours for research.

Another problem identified in earlier studies is that they relied on information from individuals such as school administrators who were not present in classrooms during reading instruction (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998). These informants tended to identify teacher expertise as teachers’ adherence to one or another particular reading perspective. More current studies focus on obtaining teachers’ perspectives to understand the events and activities that occur in classrooms.

Studies indicate that expert teachers appear to base their instruction on broad knowledge from a wide range of reading and reading theory perspectives. According to Hall and Harding (2003), broad knowledge is required because expert teachers match instructional strategies with students’ needs, drawing from a varied repertoire of practices. A series of studies by Pressley and colleagues focused on understanding the instructional practices of effective teachers and the knowledge and philosophies they use to engage in instructional decision-making. In the various studies, data was gathered from teachers of kindergarten to grade three, (Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996), grade five (Pressley, Yokoi, Rankin, Wharton-McDonald, & Mistretta, 1997).
grade 4/5 (Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Mistretta, & Echevarria, 1998), and special education (Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2000). There was also an ethnographic study examining grade one teachers (Pressley et al., 1999; Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Miistretta, 1997). While Berliner (1986) differentiated teacher groups on the basis of experience and found experienced teachers favourably impacted achievement, the Pressley studies relied on nomination by others to identify expert teachers. In some of Pressley’s work, a second group of more typical teachers was used to further explore differences. Teacher samples ranged from national to regional.

Research methods primarily involved one or two levels of questionnaires followed by interviews.

Considerable similarity was evident throughout these studies. In summarizing earlier work with classroom teachers, Rankin-Erickson and Pressley (2000) report that teachers identified as expert were found to be well-qualified, that is, they were certified teachers with at least three years of experience in teaching literacy. Expert teachers’ instruction was distinctly and substantially different from that of typical teachers. The experts had experience with several instructional approaches and integrated their background knowledge when tailoring instruction to suit learners’ individual needs. They balanced skill instruction with holistic reading and writing and were aware of their teaching practices, underlying philosophies, and goals for students.

In special education instruction, Rankin-Erickson and Pressley (2000) gathered data from 35 expert special education teachers in the United States to investigate literacy instruction. They found these expert teachers utilized both holistic and skills-based approaches to instruction. Furthermore, the special education teachers based instructional decisions on broad knowledge of the theoretical foundations of reading and drew from these theories to get information to suit the needs of their students. Rankin-Erickson and Pressley (2000) concluded that special education teachers need to have a solid understanding of the aspects of language that affect learning to read.
and of the theories and principles of direct instruction as well as constructivism. They concluded expert reading teachers are especially critical for special needs students whose unique learning difficulties make them particularly challenging to teach (Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2000).

Similar findings have come from other countries. Wray and Medwell (1999) gathered data from 228 primary teachers in Britain to evaluate the knowledge of expert literacy teachers. The teachers in this study were nominated by their district advisory staff (primarily reading consultants) as experts in literacy instruction. They included a validation sample of 71 primary teachers not so identified and incorporated an achievement component by retaining in the study only those teachers whose students achieved above average yearly reading gains. Questionnaires, interviews, and observations examined teacher practices, beliefs and knowledge, and in all of these factors, expert teachers were found to differ from those less expert. Expert teachers had a firmer command of knowledge about literacy learning and teaching, making an informed selection from a range of instructional approaches on the basis of a detailed understanding of the complex nature of literacy and reading and of student needs.

In summary, studies have found that teachers who have expert knowledge in reading—as indicated by their education, certification, or student gains—can positively influence student achievement. Expert reading teachers are experienced; they have important and specific knowledge about reading instruction that distinguishes them from teachers without this education or certification. This includes a broad knowledge about reading and about teaching reading. They draw from both skills based and constructivist views of reading to find appropriate strategies to use or to blend together to provide the best instruction for each student. Expert teachers also have a broad knowledge of the special needs of students. These findings appear to hold across regions and countries, throughout grade levels, and for special education as well as classroom teachers.
Knowledge for Learning Assistance Teachers

In BC and Saskatchewan, the exceptional learning needs of students in regular classrooms who struggle with reading are often addressed by special education teachers who serve as learning assistance teachers or LATs (BC Ministry of Education, 2006; Saskatchewan Education, 2002). Their title (LAT, Student Support Teacher, Resource Teacher, Learning Resource Teacher) and some aspects of their role may vary across provinces (Thompson, 2008).

The BC Special Education Manual (2006) describes LATs as those special education teachers who typically help to organize, maintain and integrate school services for students with special needs, and, as part of a school-based team, provide the major link with student support services available at the district level. The manual states that Learning Assistance services may include school-based consultation and collaborative planning as well as co-ordination with the school team, and instruction, assessment, and evaluation. Some schools combine learning assistance with other special education services to create a ‘Resource Teacher’ model as a district response to integration. In this model “students with special needs [are] included in educational settings with their peers who do not have special needs, and are provided with the necessary accommodations and adaptations” (Glossary, item 7). The LAT role in Saskatchewan is similar (Saskatchewan Education, 2002). Thus LATs in both provinces offer service to students who struggle with reading but who remain in regular classrooms. Their tasks are primarily related to special needs students, and would differ in content and quality from those of classroom teachers. LATs would need particular knowledge about reading and its instruction.

The expertise needed by reading support teachers such as LATs has been described by professional and policy-making groups (e.g., IRA, 2010a; Council for Exceptional Children,
2004, 2005; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2001). There is much agreement regarding these teachers’ requisite skills and knowledge.

**Knowledge for Special Needs Learners**

Teaching reading is a complex and challenging task which demands a broad range of teacher knowledge (IRA, 1999, 2000, 2010a; National Reading Panel, 2000; Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2000). The IRA in its position statement on excellent reading teachers (2000) indicated that reading is a complex system of deriving meaning from print that requires learners to develop motivation, comprehension strategies, vocabulary and background information, fluency, decoding, and phonemic awareness. The IRA recommends all reading teachers have a broad knowledge base that includes information about these critical qualities (IRA, 2010b). Rankin-Erickson and Pressley (2000, p. 18-22) found special education teachers drew on a similar knowledge base for their practice. This base included:

- Concepts of print.
- Alphabetic principle and alphabet recognition.
- Letter–sound associations, auditory discrimination, and visual discrimination.
- Decoding skills taught in both context and isolation.
- Explicit teaching of phonics based on individual student needs.
- Explicit teaching of sight words.
- Development of new vocabulary.
- Direct teaching of comprehension strategies.
- Explicit attempts to develop background knowledge.
- Teaching about text elements.
- Teaching about various illustrators.
For specialist teachers such as LATs who offer reading support, the IRA (2010a, 2010b) indicates that specific knowledge of reading instruction is critical. Such teachers must understand how to balance the components of reading instruction as they develop across individual children. They must be able to assess reading progress using a wide range of techniques and complex standardized assessment tools. They need to be able to draw from a repertoire of instructional philosophies, methods, and strategies, and they should know how to integrate them in order to meet student’s learning needs. Finally they need to be familiar with a variety of reading materials and have a broad knowledge of children’s literature. Knowledge in each of these areas must be vast (IRA, 2010b).

Guidelines of knowledge required of all teachers in BC are set by the BC College of Teachers (2008) and by the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan. The guidelines for both provinces refer to knowledge of instruction, assessment, student needs, and curricula. In addition, both the BC Ministry of Education (2006) and Saskatchewan Education (2002) have published a suggested set of coursework to develop the knowledge and skills needed for special education teachers and/or LATs.

According to the IRA (2000), teaching reading to special needs students requires significant amounts of specialized knowledge because these students differ from typical students in many ways. The BC Special Education Manual (2006), interpreting the intent of The School Act Special Needs Students Order M150/89, reports that “students with special needs have disabilities of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional, or behavioural nature, or have a learning disability or have exceptional gifts or talents” (p.1). Students who have been diagnosed with learning disabilities may, for example, “demonstrate a significant weakness in one or more cognitive processes (perception, memory, attention, receptive or expressive language abilities,
and visual-spatial abilities) relative to overall intellectual functioning” (p. 49). Each area of exceptionality may impact learning in ways that are complex and varied. For individual students, exceptionalities frequently overlap. Expert reading teachers are aware of students’ individual needs and choose methods and programs that enhance their learning (Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2000; Wray & Medwell, 1999).

In summary, for LATs in BC and Saskatchewan the body of reading instruction knowledge required in their teaching practice comes from integrating several areas of knowledge and their application. LATs must be able to teach students with varying and possibly overlapping exceptional learning needs while attending to the complexities of reading development processes and the curriculum.

**Developing Reading Teacher Expertise**

Knowledge about reading instruction can be developed. The literature indicates the positive relationship that exists between both education and professional development or PD (sometimes referred to as continuing professional development or CPD) and teacher knowledge (Charles A. Dana Center, 1999; Cordingley et al., 2003; Designs for Change, 1998; Taylor, et al., 2005). Experience is also essential in developing teacher knowledge (Berliner, 1994, 2004; Laverick, 2005; Stronge, 2002). The Council for Exceptional Children (2004) states that teacher knowledge must be constructed as continuous professional growth; such educators must be lifelong learners.

**Teacher Education**

Education for teachers is generally provided by universities or colleges and is formal in nature. That is, the courses involved lead to a university degree. Once the necessary coursework has been completed teachers are certified to teach in a particular province by a governing body
charged with that task. In BC, the BC College of Teachers assumes this role and in Saskatchewan the Ministry of Education awards the certificate. Most formal teacher education takes place in university classrooms, but distance education is now an important setting where a great deal of significant adult learning occurs (Gibson, 1992). Multi-media experimentations and the educational possibilities unleashed by satellite broadcasting have combined to provide more flexible learning opportunities that adult students’ access from many locations around the world (Brookfield, 1995).

**Theories of teacher knowledge development.** The theories of learning used to develop teacher knowledge come from general learning theories in educational psychology but have a focus on adult learners. The dominant psychological paradigms reflect behaviourist, cognitive, and constructivist or social constructivist views about learning (Woolfolk, Winne, Perry, & Shapka, 2009). Together with humanist theories, the more recent critical theoretical paradigms, and information about theories of motivation, these theories form the base for most current teacher education and PD (Kennedy, 2005). The paradigms overlap in practice (Kennedy, 2005).

**Models of teacher education.** In teacher education, orientations or models with one or a combination of theoretical paradigms as a base have been set out in various conceptual frameworks. Feiman-Nemser’s (1990) five category framework is often used to distinguish approaches to teacher preparation: (a) academic, (b) practical, (c) technological, (d) personal, and (e) critical. Alvermann (1990) referred to three views of learning to describe teacher preparation: the competency-based or transmission view, the traditional craft or apprenticeship approach, and the inquiry-oriented or constructivist approach. Distance learning (as well as more traditional learning models) may use adult educational themes of empowerment, critical reflection, experience and collaboration (Brookfield, 1995).
**Problems and issues in teacher education.** Many problems and issues are known to impact access to preservice education for teachers but research has not clarified that impact nor identified its effect in varying contexts (Wilson et al., 2001). The United States Commission for a Nation of Lifelong Learners (1997) concluded many current higher education practices have been poorly adapted to employer and adult learner needs. They can pose barriers to participation in learning, such as lack of flexibility in calendar and scheduling, academic content, modes of instruction, and availability of learning services. Wilson et al. (2001) reviewed issues and problems in teacher education across 57 American research reports. They found positive connections between subject matter preparation and teacher performance, but little research described the kinds and amount of knowledge needed. The pedagogical methods used in teacher education impacted teacher effectiveness, but the researchers concluded that the evidence was unclear in that those methods were either not identified specifically or appeared to vary. Teachers’ field experiences were an important aspect of teacher education but in some cases they were found to be problematic, as when there was no clear connection between those experiences and coursework, or when appropriate matches were not made between students and mentoring teachers, schools, or students’ expressed teaching interests. The review found very few studies concerning the effects of varying policies on the quality of pre-service teacher education (Wilson et al., 2001).

Brownell et al. (2005) found that, while research has examined general teacher preparation, there is still much to be learned about special educator preparation. They reviewed both general and special education teacher preparation literature in English to identify areas that should be addressed. For example, some of the qualities of the exemplary general teacher education programs (e.g., clear programmatic vision, integrating subject-matter pedagogy with
educational theory and field experience) appeared to be less useful, or were at least referred to as being only minimally useful, within the field of special education. Brownell et al. (2005) also noted that achievement outcomes generated from general education were different and perhaps not valid with special educators. There is therefore a need to define what it means to be a qualified special educator and to identify the essential components of special education preparation programs.

**Best practices in teacher education.** Regarding the structure of teacher education programs, research indicates that there is no shortcut to long-term university education. Darling-Hammond et al., (2005) compared 4- and 5-year teacher education programs with fast track alternative teacher education routes (e.g., the Teach for America program) using a large student-level data set from Houston, Texas. The researchers linked student characteristics and achievement with data concerning teachers’ certification status, experience, and degree levels. Results indicated that the students of certified teachers consistently demonstrated higher achievement than did students of uncertified teachers. Furthermore, nearly all of the Teach for America teachers tended to leave teaching after three years. The researchers estimated cost and attrition rates from available literature, and determined that after 3 years of teaching, 5-year teacher education programs were most cost effective because there was a lower attrition rate. The researchers also found that 4-year teacher education programs were more cost effective than any of the newer and shorter alternative teacher education programs.

One educational practice that has been consistently linked to the quality of initial teacher education is effective collaborative partnerships between universities and schools and classrooms where research and theoretical information from universities and practical knowledge form schools are exchanged (Bills et al., 2007). Effective collaborations in teacher education are
strongly recommended so that cohesiveness can develop among the teacher education participants and so there is coherence among the courses in a program, and between and among teacher education institutions, schools and other partners (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hargreaves, 2003; Holmes Group, 1990; Mancuso, 2000; Singer, 2008).

Professional development schools consist of such a collaborative partnership between teacher education programs and schools. They can take a variety of forms but generally focus on educating a large number of pre-service teachers in a single school (Holmes Group, 1990). For example, the partnership between the University of North Carolina-Greensboro and Hunter Elementary School enabled both to learn and benefit (Miller, Duffy, Rohr, Gasparello, & Mercier, 2005). The university benefited from the collaboration because they received access to a rich research environment, the schools benefited from access to pre-service teachers and courses that could help to enhance the development of their teaching staff, and the pre-service teachers benefitted because they had access to more and enhanced pre teaching experience with several mentor teachers.

A strong clinical practice in schools is recommended as part of pre-service teacher education. These pre-service practical experiences are often reported by teachers to be most useful (Sadowy, 2005). Such pre-service experience is thought to support the internalization of theoretical information that furthers the development of practical knowledge about teaching (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005). This teaching practice may have a number of forms, lengths, and approaches, and there is, thus far, no one right answer to what works best.

Some problems can occur around pre-service practicum experience. Floden and Ferrini-Mundy (2001) found that field experiences may not be well coordinated with the class-based components of teacher education and may be limited to mechanical aspects of teaching. Also,
issues may arise with placement location and with identifying schools that share educational perspectives with the university. The literature does not indicate the optimal time needed for such experience (Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). As a result, the length of practica range widely from a few weeks to several months (Sadowy, 2005).

One newer idea in pre-service teaching experience is the professional development school or PDS. The PDS model (Holmes Group, 1990) incorporates academic work and practice more closely together in a school set aside for that purpose. It is a collaborative and inquiry approach to teacher preparation that appears useful for some schools (Miller, Dully, Rohr, Gasparello, and Mercier, 2005). Professors have an opportunity to research learning and methodologies, pre-service teachers are offered regular classroom practice, and in-service teachers have access to the research information from the professors. With such models the line between academic theory and practice blurs.

Effective approaches to teacher education may need to reflect the teaching and learning needs of adult learners. Research has indicated that both in-service and pre-service teachers involved in formal education tend to be older than most undergraduate students (Hussar, 1998). A myriad of principles, practices, and models described in the literature discuss the matter of how to serve the learning needs of adult students in higher education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Mancuso, 2000; Merriam, & Caffarella, 1999). Mancuso (2000) employed surveys and conducted site visits to investigate six colleges and universities identified as best practice adult learner institutions (five American institutions and Athabasca University, Alberta, Canada). Mancuso found that employees consistently thought and operated with adult learners in mind. Other best practices he identified included having a clear mission, sharing decision-making, using a curriculum designed to meet student needs, presenting information through multiple
methods of instruction (including collaborative learning experiences), and ensuring student services that were easily accessible to adult learners. Mancuso (2000) noted that these findings represent philosophical beliefs substantially different from those used in most traditional higher education institutions.

The IRA synthesized research on teacher preparation specifically for reading instruction (2010b). They say research indicates that learning to teach reading cannot happen after a single course, but requires intensive study of instructional methods and materials over several semesters. They make six specific recommendations about reading teacher preparation. First, they suggest teacher education programs draw on research, current research, about how students become successful readers and how teachers can help them do so. They advise faculty to use effective instruction that both delivers appropriate content and models successful instructional techniques. They recommend field experiences closely coordinated with coursework that also exposes students to excellent models and mentors. They suggest that education programs should include an awareness of diversity in order to produce teachers who know how to teach diverse students. They propose that programs intentionally and regularly assess students, graduates, faculty, and curriculum to guide instructional decision making and program development. Finally they urge that teacher education programs follow a vision of quality teaching and that the faculty be given appropriate control for realizing that vision (IRA, 2010b).

**Teacher education in BC and Saskatchewan.** Teacher education institutions in both BC and Saskatchewan attempt to follow the principles set out in the Association of Canadian Deans of Educations’ Accord on Initial Teacher Education (2006). A paragraph in the Accord summarizes its major principles:
It is ACDE’s view that programs of initial teacher education should involve development of situated practical knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and academic content knowledge, as well as an introduction to research and scholarship in education. Essential to that development is a form of induction into the profession as well as ongoing communication with professional peers. An effective initial teacher education program commits to preparing teachers for their continuing professional development. (p. 2)

Each university adopts its own mission. For example, the University of British Columbia (UBC, 2008) Faculty of Education advertises a disciplined inquiry approach to learning together with an awareness of social issues and attention to preparation for research.

Provinces manage education in Canada following one or the other of two broad trends to establish teacher education policy and practice (Grimmett, 1991). Control may come from government in a top down process, or it may be designed with varying input from practitioners in a more bottom-up arrangement. Since 1997, the British Columbia College of Teachers (BCCT) has held the legislative authority to approve teacher certification while teacher education institutions hold responsibility for education itself. With twelve of its twenty members appointed by the government, the College might appear under government control. In practice, however, the College and a consortium of teachers, administrators, faculty members, and trustees have been working in collaboration (Chan, Fischer, & Rubenson, 2007a). Provincial control over certification is maintained in Saskatchewan, but there is a long-standing, strongly collaborative process which sets policies (Newton, Burgess, & Robinson, 2007). There is no consensus regarding whether control emanating from the government or from practitioners better addresses needs (Grimmett, 1991).
The literature suggests that a transmission model based on behaviourism and other paradigms is the most common teacher learning perspective across Canada (Oser, Achitenhagen, & Renold, 2006; Pratt, 2002) though many newer models have constructivist theoretical roots (Pratt, 2002). Pratt and Collins (2000) at UBC developed the Teaching Perspectives Inventory for higher education instructors across occupations. The inventory consists of five models of instruction: transmission, apprenticeship, developmental (constructivist), nurturing, and social reform. Among 2000 teachers who completed the inventory, Pratt (2002) found the transmission perspective was still the most common orientation used by teachers in secondary and higher education in Canada. The social reform perspective was seldom used (less than 2% of teachers reported using it). The frequency of use of the other perspectives fell between these two. Over 90% of the teachers reported using one or two perspectives exclusively.

Conventional teacher education views teacher learning as process of knowledge acquisition and application (Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1995). Canadian teacher education follows this pattern, favouring a professor-led knowledge transfer combined with information on what works in the classroom (Oser et al., 2006; Pratt, 2002). Some preservice programs have one year of academics with a six week practicum, while others have four years of academics plus a four month practicum. UBC offers degrees in elementary and secondary education, with a focus in special education available at the K-7 level (Thompson, 2008). Graduate programs vary from educating student teachers to fill academic and research positions to practical work in schools (Feiman-Nemser, 1990).

Bruinsma (2006) surveyed 36 deans of education in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). He found 52.2% of teacher education programs required two one-semester courses in reading/literacy and provided reading/language arts-related optional courses.
Bruinsma (2006) indicated that neither set of requirements meets reading teacher standards as set out by the IRA (2010a). MacFaddin and Godinovich (2001) reported on a study done by the BC Literacy Council which found some BC teacher education programs required no reading/literacy courses at all for secondary teachers.

**Professional Development**

Much of what teachers need to know must be learned in the context of an academic program (Feiman-Nemser, 1995), but teachers in the field must gain additional knowledge, if desired, through professional development or PD. The BC Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) defines PD as “a process of ongoing growth, through involvement in programs, services, and activities designed to enable teachers, both individually and collectively, to enhance professional practice” (BCTF, 2008). The Council for Exceptional Children (2004) suggests that to keep informed about the best instructional methods and to offer the highest quality of teaching to their students, special educators must be lifelong learners, developing their knowledge through a variety of planned, organized, and recognized PD activities.

Good PD can positively impact learning. Cordingley et al. (2003) reviewed research concerning the effectiveness of PD and found it could have a positive impact on teachers' repertoire of literacy teaching and learning strategies, ability to match these to students' needs, self-esteem and confidence, and commitment to continued learning. PD can also have a positive impact upon student learning processes, motivation, and outcomes. The Schultz Centre for Teaching and Leadership (2007) audited PD programs that offered teachers information about literacy in a Florida school district found that the 130,000 students of teachers who were trained in those programs showed significant gains in their state-wide reading test scores. For each six-hour day that teachers took part in the program, student scores on state tests rose by half a point.
PD is more likely to be less formal than the coursework found in education. Livingstone (1999) defines informal learning as “any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs outside the curricula of institutions providing educational programs” (p.3-4). Among Canadian workers, 80% of all learning efforts may be informal (Tough, 1999).

**Theories and models of PD.** As noted previously regarding teacher education, teacher PD is grounded in the same theoretical views of learning used in teacher education and in the same literature about teacher knowledge development and adult learning theory (Randi & Zeichner, 2004). A number of frameworks attempt to delineate the various delivery models, as they differ somewhat from those used in more formal education (Bolam & McMahan, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Kennedy, 2005).

In her review of international English language research, Kennedy (2005) grouped and arranged nine models used in PD for teacher learning along a continuum so that those models at one end trained teachers to implement reforms as decided by others and those at the other end educated teachers to contribute to, inform, and provide a critique of the reforms themselves. Models that trained teachers to implement others’ reforms reflected behaviourist views of learning and focused on transmission of information from an expert source to the teachers. Models that involved teachers designing reforms themselves reflected constructivist or social constructivist theories of learning. These include transformative models such as Action Research which involves the participants themselves as researchers and might have greater impact when shared in a community of practice.

Anders, Hoffman, and Duffy (2000) in their review of the reading teacher education and professional development literature reported a shift away from transmission models with their
concept of teacher training toward more transformative approaches involving education of teachers for conceptual change, enhanced decision-making capabilities, and strategic teaching. However, they noted that the best models of teacher knowledge development through PD have not yet been identified. Feiman-Nemser (1990) suggested that, while each orientation to teacher learning highlights different issues to be considered, no single theory or model can adequately account for all aspects of learning to teach. Rather, information from several areas might be profitably combined, if not at once, then sequentially (Feiman-Nemser, 1995). Hoban (2002) suggested that what is really needed is not a wholesale move towards teacher-centred, context-specific models but rather the establishment of a better balance between these and transmission focused models. Pratt’s (2002) findings that the large majority of teachers in Canada use only one or two perspectives in practice suggest that combining models may not be easily accomplished. Hannafin, Hannafin, Land, and Oliver (1997) believe that it is important for instructional practices to be grounded in some theory and supported by research. Otherwise, the findings obtained through research may be lost in practice.

**Problems and issues in PD.** The professional development of teachers has been long identified as a major challenge (e.g., Hoban, 2002; Holly, & Mcloughlin, 1989), and there is a pressing need for teachers to be supported to acquire professional understandings and applications to classroom practice. According to Naylor (2005), the debate on professional development in Canada is conceptual (e.g., what is it? who gets to choose?), organizational (e.g., where and how does it fit?), contextual, (e.g., how will it fit in the schooling of the future?), and linked to large-scale systemic reform, (e.g., how does it make reform effective?). Hargreaves (2003) summarizes these issues in more practical terms, saying that teachers currently deal with a diverse and complex clientele, in conditions of increasing uncertainty, with more and more
groups exerting influence and wanting input into decision making. Under these circumstances, a multi-method approach to helping teachers learn how to manage these diverse factors may be the most effective option.

Educational funding has recently dramatically decreased in Canada with subsequent reduction in the number and kind of PD activities provided for teachers (Basica, 1998; Clarke & Livingstone, 2001). Naylor (2001) found budget revisions in BC have resulted in larger class sizes, fewer specialist teachers, and an increased workload for both regular and specialist teachers. At the same time, policy changes concerning inclusion have put more special needs students into regular classes. In BC, both classroom and specialist teachers report they need more knowledge about the learning needs of their students but they feel they have less time to acquire that knowledge and that there is less funding for PD (BC Ministry of Education, 1997; Naylor, Pohlmann, Sparks, & Wilson, 2005; Siegel et al., 2000).

Laiken (2001) identified a dilemma related to time based on studies of PD in Canadian organizational learning through New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL). This study reported that, while time was necessary for PD, time spent on learning can take away from productivity. BC LATs have said they need more time to engage in PD, but reported they also realize that if it takes time away from interaction with students, it may affect the very progress it was meant to enhance (BC Ministry of Education, 1997; Naylor et al., 2005).

A number of issues relate to the use of standards both for teacher knowledge and for student achievement. Basica (2001) used interviews and questionnaires to investigate Canadian teacher learning. Findings revealed that teachers were concerned that the use of standards to judge teachers’ expertise could apply direct pressure on teachers’ organizations and schools to comply with demands for standard responses, that is, a system wherein all teachers must use the
same instructional approaches. This can impair the PD efforts of other groups such as teacher organizations because teachers choose only those PD opportunities that will help them achieve the corresponding standards. Also, there is a tendency to assume that all teachers have similar needs and interests and that what empowers one empowers all. According to Basica (2001) teachers have a wide variety of developmental needs, learning preferences, personal obligations, social status, and program and subject affiliation. Furthermore, the school, district, and state or provincial contexts in which they work are diverse. One type of PD cannot possibly serve the needs of all teachers.

Research indicates that collaborative PD structures are successful when teachers are actively involved in their learning through making meaningful choices regarding planning and learning (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguichi, & Gallagher, 2007; Kennedy 2005, Renyi, 1996; Naylor, 2005, 2007; Sparks, 2002). However, changing control source from decision-making by school authorities to collaborative involvement of teachers themselves is not easily achieved. Grimmett and D’Amico (2008) surveyed teachers in the Vancouver region who had experienced recent government policy changes. Teachers reported the new policies adversely impacted their opportunities to engage in tasks associated with deep professional collaborative learning, but those who had experienced such opportunities in the past valued those more than did newer teachers. Teachers needed to be familiar with and value collaboration in order to use it.

Laiken (2001) found that problems occurred in the organizations he studied when the need for structured leadership for PD conflicted with the freedom and autonomy workers needed to participate in decision-making processes. Workers needed leadership and parameters to support them while they increasingly assumed responsibility. This dilemma was reflected in Hurd’s (2004) brief to the BC Government on behalf of the Learning Assistance Teachers’
Association (LATA) of the BC Teachers’ Federation. Hurd (2004) asked the province for the
guidance of a mission statement and in-service staff, but also wanted the development of a
shared philosophy and teaming (use of partnerships with government), and participation in the
construction of an action plan of who does what, when.

An associated leadership dilemma relates to the use of conflict and confrontation as a
method of working together or a kind of collaboration. Laiken (2001) found that some
constructive conflict was essential in organizational learning, but that employees expressed fear
for their jobs if they raised issues or concerns. Also, tension existed between the desire to allow
freedom for individual learning and the perceived need to establish set bodies of information so
that those who held it could be rewarded (Laiken, 2001).

PD needs may also differ across experience, that is, new teachers may need different
information than more experienced teachers. Livingston’s (1999, 2001) survey of the Canadian
work force in general found differences in learning across worker ages. Findings indicated that
young people devoted more time to both course participation and informal learning. Moreover,
the relative importance of courses diminished as middle-aged adults accumulated more
experiential knowledge. Finally, results indicated that older employees participated very little in
courses but continued to be active informal learners, as well as valuable informal tutors for
younger workers.

Turbill (2002) also believes that teachers with divergent reading experience may differ in
their needs. He argues that more experienced teachers have acquired a rich knowledge about
reading instruction that matches both the earlier views of reading under which they learned to
teach and more current views examined through on-going PD. Beginning teachers do not have
rich experiential histories to help them understand the instructional practices that were previously
taught. In the current balanced view of reading, new teachers may be at a disadvantage and may need information about instructional practices from previous eras (Turbill, 2002).

There is much about PD that still needs to be researched. Anders, Hoffman, and Duffy (2000) noted that a packaging mentality was becoming a popular approach used by school systems and districts, and they warn that this may lead to research that pits one such method against another with teachers becoming subservient to the method. Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, and Shapley (2007) compared evidence standards of PD effectiveness and found that research has not yet determined whether PD programs implemented by study authors are effective when delivered by others in more typical contexts. Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, and Garet (2008) proposed that studies need to examine the effects of PD led by multiple trainers and delivered in the full range of settings in which that program is designed to work. They say research is needed to identify what features of PD matter, including how much PD is needed to ensure effectiveness and whether adding school-based supports (e.g., coach/mentor) are worthwhile.

Smaller, Clark, and Livingstone (2001) found that, although there is a large volume of literature covering PD themes, little attention has been paid to how teachers themselves see these matters—what they think is important to know and to learn, how they would like to engage in this learning process, and what they are already doing in this regard. For example, Andrews (2002), in examining the effectiveness of PD courses in Ontario, gathered data from the 60 instructors who judged their own courses as effective. Potentially useful information from PD participants (i.e., teachers) has been missing from the literature and is needed if we want to understand how to design and implement effective PD that suits teachers’ needs.

No studies were found on the effect of distance from universities on teachers’ needs, supports, or challenges in acquiring expertise through PD once in service. I anticipated that the
distance teachers worked from a teacher education facility offering post-graduate and/or graduate courses in reading would have an impact on access to further education and possibly less formal PD for teachers who were already employed. Specifically, courses might be more difficult to access, and contact with university researchers and experts might be more limited. Teachers employed far from a full service university may therefore have an increased need for reading information compared to those who worked within easier travel distance of courses, and the supports they needed and the challenges they faced might also differ.

**Best practices in PD.** Anders, Hoffman, and Duffy (2000) in their review of reading teacher education and professional development literature, found that in service teacher education has not been a high priority in reading research and that major gaps exist with respect to reports from teachers themselves. But some features of effective PD are being identified (Wayne et al., 2008; Sparks, 2002). Darling-Hammond (1997) summarized effective PD as sustained and intensive, supported by modeling, coaching, and problem solving around specific problems, and grounded in participants’ questions.

Cordingley, Bell, Rundell, and Evans (2005) reviewed 45 studies to identify the best practices for PD. They found that effective PD provided teachers with peer support and specialist expertise, engaged them in observation and feedback, supported them to experiment with new skills in the classroom, and considered teachers’ feedback during the PD process. Also, effective PD provided a significant in-school component whereby teachers could collaborate as they attempted to understand and incorporate new ideas into their practice. Sparks (2002) indicated that high quality staff development deepens teachers’ content knowledge and pedagogical skills; includes opportunities for practice, research, and reflection; is embedded in educators’ work and
takes place during the school day; is sustained over time; and is founded on a sense of collegiality and collaboration.

The literature has identified many effective forms of delivery for PD. Hirsch, Koppich, and Knapp (2001) report that teachers may deepen their knowledge and skills through participation in workshops and summer institutes. They may use on-site coaching, study groups, graduate coursework, instructional supervision, curriculum development work, observation of master teachers or model programs, interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and friends, books and on-line information, and participation in professional networks. The Council for Exceptional Children (2004) recommends that special education teachers learn through academic activities, research, district PD programs, teaching courses, delivering presentations, publishing books and/or journal articles, mentoring, serving in professional associations, or educational travel.

The components of effective PD programs also vary. Kevin (2007) collected data from three groups to examine the components, focusing on the teacher, the experience, or the school. Components focused on the teacher included matching teachers’ conception of the profession, needs, existing knowledge, and stage of development as a learner. Kevin (2007) found there was a need to accommodate teachers as researchers within their own classrooms. PD components related to the school included creating a community of practice within the school, district, or curriculum area, and ensuring feedback from other stakeholders. The receptiveness of the school administrator and his/her accommodations of encouragement, time, and resources were critical. Kevin (2007) also found that the facilitator/teacher relationship was important as was the programs’ ability to provide input from knowledge sources such as text, people, and courses. Finally, providing teachers with time to reflect and question their learning helped them integrate their knowledge about the program and its components into their personal teaching approach.
PD needs to extend over time to be effective (Smylie, 1989; Sparks, 2002). Using data from a national survey of American teachers’ ratings of sources of professional learning, Smylie (1989) found that district-sponsored in-service programs (one time, beginning of the year workshops with no follow-up) ranked last among 14 possible professional learning sources. Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguichi, and Gallager (2007) examined effects of different characteristics of PD on 454 teachers’ knowledge levels and on their ability to implement a science program. They found that more teachers implemented the science program when time was incorporated to allow teachers to attend meetings and plan for program implementation. Time is needed for the reflective thought that enables teachers to slowly attempt to alter practice (Laiken, 2001).

Effective PD must be directly relevant to teachers’ practice, as well. Kennedy’s (1998) review indicated that PD programs whose content focused mainly on teachers’ behaviours had less influence on student learning than those focused on teachers’ knowledge of the subject, on the curriculum, or on how students learn the subject. It is also desirable to ground PD in participants’ own inquiry and in experimentation (Darling-Hammond, 1998).

Collaboration among colleagues, teachers, districts, universities, teacher unions, and other partners appears to be desired and effective in PD (Darling-Hammond & Ingersoll, 2001; Naylor, 2005, 2007; Randi & Zeichner, 2004; Sparks, 2002). The value of collaboration at several levels was demonstrated by an Alberta program designed to improve reading achievement through encouraging teachers to learn together (Hrycauk, Hrycauk, Joyce, & Mueller, 2005). Collaboration can build knowledge in a community of practice model (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hargreaves, 2003; Lee, 2005), even as mentoring and induction programs can support transitions between academic and practical learning (Roehrig, Bohn, Turner, & Pressley, 2008).
Maximizing PD efficacy requires the support of school and system administrators and ultimately of system policies. The American National Reading Panel (2000) found PD initiatives that were most extensive and supportive in terms of a whole school system also were most successful. System-wide policies can produce rapid improvements in teaching quality according to the American National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2008). Such broad policies can create incentives and supports for teachers and administrators to jointly restructure the school day, and provide funds, time, and leadership, in addition to providing opportunities for the PD to be used for special certification.

Other characteristics of PD associated with positive changes in practice include PD events that are challenging (Lee, 2005), that encompass more than just one's own school (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995), or those connected with school change (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Focusing PD on subject matter, pedagogical issues, or on school reform issues also appears to enhance teacher learning (Kennedy, 1998).

**PD in BC and Saskatchewan.** Some information is available about teachers’ PD in Canada that might also relate to BC and Saskatchewan. Smaller, Clark, Hart, Livingstone, and Noormohamed (2000) surveyed a representative random sample of elementary and secondary school teachers across English Canada. Respondents (N = 753) reported they spent much time and effort learning in relation to their practice. Over 80% of teachers, even those senior teachers with over 20 years of experience, still took formal courses. Almost half of those who took courses reported that one or more of them were required or recommended by an employer. While the preferred mode of informal learning varied, over 80% of respondents reported that they engaged in it primarily through collaborating with colleagues.
Ontario teachers also reported they engaged in much informal learning (Smaller et al., 2001). Over 98% of these teachers surveyed reported continually learning on the job in a number of areas—computers, communication skills, teaching a particular grade/subject, classroom management, student problems, and just generally keeping up with new knowledge. Informal learning took place primarily through collaboration with colleagues (80%), but 63% of educators also engaged in learning on their own. Half of the respondents planned to take an additional course within the next two years. Approximately 84% of those with five years experience or less said they would take a course. Special education and reading were their first course choices. Online and traditional in-class courses were both preferred modes of delivery. Teachers relied on word-of-mouth advice from colleagues more than other sources like ads or web sites in choosing courses. The findings in both of these Canadian studies were similar among teachers with varying years of experience. Teachers on average accessed more PD activities than Canadian workers in general, and even experienced teachers continued to take some formal courses.

In BC, differences across teacher experience have been reported for one type of PD, teacher collaborative professional learning. Using a metropolitan Vancouver subset of data (N = 90) from a five-year investigation (2002-2007) of teachers and principals across Canada, Grimmett and D’Amico (2008) found that teachers’ capacities for collaborative professional learning was differentially affected by the perceived impact of policy changes on their working conditions. Teachers in the study reported infrequent engagement in tasks that required the kind of commitment to collaborative instructional tasks often associated with deeper learning. Grimmett and D’Amico (2008) indicate that these findings are inconsistent with results of previous research during the 1990s. The study also found differences between more and less experienced teachers. Both groups reported experiencing structural impediments to collaborative
professional learning. This frustrated more experienced teachers, but not less experienced teachers, who did not show a similar openness to activities emphasizing group work. The study concluded that various (unspecified) contextual policy changes had contributed to a different form of socialization for beginning teachers than for their more experienced counterparts. Thus, the researchers inferred that policy contexts affected how teachers thought about collaboration as professional development, and that their perspectives may then differ across teaching experience.

Teacher Experience

Teaching expertise is considered to be the result of acquiring requisite knowledge and experience or practice (Laverick, 2005). Therefore, in addition to academic criteria, experience in reading instruction is considered important as it provides opportunities to practice applying knowledge, developing skills, and acquiring information that can be used to inform instructional decisions in the future (Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2002). Although teaching experience does not necessarily equate with expertise, it does have a powerful impact (Berliner, 1994, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; McNeil, 1974; Stronge, 2002). Stronge (2002) found that teacher expertise as defined by experience can account for up to 40% of the variation in student achievement. Rankin-Erickson and Pressley (2002) reported that expert special education teachers had at least three years of experience. They concluded:

Teachers need experiences in which they are directly responsible for the reading instruction of students for them to develop their own teaching skills and background knowledge. In addition, they need opportunities to work with others to develop skills in problem solving, consultation, and collaboration. (p 34)
Additional teaching experience, particularly experience beyond that which is acquired during pre-service teacher education, is frequently included in standards for reading specialist teachers (CEC, 2005; IRA, 2010).

**Best practices in teacher experience.** Smylie (1989) reported that the top-rated sources of PD information for the teachers she surveyed were their own classroom experiences both before and after service. Optimal experience for specialist positions has not been identified, but guidelines for reading specialists generally specify at least two years (CEC, 2005; IRA, 2010a).

**Teaching experience in BC and Saskatchewan.** Special education documents indicate that LATs in BC and Saskatchewan require or should have prior classroom teaching experience (BC Ministry of Education, 2006b; Saskatchewan Education, 2002). However, in practice, at least in BC, it appears that districts often employ teachers without this experience (Naylor, 2001).

In summary, expertise in addressing the reading instruction needs of special needs learners may be developed by formal education both before and after service, by less formal PD once employed, and by experience both before and after beginning to teach professionally. Several professional and community agencies have published their view of the standards of education and experience they believe are required for expertise. Research must more clearly identify what is most effective and in what contexts.

**Expert Teacher Availability**

There is a shortage of teachers for special education positions including learning assistance in Canada and across North America. In 2002-03, 98% of American school divisions reported an insufficient reserve of special education teachers (including reading support teachers), though in actual practice only 1% of these positions remained unfilled (McLesey,
Tyler, & Flippin, 2003). Boe, Cook, and Terhanian (1998) surveyed 46,599 American public school teachers to investigate teacher supply issues. They found a chronic annual shortage of fully certified teachers for special education (9.8%), almost twice that in general education (5.5%). The lack of teachers for special education was attributable to fewer certified new teachers entering the field, fewer working teachers who upgrade certification, and to a higher rate of turnover.

The literature suggests there may be a continuing shortage of teachers for LAT positions in BC and Saskatchewan. The 1997 BC Ministry of Education Report on Learning Assistance Services stated that the use of teachers who do not meet the suggested provincial guidelines of education and experience was still extensive. Dumas (2001) and Hurd (2002) both reported a qualified LAT shortage in BC. The report titled “Educator Supply and Demand to 2011” (Saskatchewan Education, 2007) found evidence of a continued provincial shortage in special education in that province.

**Teacher Attrition in Special Education**

McLesey et al. (2003) reported that teacher shortages may be attributed to a number of factors including funding or labour market inequities, working conditions, and the distribution of local power. These and other factors have had a specific impact on special education. McLesey et al. (2003) found that more special education teachers leave the profession than regular teachers and that fewer return after taking leaves and that uncertified teachers are three times as likely to leave as are fully certified teachers. Thus, hiring each year teachers who are unprepared and inexperienced contributes to the attrition rate for special education teachers.
Impacting Teacher Quantity

Darling-Hammond (2003) indicated that in order to impact the number of expert teachers available, policies must focus on improving working conditions, insisting on effective teacher preparation, and providing support for new teachers. These types of policy supports have been linked to increased retention rates among special educators (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Guarino, Santibanez, and Daley (2006) grouped these policies into three sets: (a) compensation policies, (b) pre-service policies, and (c) in-service policies. There is no certainty about what types of policies are best for teachers. The Educational Testing Service (2003) studied teacher preparation policies in seven countries whose students performed better than American students in math and science. The best performing nations applied rigorous entry requirements and high standards for teachers. Most countries front loaded their teaching requirements, emphasizing selection and a strong program of course work. Others, such as Japan, back loaded requirements with rigorous induction programs, probationary periods and continuing professional development. Both methods for preparing teachers appeared effective (Guarino et al., 2006).

Policies to impact quantity. Policies and sources of support that help teachers gain knowledge can increase the quantity of expert teachers for and in teaching positions. Such policy areas can include beginning teacher induction programs, school restructuring practices, incentive pay schemes, or availability of PD (Darling-Hammond & Ingersoll, 2001). The same researchers have reported that teacher education institutions, governments, and departments of education can help to provide support. School districts and schools offer much support, and teacher and trustee groups contribute, as do other community agents and agencies.

Rewards and incentives for education and PD have been shown to positively impact the quantity of expert teachers (Morice & Murray, 2003; National Board for Professional Teaching
Standards, 2005). Financial support might include workshop tuition/ bursaries or travel funding. There are several Canadian examples of such financial support where a 30-36 credit hour (one year) certificate, diploma or after-degree program is available for special education teachers who wish to upgrade their credentials (Thompson, 2008). Typically, completing this program raises a teacher one step on the salary scale. Mentoring and induction programs can be effective in lowering turnover rates, at least among beginning teachers (Roehrig et al., 2008; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). The amount of administrative support teachers receive appears to help retain expert teachers (Shen, 1997). Ingersoll and Alsalam (1997) and Ingersoll (2001b) found teachers appeared more committed to teaching where there was school autonomy with faculty influence. Still other policies provide leadership opportunities or more desirable positions for those with special expertise. Resources are critical. Where there is more money for salaries and financial support for education and PD, teacher retention appears to improve; in periods of financial restraint, collaboration with outside groups can maximize support (Guarino et al., 2006).

Teacher education institutions. The number of teachers available for and in special education roles may be impacted by policies at teacher education institutions regarding the kinds of courses and programs they offer, and by the speed with which they adjust to school system needs (Sadowy, 2005). Sadowy (2005) reviewed course syllabi in Canada and found that shorter pre-service language arts courses may not include much information about teaching reading, especially to struggling readers. Practical experience combined with work with mentor teachers can support the development of expertise (Rankin-Erickson & Pressley, 2002). Administrative policies may exclude access to reading related courses (Learners, 1997). Many institutions offer distance programs, a few of which feature literacy and reading. Information is still needed about the specific impact of each policy and program on the quantity of expert reading teachers.
Governments and departments of education. Governments choose their role in education according to their political ideology, and the policies they create impact the number of expert teachers available. Grimmett (1991) explains that in Canada, provincial governments may retain greater centralization of policy-making and resource allocation or hold a more collaborative governance plan. BC appears to follow, or at least aspire to, a collaborative decision-making perspective with its College of Teachers—the body that certifies teachers—and school boards and districts having input into local policy and resource management (Chan, Fischer, & Rubenson, 2007a). Saskatchewan, while maintaining central responsibility, uses a fully collaborative governance system where the province and education stakeholders, including the general population, actively debate, consult, and collaborate to construct policy decisions, though districts have much responsibility to make adjustments to better meet students’ needs (Newton et al., 2007).

Governments and districts may choose from a range of policies to impact the number of expert teachers available for particular roles. Hirsch, Koppich, and Knapp (2001) examined the impact of American state policies on teacher quality and listed several policy strategies. States first tried to attract expert teachers by increasing salaries, offering bonuses (perhaps tied to particular standards), and offering incentives to work in areas of shortage. They then facilitated hiring by making it easier to receive expert teachers from another state and by allowing retired teachers to retain their pensions while earning a salary. Incentives such as signing bonuses, housing assistance, scholarships, and free graduate courses were also used to attract teachers to the hardest-to-staff areas. For teachers already in service, a number of policies motivated and supported teachers’ ongoing professional learning. For these teachers, states targeted resources to PD, specified topics, encouraged comprehensive local PD, bolstered teacher networks and other
support structures, and attempted to maximize the time allocated to PD. These two policy strands—attracting expert teachers and supporting existing teachers to develop expertise—can also be used at district levels. Hirsch et al. did not evaluate the effectiveness of these policies, but there is general agreement about a need to adapt policies for local purposes (Basica, 2001; Grimmett, 1991).

**Teachers and teacher organizations.** According to Renyi (1996), teachers have been assuming a greater role in their PD partly in response to an overall desire to become more professional. One way they have done this is through teachers’ unions (Bascia, 1999; Naylor, 2005, 2007). Unions may of course bargain for supports for teachers’ PD. This bargaining may be applied at provincial or at district levels. Districts may use educational leave with some salary to support PD requirements to develop expertise in areas of shortage especially special education (Thompson, 2008). Unions can also offer substantial support through lobbying, workshops and courses, financial support, research (e.g., Naylor 2005, 2007), organization of teacher interest groups, and information to help teachers develop an understanding of the broader political and social context of their work (Basica, 1999, 2003). Both the BC Teachers’ Federation (BCTF, 2008) and the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation (Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit, 2008) offer such supports. Teacher organizations and teachers offer unique and valuable perspectives on PD by responding to their own perceived need (Bascia, 1999).

**Collaborations.** Professional and district initiatives to enhance teacher knowledge can be successfully undertaken in partnership with organizations funded by public monies or philanthropic grants (Bascia, 1999; Renyi, 1996). Partners may include teacher unions, universities, libraries, museums, other community organizations with education interests, and businesses. Renyi suggests teachers and these organizations should form long-term, genuinely
collaborative relationships which fulfill the obligation of each to the public. Such collaborations may increase teacher knowledge, but they may also involve teachers in educational decision-making together with partners who might otherwise make those decisions alone (Bascia, 1999). Chan, Fischer, and Rubenson (2007b) suggest that governments that hold a more collaborative governance view may press schools and school systems to be more responsive to the economy and to create alliances with the private sector, particularly in times of financial restraint.

Canadian provinces offer several collaborative examples that enhance teacher access to PD. For example, in Nova Scotia, several school boards have entered into partnerships with local universities to offer masters programs to cohorts of teachers employed by the school division (Thompson, 2008). The programs are designed specifically for each board. Each cohort takes courses designed to meet the requirements of the university as well as the uniqueness of their districts. Courses are delivered at a time and location convenient for teachers, as teachers are also often working full-time while they complete them.

Collaboration that impacts the quantity of expert teachers may be undertaken at a different level by teachers with their colleagues. Formal or informal groups of teachers who share mutual interest may form a community of learning for support as they seek knowledge. Such groups may have a positive impact on both teaching practice and research and on student achievement (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

**Standards of Qualification and Teacher Availability**

One policy that may positively impact the number of expert teachers available for particular teaching roles is the use of standards of qualification for teachers for those positions. Standards that reflect special literacy-related qualifications for teachers appear to improve the quality of their reading instruction; the results are reflected by higher levels of student
achievement. Bond, Smith, Baker, and Hattie (2000) found teachers certified by American National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) to possess more attributes of expert teaching when compared with non-certified teachers. Laverick (2005) examined teachers with early childhood certification and reported their perception that certification promoted early literacy in their students. Vandevoort, Amrein-Beardsley, & Berliner, 2004, reported on a study that found that students of NBCTS teachers surpassed the students of non-certified teachers on 72% of the achievement comparisons they examined.

Teacher standards may increase the quantity of expert teachers in several ways. The Centre on Personnel Studies in Special Education (McLeskey et al., 2003) reported that uncertified teachers left special education in the United States at a much higher rate than certified teachers. Standards may result in financial and other supports for teachers to achieve them. Podgursky (2001) reports the Los Angeles Unified School District gives National Board-certified teachers a 15% bonus for the 10-year duration of their certificate and as a consequence of that and other policies of support, this district has achieved a higher than average number of NBPTS certified teachers. Even voluntary standards appear to increase expert teacher numbers (NBPTS, 2001; 2005). The BC College of Teachers (2008) states they intend their standards to impact both teacher education and professional growth (though they do not specify how).

Standards may also increase teacher quantity for particular positions by improving the professional status of ‘expert teachers’ (Laverick, 2005; NBPTS, 2001). This was one of the goals of the American National Board Certified Teachers when it instituted standards for expert teachers’ qualification in various fields including reading (Bailey & Helms, 2000). In terms of the impact of its certification, the NBPTS (2001) quoted teachers as saying that since they have become accredited they have received increased recognition and respect, and are more often
sought out for their ideas and opinions. In fact, 74% of respondents reported their new status resulted in additional professional roles within their school, district, or community, including mentoring or serving on school, community, district, or union committees. Existing research indicates that the NBCT standards increase teacher competence (Bond et al., 2000).

Despite the recent favourable interest in teacher standards and the initially positive reports based upon the American experience, opinions vary as to the effectiveness of such standards and requirements (Goodman, 2007; Geiger, Crutchfield, & Mainzer, 2003; Smaller, et al., 2001). As Cumming (2002) noted, there are no automatic links between developing professional teaching standards per se, and “living these out in everyday learning environments” (p. 3). Teachers themselves and their unions voice particular concern (Basica, 2001). More needs to be known about the effects of the use of standards. In the American experience, Podgursky (2001) highlighted the need for a rigorous and arms-length research of certification.

**Standards of qualification for reading expertise.** Reading interest groups have presented what they consider appropriate standards of teacher knowledge and experience, and education policy makers have adopted sets of such standards. The most prominent of these comes from the International Reading Association. The current IRA Standards for Reading Professionals (2010a) have been developed (and are regularly revised) by a panel of outstanding American reading educators. Those IRA standards listed under Category III: The Reading Specialist/Literacy Coach would apply to LATs. The IRA states that such teachers should have skills in specialized reading and writing instruction and in assessment and diagnosis. They recommend a master’s degree specializing in reading instruction and successful classroom experience. The U.S. National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 2001) used
IRA lists as a base for their suggested standards for American teachers. Many states use these NBPT standards or similar certification. Thus, there is much similarity among the standards.

In Canada, standards vary across provinces since education is a provincial mandate, and across districts if no provincial requirement applies. The provincial standards that apply to LATs in both Saskatchewan (2006) and BC (2002) do not specifically mention literacy or reading.

Saskatchewan and BC differ in the application of their standards. In Saskatchewan, as in BC, all teachers with a basic teacher’s certificate are certified to teach all subjects K-12 including special education. However, the Saskatchewan ministry’s policy is to give school boards Special Education Foundation Operating Grants only if services for students are provided or supervised by personnel who have met the special education qualifications (Thompson, 2008). These standards apply to all special education personnel. In BC the Ministry of Education recommends a set of guidelines as standards for LATs and uses these as the base for standards for other special education teachers to which it may add additional qualifications. However, the responsibility to choose to use these or any other qualification or not is left to district boards. Thompson (2008) found no information on how many BC districts use the suggested provincial level standards.

In summary, there is a shortage of expert teachers who are prepared for meeting the reading instruction needs of special needs learners. Education systems and community agents use a range of policies and programs to encourage and support more teachers to gain the expertise for specialized roles. One policy currently considered to positively impact the number of such teachers is the use of standards of teacher expertise. Organizations such as the IRA have published their view of such standards for reading specialist teachers, and these have been used
extensively as models. Saskatchewan and BC each have standards of qualification for special education teachers, though these do not mention literacy or reading specifically.

**BC And Saskatchewan Contexts**

Effective PD will suit the context of teacher’s practice (Hirsch, Koppich, and Knapp, 2001; Naylor, 2005). Investigations that aspire to develop information on which to base strategies that positively impact the quantity of expert teachers must examine the context in which the information is intended to be used. Some such studies relate to BC LATs access to reading instruction information; few are available for Saskatchewan.

**Review of Learning Assistance Services in BC**

The BC Ministry of Education (1997) conducted a large survey to investigate the role of Learning Assistance Services in 115 BC public schools. Results indicated significant variation among districts in their policies and programs around learning assistance services. LATs reported receiving support for acquiring knowledge related to their tasks from the ministry manual, district special program manuals and handbooks, Learning Assistance Program binders developed by district teachers and staff, district meetings for LATs, district in-service meetings, meetings of the Learning Assistance Teachers’ Association, and school-based team meetings. Although the data included LAT time spent on various services, it did not ask about reading instruction specifically.

**Review of Special Education in BC**

On behalf of the BC education department, Siegel et al. (2000) conducted a study to investigate how inclusive learning practices in special education were being implemented in BC schools with a particular focus on identifying special education needs and barriers. The researchers made recommendations based on data gathered from over 400 submissions from
individuals and groups with educational interests. Several recommendations related to education and PD for teachers. These included providing more education and practica that included teaching to a diverse range of students. Also, the report recommended that the Ministry provide tuition rebates for teachers to undertake special education courses in districts experiencing a shortage of teachers, support the development of distance education courses, provide a website with information about best practices, and support district, regional, and provincial conferences.

**The Challenge of Special Education Issues in BC**

Naylor (2001) utilized a random sample of 800 BC elementary and high school teachers to examine teacher work life. He reported that teachers felt their workload and stress had increased as a result of the inclusion policy in the province, and that the amount of support available to access further training was not sufficient to meet the increased needs.

**The Challenge of Specialist Support (BC)**

Naylor (2005) of the BCTF surveyed specialist teachers (LATs, ESL, and Special Education teachers) in two BC districts about their experiences with the inclusion policy and its ramifications. LATs reported their roles now encompassed a wider range of student needs. They also perceived that a reduction of funding for education concurrent with the implementation of inclusion policies had resulted in a reduction in specialist support staff including LATs. Many specialist teachers now had new responsibilities in areas such as ESL, Learning Assistance, and Special Education, though they had little or no education or experience in some of those areas. These specialist teachers expressed a need to access more knowledge in the areas in which they must now offer service.

Naylor (2005) expressed particular concern about the disillusionment of many specialist support teachers in the province. As a result of reduced funding and an increase in their range
and volume of tasks, many of these teachers would no longer choose this role, but would instead seek classroom assignments. Naylor reported that younger or less-experienced teachers would have to take on LAT roles, and some might need to rapidly acquire the knowledge needed for expertise. The groups involved in his study proposed meeting this challenge in part with a BCTF initiative offering improved access to information and PD.

**Langley Special Education Review (BC)**

The Langley Teachers Association (2008), District Parent Advisory Council, and CUPE Local 1260 (the teaching assistants’ union) conducted a review of special education in the Langley School District in BC. They used provincial data and local information from parent, teacher, and support staff focus groups, public inquiry sessions, and e-mail responses to identify limitations of special education in the district. They found unmanageable Resource Room teacher caseloads (this role included LATs), a lack of support for classroom teachers, issues around education needs for regular and resource teachers, and lack of appropriate courses in teacher education programs. The main issue identified was the negative impact of under funding in special education, and most troubling was the teachers’ sense of disillusionment about the state of special education in their district.

**Special Education Teachers: Certification and Salary Classification (SK)**

At the request of the Saskatchewan Education Ministry, Thompson (2008) reviewed the use of special education teacher qualifications in Canada and the reflection of these qualifications in determining salary classifications. She found that in all but two provinces/territories across Canada, teachers required only a basic teacher’s certificate to teach special education. However, several provinces used various pressures and incentives encouraging teachers to upgrade their education to obtain a certificate or diploma in special education. Those
pressures and incentives took the form of measures that facilitated access to further training and/or salary increases. Newfoundland, for example, provided opportunities for paid educational leave at the provincial level for teachers in areas of need as identified by the district. In BC and New Brunswick, the certifying body recognized special education as a teachable subject area at the secondary level. However, no university in BC offered a teaching concentration in special education at the secondary level. That province had recognized special education as a secondary education teachable subject area in order to accommodate American applicants for teachers’ certificates. Thompson pointed out that Saskatchewan was unique in that special education teachers must have 18 credit hours of special education training. She concluded that this certification benefits school boards which receive grant recognition, but not teachers because they would not receive a salary increase.

In summary, there appears to be a need among BC LATs for further knowledge about reading and its instruction for special needs learners, and for suggestions regarding supports needed and challenges to be addressed. Less information is available about Saskatchewan. Although a number of supports are offered for teachers’ PD at the provincial level across Canada, no information suggests which policies and programs might be most effective in any particular context.

**Literature Summary**

The exceptional learning needs of students who struggle to learn to read and who remain in their regular classrooms are addressed in BC and in Saskatchewan by LATs. The academic needs of these students can be complex. Much research documents the necessity for teachers to have expert knowledge of reading instruction to meet the needs of struggling readers. Expert knowledge may be developed by a combination of formal education, less formal PD, and
experience. Where there is a shortage of expert teachers for special education, education systems and other groups and organizations have used a variety of policies and programs to address issues of expert teacher quantity for these particular positions including learning assistance. One of the policies currently in use is the application of standards of knowledge and experience. However, policies and programs, such as the use of standards, must suit a particular context. The need for specific information about the reading instruction knowledge needs of LATs in BC and Saskatchewan and about how to support their access to any desired further knowledge about reading remains.
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

My study explored the perceived needs, supports, and challenges of LATs in Saskatchewan and BC concerning access to knowledge about reading instruction. It is a descriptive study that employed some case study techniques. According to Creswell (2007), case study methods support the building of a complex holistic description of the context of the case (such as that in which the LATs worked) and are also used when there are multiple examples of similar individual cases (such as LATs working in the similar contexts of the two provinces). This study had to analyze and interpret documents, informant reports, information from secondary sources, and some data in the form of tallies of responses. As Cresswell described, case study enables data from a number of different types of sources such as I had to be managed holistically in interpretation and analysis. Thus, case study methods served the needs of this exploratory study. These methods enabled the management of data gathered from multiple examples of similar individuals and allowed it to be set into a form readily available for interpretation and analysis.

The research questions addressed are listed below:

**About needs for knowledge about reading instruction:**

1. What are the tasks of LATs regarding the education needs of students who struggle with reading?
2. Do LATs feel their education and experiences have prepared them to meet the expectations of their jobs in relation to reading instruction?
3. What are LATs perceived needs, if any, with regard to education and professional development about reading instruction?
About supports:

4. What supports do LATs use and want to help them acquire further knowledge about reading instruction?

About challenges:

5. What are the challenges LATs encounter in accessing desired knowledge about reading instruction?

About contextual factors:

6. What are the patterns of interaction, if any, between LATs’ reported needs, supports and challenges, and three factors of context:
   a. distance from a full service university
   b. provincial use of LAT standards of qualification as guidelines or as requirements
   c. length of teaching experience in an LAT position

This chapter first describes some aspects of the provincial level contexts of the work of LATs in BC and Saskatchewan to ascertain basic similarities and differences. This is followed by a discussion of data sources and the tools used to collect both interview and document information, together with a review of the strategies used to enhance study validity and reliability. Study procedures are then reviewed in some detail together with comments on the order in which they were undertaken. A summary of the method closes the chapter.

Provincial Context

Learning assistance programs and teachers (LATs) in two Canadian provinces, British Columbia (BC) and Saskatchewan, were the focus of this study. The choice of provinces was a matter of convenience, as I had lived and/or worked in both and had ready access to data sources. Provincial contexts were compared at the outset of the research, and it was established that they
were sufficiently similar to enable LATs from both provinces to be treated as one group when considering most focal issues. Reporting on LATs as a single group enabled an examination of circumstances that are common to all LATs. Therefore, their perceived needs, supports, and challenges are synthesized across provinces. However, where differences in the provincial contexts resulted in varying views about needs, supports, and challenges respecting access to knowledge about reading instruction, the differences are described at the level at which they occurred. For example, at the provincial level, similar qualification standards were applied differently, at the district level, access to universities varied, and at the teacher level, LAT teaching experience was different.

To establish general LAT teaching contexts in 2007/2008, the time of data collection, relevant factors were identified at the provincial level that might affect LAT need for, or access to, knowledge of reading instruction. These included data on demographics such as population and its distribution and levels of education funding. Ministries of education were a particular focus (e.g., their policies respecting LATs’ roles and responsibilities, and LAT standards of education and experience). The locations of universities with undergraduate and graduate level coursework on reading were noted. Provincial contextual information was gathered before the interviews took place. It provided background to LATs’ reports and could be viewed in terms of the affordances and constraints presented to LATs seeking knowledge about reading instruction.

General information about the provincial contexts appears in Table 3.1. It was taken from a Statistics Canada report on data for the 2005-2006 school year (Blouin, 2008). Blouin’s report was the most recent at that time and was informative because it used similar data collection procedures and definitions of parameters across provinces.
Information also was gathered about education ministry roles and responsibilities for learning assistance programs, and the philosophical foundations on which their policies were based, if available. This information included a description of LAT standards of education and experience and their application in each province. This information was found in provincial level public documents on special education. Table 3.2 shows provincial positions on LAT roles and responsibilities, and Table 3.3 presents a description of provincial level standards for education and experience, and their application.

Table 3.1

*Provincial Demographics and Education Funding, 2005-2006*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>4,260,246</td>
<td>990,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public school students</td>
<td>589,388</td>
<td>174,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation rate (%)</td>
<td>73.9% (8th highest)</td>
<td>83.9% (4th highest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student to educator ratio</td>
<td>17:1</td>
<td>15:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time educator equivalents</td>
<td>33,701</td>
<td>11,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditures/ public school student</td>
<td>$9,798</td>
<td>$9,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditures as % of GDP</td>
<td>3.2 %</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *Blouin, 2008.*
Table 3.2

*Provincial Position on Roles and Responsibilities, 2007*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provincial role in special education</td>
<td>• Sets educational standards, monitors student performance, reports results, works with partner groups to improve student and school performance, allocates funds, oversees system governance (p.6).</td>
<td>• Provides leadership in “curriculum, instruction, policy development, program evaluation/implementation, financial management and interdepartmental liaison and strengthens commitment among all partners” (p.19).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District role in special education</td>
<td>• Districts “are responsible for ensuring that special education services and programs are delivered to any of their students who require them” (p.1).</td>
<td>• Districts “are the principal providers of education and ensure that students are provided with programs that are consistent with their needs and abilities” (p.14).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility for professional development</td>
<td>• Districts have responsibility for “planning and coordinating staff development programs” (p.9).</td>
<td>• The education ministry “assists school divisions to develop and implement professional growth opportunities and staff supports” (sec VI.2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of LAT</td>
<td>• Set by the district (p.7).</td>
<td>• Set by education ministry and district together (sec VI.2).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *BC references were from BC Ministry of Education, 2006; Saskatchewan references were from Saskatchewan Education, 2002.*
Table 3.3

*Provincial LAT Standards and their Application, 2007*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministry of Education Position</th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application of standards</td>
<td>• Suggested as “guidelines”</td>
<td>• Required to be “acceptable to the Minister”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To whom standards apply</td>
<td>• All special education teachers.</td>
<td>• All special education teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards of experience</td>
<td>• “Successful” classroom teaching experience</td>
<td>• “Regular” classroom teaching experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards of membership and certification</td>
<td>• B. Ed. or equivalent Teaching certificate</td>
<td>• B. Ed. Teaching certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course work</td>
<td>• University level course work (no specific credits) in:</td>
<td>• University level coursework (18 credit hours total) in:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Adapting and modifying curricula</td>
<td>o Speech and language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Assessment</td>
<td>o Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Teaching students with special needs</td>
<td>o Teaching students with exceptional needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Additional coursework, e.g.:</td>
<td>• Additional coursework, e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Particular exceptionality</td>
<td>o Particular exceptionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Behaviour and emotional needs</td>
<td>o Behaviour management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Computer technology</td>
<td>o General exceptionalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>o Collaboration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *Saskatchewan references were from Saskatchewan Education, 2002 (Section 6.1); BC references were from BC Ministry of Education, 2006, (Section D, p.25).*
British Columbia

Demographics and Education Funding

As may be seen in Table 3.1, British Columbia had a population of approximately four million people in 2005/06 (Blouin, 2008). This population was distributed in larger urban centres concentrated in a narrow band along the province’s southern edge (Natural Resources Canada, no date). Mountains, a large island population, and weather factors could challenge access to learning opportunities for teachers who did not live and work in the southern urban centres. Over half a million students were served in the 57 districts of the BC public school system. The province’s schools had the highest student/educator ratio in Canada, which impacts LAT caseload. The high school graduation rate was the 8th highest of the ten provinces. The province expended $9,798 per student and used 3.2% of the provincial GDP on public education.

Three large full service universities—the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, and the University of Victoria in Victoria—were situated in cities along the lower edge of the province. They offered pre and post graduate courses on reading instruction. Several smaller or affiliated facilities offered graduate courses in other locations, but at the time of the study none of their programs focused on reading or literacy

Provincial Position on Roles and Responsibilities

According to its special education policy document, as a philosophical base BC promoted “an inclusive education system” (BC Ministry of Education, 2006, p.2) in which students with special needs were served as much as possible in regular classrooms with support. The actions of the ministry consisted of policy making, setting curriculum standards, system monitoring and evaluation, and financial management. Responsibility for special needs students consisted of “working with partner groups to improve student and school performance” (p. 6), in which
activities the ministry “oversees” (p. 6). The partner groups were not identified. To accomplish this, the province had a special education section within their ministry managed by a staff of two (personal communication, BC Ministry of Education, unidentified administration assistant).

BC school districts had specific collaborative responsibility for “participating in local inter-ministerial structures designed to provide coordinated services for children and youth” (BC Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 8), “involving community representatives of groups concerned with students who have special learning needs in program planning and evaluation” (p. 9), and “participating in community-level planning with other agencies and ministries in setting service priorities” (p. 9). Districts must ensure access to “relevant PD focusing on area of specialty” (p. 6) and should ensure staffing “encourages the availability of personnel with the range of training and skills necessary” (p. 6).

The exact role of the LAT would be defined by each district as these were responsible for, “specialist staff assignments and job descriptions that include any necessary specialist qualifications” (BC Ministry of Education, 2006, p.7). In general, BC LATs supported students who had mild to moderate special needs in regular class placements. Their role varied slightly within a district or school depending on LAT qualifications and student needs (Naylor et al., 2005). More specialized teachers, commonly titled Resource Teachers, usually supported students with more severe needs or students in particular categories of disability. There had been some recent blurring of these two roles in BC and the same teacher might hold both LAT and Resource positions within schools (Naylor et al., 2005).

**LAT Standards and their Application**

BC listed standards of qualification and experience for LATs (Table 3.3). These standards were applied as guidelines for all special education teachers including LATs. Other
categories of special education teachers might have additional qualifications suggested. Districts had responsibility for the “establishment of qualification standards for personnel,” (BC Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 6). Districts could vary application of these guidelines without restriction. The guidelines say LATs should have knowledge and skills for: communication and collaboration; teaching and management strategies; evaluation and selection of instructional materials; use of informal and norm-referenced assessment tools; and development, implementation, and evaluation of students’ Individual Education Plans in collaboration with other personnel (p. 25).

To achieve such skills, the guidelines suggested LATs should have first, a teaching certificate and a bachelor’s degree in education, then university level coursework in curriculum adaptation, assessment, and teaching students with special needs. Further coursework was also recommended in areas of specific exceptionality (e.g., learning disabilities, hearing impairment), in addressing behaviour and emotional needs, and in computer technology for special education. In addition to formal education, LATs should also have successful classroom experience.

Saskatchewan

Demographics and Education System Funding

In 2006, Saskatchewan had nearly one million people, less than one quarter of the population of BC (Blouin, 2008). This was distributed in small urban centres and in rural areas in the lower half of the province (Natural Resources Canada, no date). According to Blouin, Saskatchewan’s relatively high public school population compared to its general population was related to its younger average population age. The high school graduation rate of 84% was slightly higher than average for Canada (4th highest) and somewhat higher than that of BC. The province had a relatively high educator/student ratio (15.3, the 4th highest in Canada). It used
3.6% of its GNP on public school education, which was slightly higher than that of BC, spending approximately $9,500 per student per year (very slightly lower than BC). The education system was organized into 12 larger school divisions. Two smaller, centrally located universities two hours driving distance apart offered graduate programs with coursework in reading.

**Provincial Position on Roles and Responsibilities**

According to provincial documents, the philosophical base of Saskatchewan’s special education service was “supporting diversity within schools and communities,” that is, inclusion with support (pp. 10-11), and it was “a shared responsibility” (Saskatchewan Education, 2002, p. 19). Thus, while BC’s education ministry viewed its role as overseeing, Saskatchewan’s intention was to “provide leadership” (p. 19) by working with districts and other partners to make policy, set curriculum standards, monitor and evaluate the system, manage finances, and liaise between departments. Collaborating partners were listed: other government department personnel, members of the Teachers’ Federation (STF), the Saskatchewan League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents (LEADS), the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association (SSTA), the Saskatchewan Association of School Councils (SASC), students, families, school support personnel, other human service providers and community members (Saskatchewan Education, 2002, p. 19). A school learning community was considered to be made up of a number of people including, “students, teachers, principal, support staff, itinerant professionals, parents, volunteers, human service personnel from partner agencies, and community organizations and individuals,” (Saskatchewan Education, 2002, p. 4).

To provide leadership, the Saskatchewan education ministry employed a Special Education Unit of five staff persons—director, assistant director, two senior program managers, one community education coordinator—and two administrative assistants (Saskatchewan
Education, 2002). The Unit’s task was described as providing leadership for actions that assisted in meeting the needs of special needs students through collaboration with school divisions, interdepartmental groups, and local service providers. Services listed as ministry responsibilities and which would directly impact LATs’ professional development would include research and development of teacher resources and initiatives outlining effective practices, and consultative support services.

In Saskatchewan, districts were “the principal providers of education” (Saskatchewan Education, 2002, p.14) and were to ensure that students were provided with programs consistent with their needs and abilities. The ministry set special education teacher qualifications while districts were responsible for hiring qualified teachers (Saskatchewan Education, 2002). The ministry and districts shared responsibility for professional development (Saskatchewan Education, 2002). The role of the LATs was set by the education ministry and district together, and, as with BC, in general, it would be to support students whose mild to moderate special needs would allow them to remain in regular class placements (Saskatchewan Education, 2002,).

**LAT Standards and their Application**

The standards of LAT education and experience set by the Saskatchewan ministry (see Table 3.3) applied to all special education teachers and professional support staff (Saskatchewan Education, 2002). Saskatchewan’s standards were required by its policy which stated, “Special education teachers and professional support staff who are responsible for individual assessments, program planning and program delivery must possess qualifications acceptable to the Minister,” (Saskatchewan Education, 2002, V.6.1i). Saskatchewan teachers sent proof of their experience and university transcripts to the Minister, and those who met the standards received an official letter of qualification to teach in special education including as LATs. Districts were financially
penalized if they did not use qualified teachers as “special education funding recognition in the Foundation Operating Grant requires that services for students with disabilities must be provided or supervised by personnel who meet the criteria for special education qualifications” (Saskatchewan Education, 2002, V.6.1i). Interim permission to teach was possible provided there were no more qualified candidates, qualified personnel were available to supervise, and the teacher undertook to attain the qualifications within five years (Saskatchewan Education, 2002).

As with BC, the Saskatchewan standards asked for a regular teaching certificate and a bachelor’s degree in education. Additionally, an LAT was required to have two years of regular classroom teaching experience and 18 credit hours of courses, three in each of speech and language, assessment of special needs students, and teaching and learning strategies for special needs students, and an additional nine credit hours chosen from, but not limited to, particular exceptionalities, behaviour management, or collaboration.

In terms of basic teacher qualification, course work, and experience, the standards were remarkably similar between provinces. Neither mentioned coursework in reading or literacy specifically, though some information about reading instruction would likely be included in the courses suggested, and there was some room for options in courses taken.

**Districts**

Three public school districts in each province were chosen for the study. The districts matched two criteria: (1) the distance of their central office from a full service university was approximately one, two, or three driving hours, and (2) they used a learning assistance program to support special needs students in regular classrooms. My accessibility to the districts was also considered with the result that these districts all fell in the southern portion of each province and
were near to Highway 1. With respect to distance, driving time was used rather than kilometres as travel challenges in some districts (traffic, bridges, population density) added driving time.

With respect to distance from a full service university, districts were selected according to their access to education facilities offering classes about reading instruction at both undergraduate and post graduate or graduate levels. Thus, one urban district in each province had a centrally located district office approximately one hour (i.e., less than 1.5 hours) in travel time from a full-service university. A second district’s office was approximately two hours in time, and a third relatively rural district was an average of three hours from a full-service university.

Each district was checked to see that it had a learning assistance program and employed teachers by whatever title to provide academic support for students with mild to moderate learning difficulties who remained in regular class placements. While most LATs would have had some students with an ESL history, districts using LATs as their primary support for new ESL students were not chosen, as those LATs might have had different knowledge needs.

**Learning Assistance Teacher Association**

In BC, the Learning Assistance Teachers’ Association or LATA, a teachers’ federation interest group, also helped to recruit LATs. This added 10 teachers from 8 different districts (two districts had two teachers each). They were assigned to their appropriate travel distance group. Information about their district’s learning assistance program and LAT role was obtained from each of these teachers during their initial contact and from their district websites to ensure their LAT roles matched those of the teachers approached through districts. No other contact was made with the district and no administrators were interviewed.
Data Sources

**Contextual data.** Contextual data included published information from Statistics Canada (Blouin, 2008) and both provincial ministries of education, special education branches. As indicated above, these data were gathered before interviewing key stakeholders to assist in developing background information on the two provinces. Information to assist with the choice of districts was obtained from their websites and confirmed through phone conversations with district central office administrative assistants with responsibility for learning assistance programs. Information about LATA came from its website and from a phone conversation with its president.

**Primary data.** Primary source data came from interviews with fifty LATs from three districts in each of Saskatchewan and BC and from LATA in BC. The teachers reported on their perceived needs, supports and challenges regarding knowledge about reading instruction. Interviews with one district administrator and one or more program coordinators in each school district confirmed and clarified teacher reports and elaborated on district policies. Further primary data came from interviews with one person in the special education branch of each provincial education ministry who had responsibility for learning assistance programs. These people provided information about provincial policies and programs related to LATs’ potential need for, and access to, knowledge about reading instruction.

**Secondary data.** Data to confirm primary informant reports were also obtained from secondary sources located by following references made by the primary informants. These data consisted of publically available information from educational institutions, teacher and community organizations or groups, publishers, universities, and any other sources of interest mentioned by the primary informants. A list of the sources of secondary data along with the
contact method was made. These data were primarily obtained from websites, on-line publications, or rarely, through contact with agency representatives.

**Recruitment**

I located provincial ministry informants by calling each ministry’s special education branch with a request to speak with the person responsible for learning assistance services. I asked the people thus contacted about protocols for obtaining study permission and also if they would agree to participate in the study interview. In both cases they were willing to participate and were able to give study permission themselves. They were sent an information and consent letter (Appendix A) and the Provincial Level Interview Guide. Once their permission was obtained, we made interview arrangements. I conducted a phone interview in BC (informant preference) and a personal interview in Saskatchewan. These were followed by several email exchanges where additional information was sent by the informants who had not had it available during the interview but had collected it later and sent it electronically.

Teacher and district interview participants were located through a letter of request to the districts accompanied by consent forms and samples of the two questionnaires to be used in the district. These were the District Administrator semi-structured interview and the Learning Assistance Teacher semi-structured interview (B). Once permission was obtained from the district, an administrator responsible for special education—a superintendent or an assistant superintendent—was assigned by the district as the study contact person. In some districts, this person agreed to the interview themselves. In other districts he or she identified one or more district learning assistance coordinators to be interviewed as well for those questions where the administrator said coordinators would have better information or more time. In all districts, learning assistance coordinators assisted me with arrangements for teacher recruitment.
In two Saskatchewan districts, I attended regularly held LAT meetings to give teachers information about the study and invite their participation. Names of volunteers were collected and appointments arranged for interviews, or questionnaires in either electronic or hard copy form were provided to those who preferred those modes of responding rather than an interview.

In the third Saskatchewan district and in the three BC districts, teachers were recruited through an e-mail request from me forwarded through district coordinators along with an explanatory note from them to say the district had given permission for the study. Teachers interested in participating contacted me directly. The same procedure was followed with LATA, the Learning Assistance Teachers’ Association of the BC Teachers’ Federation. The request went first to the LATA president for permission to conduct the study, then through the electronic list-serve to the members. The email requests contained the questionnaire in an attachment. LATs interested in participating in the study contacted me directly.

**Data Collection and Management**

Information was obtained from primary informants using the study’s three semi-structured interview protocols. Teachers were either interviewed face to face or by phone and 15 teachers (9 in BC, 8 in SK) chose to respond to the interview questions in a questionnaire format. District informants were interviewed either face to face (2 in SK), by phone (1 in BC and 1 in Saskatchewan), or by phone and email combined (1 in BC). The president of LATA was interviewed by phone. At their choice, provincial ministry informants were interviewed in person in Saskatchewan and by phone in BC, and in both provinces further information was obtained through exchanges of e-mail. Documentation for any needs or sources of support or challenge mentioned was requested from study participants at every level. For example, if a teacher reported taking an on-line course, the university offering the course and its web address was
collected, if available. The address could be used for later confirmation of the report. Those websites which offered graduate coursework about reading were in fact reviewed for the particulars of their programs. When interviews were conducted in schools, LATs could show or provide supporting documents, but in two cases they mailed documents to me after their phone interview. In four cases, teachers were re-contacted by phone or e-mail to ask for clarification or to check transcription accuracy. One long transcription about the formation of a community of practice was sent to the LAT for such a check.

At each interview I began with a brief review of the purpose of the research, assured the subjects of confidentiality, and suggested they might choose to omit questions if they preferred. I then asked if they had read the consent form (received previously), and if they had any questions about that document or about any other aspect of the study. I answered any questions, the consent form was signed, and the interview proceeded. Interviews followed the order of the interview guides in all cases with the teachers, but with district and ministry informants, discussion was more fluid, moving back and forth in the guide. Teachers using the questionnaire format received an email or a mailed package containing the same instructions and a self-addressed envelope for returning their signed consent forms and completed questionnaire.

Data from the interviews were transcribed as collected. During transcription some light editing took place. For example, student names were removed. If secondary source information had been collected in relation to a report from a primary informant, it was placed inside the transcription of the associated primary interview if it was brief. Longer information was referenced in the primary interview, perhaps with a summary note. Documents were labelled and filed; electronic documents, also labelled, were filed on my computer.
Informant Protection and Permission

Each LAT potential participant received a letter of information about the study and an invitation to participate in it (Appendix A). The letter explained the study process and participant safeguards and included a consent form. As data were collected, to protect individual identities, a number was substituted for the names of all primary informants, though their province remained identified. A separate file stored apart from the Case Record contains the participants’ names together with the identification numbers assigned to them for reporting and reference purposes.

Each ministry informant also received a reference number, but because there were only two people in special education in BC, for example, their identity might well be obvious. This possibility was discussed with informants before their interview, and the offer was made (and accepted) to send them their entire interview transcript for editing as an additional safeguard for them. Other ministry staff who sent me information at the request of the interviewed person were considered secondary data sources and where not given consent forms as it was part of their job to respond to public requests for information about their organization, and their data consisted of publicly available documents and descriptions normally available from their websites.

Teacher Participants

In both provinces, for the intent of the study the term ‘learning assistance’ referred to programs of support for students struggling with academic tasks but who remained in regular classrooms. Resource teachers (RTs) or teachers with other titles were included in the study in those districts where they delivered or also delivered the learning assistance program. The decision to include a teacher was based on whether they provided support services defined as learning assistance. Seven RTs who also carried the LAT role were included in the study but were asked to respond to interview questions in terms of their learning assistance role (as were
LATs who held teaching positions outside special education such as school librarian or French teacher). All of the districts in the study including those of the teachers accessed through LATA had specialist teachers who fit the study definition for learning assistance, though their titles varied.

Most data was received through either an interview (34 LATs) or a questionnaire format (16 LATs). A total of 50 LATs across the two provinces, 24 from Saskatchewan and 26 from BC participated in the study. Table 3.4 displays information about the LATs. Four of them were male and all males were from BC. Forty-six of the teachers were from the districts approached, but in BC, 7 teachers responded to the invitation to participate through LATA. Other of the LATs’ characteristics will be reported in Chapter IV as they address the study questions directly.

**District Administrator Participants**

Districts passed the research request to a superintendent or assistant superintendent with responsibility for learning assistance. Interviews with these persons were conducted in five of the six districts. In the sixth district, the person assigned to assist the research helped arrange teacher contact but was not available for an interview. Some district interviews were conducted with two or more persons. An initial interview was conducted with an administrator, who answered some of the interview questions and then passed me to one or more learning assistance coordinators, whom I could ask for missing information. Coordinators signed separate permission forms.

**Provincial Department of Education Participants**

Personnel from both education ministries were very helpful in sharing documents and in referring me to sources of further information such as colleagues who sent electronic responses to me directly. Thus, provincial level information was obtained from both primary informants and from one or more secondary source department personnel and/or documents.
Table 3.4

LAT Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>BC LA Ts</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Saskatchewan LA Ts</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total LA Ts</th>
<th>%</th>
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<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>85</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewed</td>
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<td>54</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sent questionnaire</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessed in districts</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessed from LATA</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible minority*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL speaker*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAT title</td>
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<td>58</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT/LAT combined</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *This information was not available for those responding by phone or by mailed questionnaire.

Missing Primary Data

Some desired data were not available. In four of the teacher interviews, school schedules did not permit the interview to be completely finished. In situ, a decision had to be made to omit one to three of the later interview questions, not necessarily in sequence. The questions omitted were chosen to be those least likely to contain needed information, for example, if that topic had
been discussed through responses to earlier questions. The other question omitted was the last one asking for any other information the LAT might like to add.

One BC district informant could not be interviewed, though little information was lost through this omission. Much, if not all, of the information needed was gathered from the district website or provided by LATs who had shared staff room copies of district PD publications. One high school LAT responding in questionnaire form left most questions unanswered, indicating “not applicable”, and indeed, that LAT provided no direct instruction to students but managed paperwork to maintain special needs designations. In all data tallies this informant’s responses were missing.

Occasionally a participant did not answer an interview question. Such omissions were more common in provincial and district interviews and rare in teacher interviews. Where LATs omitted a question they said this was because they did not have an opinion or because they did not know the information. In the latter case they were sometimes able to suggest where the information might be found. Omitting a question was acceptable according to the Letter of Information, but some of those data remain missing.

Some requested information was not available. No BC district level informants identified the qualifications of education and experience used for LAT hiring in their district. Thus, the reports of LATs about their district’s qualification requirements could not be confirmed. Also, no district informant in either province answered the question about what portion of their LATs met district or provincial standards of education or experience, saying they did not know or did not have that information.
Secondary Data

Occasionally, informants could not provide some or all of the information to explain how a program worked, who offered it, what policies it had as a base, how it might be accessed, etc. In these cases, the informants were asked to suggest where the information might be found. Subsequently, if needed, an attempt was made to secure the information from the suggested source or from a source I located myself. A list of these sources contacted was kept. Secondary source information collected was used to confirm primary informant reports.

Hard copy data collected as secondary source information from districts and/or from teachers included district publications about job descriptions (none of these listed hiring qualifications), district PD offerings for 2006/2007 or 2007/2008, reading related conference information, promotional material for workshops and university or other study programs sent to school staff rooms, and samples of publically available information sent to LATs by their coordinators. It also included publicly available research reports, government documents and reports, conference presentation notes, and other items of information shared by colleagues. Other sources were PD workshop handouts, newsletters or publications, or binders of information. These binders were about reading instruction methods particularly information related to special needs students, old and new methods, approaches, or tools related to reading instruction and lists of instructional supports such as word lists. These binders had been prepared by districts or a provincial ministry or purchased from publishers or workshop presenters.

The information from secondary sources arrived in hard or electronic copy or was in the form of transcribed phone calls and/or email letters. With the exception of teachers’ federation librarians in both provinces, no secondary sources were visited in person. The most common sources of secondary information were websites.
Contextual Data

A small amount of contextual information gathered during preliminary work on the study helped establish the provincial level context for the teachers’ work, but it also offered clarification and confirmation of some informant responses particularly as they related to standards of education. The standards of qualification for LATs in each province are one example of the data collected initially as contextual data but it offered useful confirmation of informant reports. These data were set in the Case Record to be available for analysis.

Data Storage

Electronic copies of the Case Record and transcripts of interviews were stored in a secure cabinet in my British Columbia home office. Hard copy documents of contextual and secondary source data were stored in the same office, together with original transcripts of interviews. Photocopies of the primary data interview transcripts and backups of all electronic files were secured in a locked cabinet in my Regina home office.

Tools

Three semi-structured interview guides were used as interview guides or as questionnaires to gather primary source data, one for LATs, one for district administrators, and one for ministry informants. All the district and provincial informants were interviewed, but fifteen of the LATs completed their guide as a questionnaire. The LAT guide was intended to be used in either form and included both checklists and blanks for unstructured responses. These guides were constructed following advice in Seidman (1998) who recommended using both choice of response and composed answer questions in combination. Seidman also suggested structuring guides so they can be presented as questionnaires if interviews are not possible or if subjects prefer that method. Thus, many of the questions were designed with the most commonly
anticipated responses as a choice and a large space for “other” responses and/or for comments. This gave both information that might be tallied and unique answers together with explanation and rich description. Also following Seidman’s advice, the guides were semi-structured; that is, the questions and their order need not be followed rigorously during an interview. Free ranging discussion could occur if it appeared profitable to study concerns. This would not have been possible with a more structured guide.

I recorded the interviews by hand. During a trial, audio recording had impeded the flow of information and interfered with the comfort of one trial teacher. Since I could write as quickly as most informants talked, it was more convenient to transcribe the interview in process. A check with a recorded interview suggested it was equally accurate, if not more so than transcribing the interviews from the recording. Misheard comments, problematic on a recording, could be immediately queried and corrected during an interview. Interview data could be lightly edited as it was received, saving an editing step. Thus, a code was substituted (s1, s2, etc.) for names of students, repetitive data was omitted, items that needed to be further queried were indicated by underlining before they were forgotten, and the numbers of previous questions which also gave information to a current question were noted as “see also #16”.

Particular attention was paid to possible differences between the two methods of application of the teacher interview tool, that is, by its use as an interview guide or as a questionnaire. No specific tallies were developed regarding difference but the two response types were compared generally and some observations were made. First, I had been concerned that interviewed LATs would give more explanation, but there appeared little difference in the amount of response data gathered. Those returning the questionnaire had recorded comments and discussion in at least as great a length as those LATs who were interviewed. In terms of
meaning, unclear interview responses could be queried during interviews, but this was not as convenient with questionnaires where I would have had to send the text back to the LATs for vetting or to consult with them by phone. However, the more involved sentence structures and grammar and punctuation patterns applied in the questionnaires left no places where I believed I might be misinterpreting the intended meaning. The handwriting on the questionnaires was decipherable to my satisfaction. Though no tallies were made, there appeared no outstanding difference in the themes discussed between the two collection types. I concluded that, while there were perhaps some small differences in quantity and in quality of language between the data collected by interview and by questionnaire, these did not appear to impact either the reliability or the validity of the data.

Another difference in data collection was that some interviews were conducted by phone at the informant’s request after I offered that option. These informants lived at a distance and they said they believed a phone interview would be more convenient for them. One provincial informant, three district administrators plus the president of LATA, and three LATs were managed in this way. There were not enough cases to enable reliable comparison of phone versus personal interview or questionnaire for any informant group. The texts of all the district administrators varied considerably in length and attention to the order of questions, and no patterns among the differences were noted. The district informants gave me approximately 15 to 20 minutes of their time and referred me to LAT coordinators for any additional information needed so that district interviews, once the data from both administrator and coordinator were combined, resulted in similar amounts of information, similar themes identified, and the same questions where data remain missing (regarding qualifications of LATs as advertised for and as in service).
The LAT phone interviews were more difficult to transcribe, and these informants were more often asked to repeat misheard information. The interviews were shorter in time than the average face to face interview and the finished text was shorter. No difference in themes was identified between LAT phone and face to face interviews. Thus phone interviews with LATs appeared somewhat less satisfactory in terms of length compared to either interviews conducted in person or questionnaires returned, but their data appears satisfactory in terms of information gathered.

**Provincial Education Department Informant Interview**

The Provincial Education Department Interview was designed to guide discussion about provincial level contexts, policies, and programs that might impact LATs’ needs for and access to knowledge about reading and reading instruction. It required only composed responses and allowed free ranging discussion. Supporting documents were requested where possible. Missing information or documents were obtained with the assistance of the interviewed person who gathered it later or sent a request through their department.

**Development.** After initial development, this guide was reviewed by four university professors, three from my committee, two of whom had previously been LATs themselves, and one other professor recommended as a specialist in developing interview guides. Following these reviews, a revised draft of the guide was reviewed by two education doctoral students. Both of these colleagues were former school administrators. One had previously been an LAT. The other was employed by a provincial teachers’ federation and gave particular advice on setting questions that would remain within guidelines of federation conduct. This guide was not used in trial. There were no provincial level personnel available on whom to conduct a trial who might not later be required as study participants.
**Sections.** The provincial interview guide included four sections. The first section asked for the informant’s title and role. The second section asked about the purpose of learning assistance programs in the province and the roles and responsibilities of its teachers. The guide then asked about the province’s use of standards and requested numerical information about the number or proportion of LATs who met the standards. After questions about the number of teachers for learning assistance positions, the fourth and final section asked about the philosophy behind provincial policies with respect to support for LATs to acquire knowledge about reading.

**District Administrator Interview**

The District Administrator semi-structured interview guide was intended to gather information from administrators and/or coordinators responsible for learning assistance programs in the six school districts selected for the study. This tool was designed to collect information that would clarify and/or confirm teachers’ reports in that district. It also asked about policies and/or rationales for the various programs of support each district offered. After the first demographic items, this guide presented open-ended questions with no choice responses.

**Development and trial.** The guide was developed and reviewed by the same four professors, revised, and then reviewed by the same two university colleagues as the provincial guide. The second revised form of this guide was then given as a trial to two elementary school principals, one of whom had recently retired. One of these individuals worked in BC and one in Saskatchewan, and both had past LAT experience. Their suggestions supported a final revision.

**Sections.** The District Administrator Interview first asked for district demographics and about the role of LATs with respect to support for developing knowledge about reading and its instruction. A second section asked what qualifications of education and experience the district expected for LATs. It asked about availability of qualified teachers for learning assistance and
what the district did if not enough qualified applicants were found. Finally, in a third section, information about district supports for LAT professional development was gathered.

**Teacher Informant Interview**

The primary body of data for the study was gathered using the Teacher Informant Interview (Appendix B) as an interview guide or as a questionnaire. This interview was also semi-structured to enable it to act as a catalyst for discussion. Apart from initial demographic information, this guide asked for a composed answer, but many questions (where a tally would be useful) also contained a checklist of possible responses. Some particular information was sought through more than one question to enhance reliability. This offered clarification later.

**Development and trial.** Once developed, the Teacher Informant Interview guide was reviewed by the same four professors as for the other guides, revised, and further reviewed as before by the two graduate student colleagues. A third revision was prepared and used in trial interviews and as a trial questionnaire with two (recently retired) LATs in each province to check again for possible misinterpretation and to ensure that wording would be applicable and interpreted similarly in either provincial context.

**Sections.** The teacher interview guide had three sections. The first section gathered demographic information. The second section asked about reading-related education and experience before beginning LAT work and about education or informal PD subsequent to taking an LAT position. Questions asked whether and how the teacher’s education and experience related to provincial standards for special education. A third section focused on the teachers’ perceived needs, supports, and challenges. Specifically, it inquired about personal initiatives for seeking further information as well as supports used in the past and recommended for the future to help with the acquisition of information about reading instruction.
Application. The teacher interview guide could also be used as a questionnaire, electronically or in hard copy, for teachers who preferred a questionnaire format or who could not be interviewed because of distance or time constraints. No difference between the length or detail included in responses was apparent between the interview and the questionnaire formats in the trials or study proper.

Validity and Reliability

To offer trustworthy information, research must have validity and reliability (Merriam, 1988). To this end, Merriam advised that qualitative research, seeking to describe rather than test hypotheses, must appear to reflect the situation as the participants view it. What is truthful to them may be taken as valid by a researcher. Merriam (1988) suggested several ways to ensure a trustworthy result (pp. 163-183). She said that internal validity (the extent to which findings agree with reality) can be addressed using triangulation (obtaining information on a single aspect from a number of sources), and by checking interpretations with informants. Reliability (consistency of findings) would be enhanced by triangulating data and also by an audit trail, that is, by leaving a clear description of method and how the findings were derived from the data (p.184). External validity or the generalizability of findings is under much debate according to Merriam (p. 184), and Palys (2002) suggests researchers must be cautious in generalizing results.

These suggested procedures were followed with care as described in detail below in order to establish and maintain a reliable and valid study. With respect to generalizability, readers are encouraged to use caution in applying any of the recommendations directly to a different context. Rather, this study’s information might be used as a source of ideas and suggestions to be first tested within the parameters of their own situation.
Procedures

Merriam (1998) recommended six steps for conducting and interpreting case studies:

1. Understanding the Case Context
2. Gathering the Case Data
3. Constructing the Case Record
4. Building Validity and Reliability
5. Developing the Interpretation and Analysis
6. Writing the Study Report

I followed these steps to conduct my study.

Step 1 Understanding the Case Context

Initially, contextual information was used to enable the choice of appropriate, relatively comparable school districts. The study also needed to ascertain the provincial level context of the role and working conditions of LATs to ensure a basic understanding of their reports.

**Provincial contextual data collection and analysis.** An initial literature review collected demographic data and ministry policies relating to the role of LATs. Universities with graduate classes about reading instruction were located. A summary of this information in chart form was placed in the Case Record.

**District contextual data collection and analysis.** Potential study districts were identified at three average distances from a full service university. Website information established that each district used teachers in a similar LAT role. District Student Services administration assistants with responsibilities for learning assistance confirmed the LAT role matched the definition of providing support services to students with mild to moderate learning
difficulties but who remained in their regular classroom. Six districts were chosen and approached and study permission received.

**Step 2 Gathering the Case Data**

**Primary informants.** With permission from three districts in each province, and later from LATA, an association of the BCTF, LATs were accessed either through an arranged interview or by distributing a copy of the interview guide to be used as a questionnaire. Interviews with district personnel, with the LATA president, and then with provincial department of special education personnel followed most of the teacher interviews.

**Secondary source data.** Published materials and reports from secondary sources were collected throughout the interview period and were examined for clarification of primary informant references. In the few cases where secondary sources were contacted in person, each contact was informed briefly about the study and offered time to receive and read study information, but all were prepared to answer questions immediately. Generally they were asked to explain a program offered and to support their information with documents if possible. Those secondary informants who expressed interest were sent the Letter of Information.

**Step 3 Constructing the Case Record**

As information arrived, it was set into a single Case Record pulling the extensive mass of unordered data, arriving in a variety of formats, into a single accessible form. The original data was reordered and lightly edited. This light editing consisted of the removal of discrepant or obvious errors through checking information elsewhere in the interview text or contacting the informant for advice, removal of identifying information such as names of students, and the addition of researcher notes such as “see also #3a”. The data gathering and management steps, together with the validation step (Step 4), proceeded simultaneously to a large extent.
Information was collected, sorted, organized and/or summarized; references were checked, and all transcribed and set into the Case Record and/or filed. Analysis would proceed from this single electronic document with the raw data available for reference if needed.

**Contextual data management.** The tables of contextual information gathered early in the study did not fit under the six question headings, so it was instead organized by province or by district. As with all three data levels—contextual, primary, and secondary source data—a note describing any stored elsewhere (in hard copy or electronic version) was left in the Case Record in the relevant section. Electronic copies of published documents from which the contextual data were taken were stored on the research computer and referenced in the tables.

**Primary source data management.** Information from LAT responses was organized in the Case Record into six headings according to the six study questions so that all the responses to each question were set together. The final question about patterns of connection used further sub-sections based on province, distance, and LAT experience, again following the study questions. Informant code number, interview guide question number, and line numbers were applied such that every item could be tracked back to original raw data. Information from district and ministry informants was also placed into the Case Record but in a separate section in transcript order as these interviews had followed conversation leads as intended and not necessarily question order.

**Secondary source data management.** Secondary source data obtained by following references made by the primary informants was also part of the Case Record. These data were in several forms: hard copy, transcription of phone conversations, and published data or e-mail transcripts in electronic form. Each data item was either placed in the Case Record at the point of the original reference to it, or, if it was lengthy, it was referenced and possibly summarized there, then placed in either the electronic or the hard copy files. For example, if a pamphlet about an
online study program was received, it was filed and a note in that LATs’ Case Record transcript
drew attention to it by file number and brief description. Thus raw data could be quickly located.

**Editing and preparation for analysis.** Data items were lightly edited as they were
entered into the Case Record to leave only information that might prove useful to the analysis.
However, after entering, a second level of editing was applied to the Case Record to make it
further accessible for analysis. This consisted of additional cross referencing to draw attention to,
and to facilitate the use of, information from more than one place at once, e. g., “see also #
25.3.5”.

Where numbers would usefully give weight to the data some yes/no and some choice
responses in the teacher interviews were tallied. Some descriptive information was also coded
and tallied if it could be made to fit into a simple, clear code, and providing it would be useful to
the study questions. An example of such a code was used with the question asking if and how the
provincial government had supported the teacher to access knowledge about reading instruction.
The codes used were: 0 = no, 1 = some or much, 3 = don’t know, 4 = no response. Appendix C
contains a list of the questions that were tallied or coded and tallied, together with the codes
used. The tallies were summarized in frequency tables using EXCEL software program and
graphs of some of these were developed using a statistics software package (SPSS). Both tallies
and graphs were placed in the Case Record.

Three special tallies of information from the teacher responses were made taken from
across each interview transcript. The first of these was a list of the professional development
workshops and/or topics about reading instruction the teachers reported attending. The second
list reported conferences offering reading instruction information that teachers mentioned
attending. A third list of informal certificates teachers had acquired on reading instruction was also made. These lists were placed in the Case Record.

The entire Case Record—the contextual information in tables, the primary informant transcripts organized by question, the lists of workshops, conferences, and certificates, the tallies and graphs, the notes and references to secondary source data, and the transcripts of the district and provincial informants—formed a lightly edited, organized sum of the data ready for analysis. Thus the completed Case Record contained virtually all of the information or summary notes of the information that would be used for the analysis. All of the data in the Case Record remained as close to the informants’ words as possible and were accessible for study. The Case Record comprised a transcribed and restructured summary of the data into a shorter, referenced, indexed, and public record of approximately 230 single spaced pages.

**Step 4 Establishing Validity and Reliability**

A variety of actions were undertaken to enhance the validity and reliability of the information received from the informants and therefore of the study. Triangulation of various forms helped to establish both validity and reliability. Triangulation was achieved primarily by collecting the same information from more than one source, for example, from a teacher and from that teacher’s district informants, or from two or more different teachers, or from a teacher and from supporting documents or secondary sources such as websites. This vetting or checking of sources was undertaken constantly during the study data collection period. Also, to establish a clear audit trail enhancing reliability, the steps in the study process have been described in detail in previous sections.

**Primary source data validity and reliability.** Effort was made to ensure the interview transcripts accurately reflected the information received from those interviewed, that is, it
reflected the situation as the participants saw it. During the interviews, unclear statements were queried for clarification and complex statements and longer narrative passages were checked by reading them back to informants immediately. Further checks for accuracy, for additional information, or for references were made with a few primary informants by phone or e-mail during the transcription of their interview into the Case Record. In the case of a long narrative from a teacher about the formation of a reading interest group which developed into a larger community of practice, the transcription was sent to the informant, and she checked its accuracy and made additional comments.

An attempt was made during the interviews or during the transcription phase to establish reliability within each informant’s report. If an inconsistency was noted during the interview, it was queried. During an interview, references were requested relating to a particular source of support or impediment, and some of this information was checked and elaborated later using information from the referenced source. Information from district informants was used to confirm teacher reports and provincial informant information was similarly used for both teacher and district data. Hard copy information, usually photocopied, such as a brochure of a workshop or an education program, was requested from all informants, if available, to help confirm reports.

Checking response validity was particularly rigorous in the case of the provincial level informants as they would be identified by province and could possibly also be identified by individual, and would need to be protected. Thus the entire transcript of the information received from each of the two provincial informants was returned to them for vetting. A very small amount of information was removed from the study as a result of these checks. It was assumed that electronic information such as that received from Saskatchewan provincial informants through e-mail subsequent to the interview would reflect their views satisfactorily, as they wrote
it themselves and knew it would be reported in doctoral research. One concern affecting both validity and reliability is that informants might have initially withheld or edited information to reflect current political positions. There was some suggestion of this with respect to district informant responses about LAT qualifications used in that district. Although it was clear from LAT reports that most districts in both provinces used some LATs who had less qualification than their provincial guidelines suggested or recommended, this appeared a delicate subject, and some informants did not provide information about this.

Some reports such as teacher responses to the question about support received from their provincial ministry resulted in conflicting reports rather than the similar response from all that might strengthen reliability. This variance may have reflected teacher perceptions rather than the actual activities of the provincial agents. Fortunately, some of the responses in the area included a description of what the informant believed the education ministry did or did not do, and these pieces of information offered insight.

Management of triangulation data. Additional information received by checking with a primary informant was recorded and entered into the interview transcript and then into the Case Record and dated with an indication that it was received as a result of a check. Frequently, the same information was presented by more than one informant. This was the case with two LATs reporting their district would only pay tuition support if the course taken would not lead to an increase in salary. There was much overlap regarding some support sources. To give weight to similar responses, a running tally was kept of the various workshops and conferences attended and certificates achieved by LATs and in this way a record was made of the most commonly accessed or at least the most available, if not necessarily the most effective, of these offerings.
Some reports were triangulated by contacting a referenced secondary source. For example, an LAT reported taking reading related courses locally from the University of Lethbridge in Alberta. That institution’s website confirmed the intent of their outreach program and explained its operation as it related to courses about reading instruction. This could be done here because the coursework was recent and the site still up, but this was not always the case.

Occasionally teachers did not have further or accurate information. Sometimes the data was easily confirmed by asking for clarification from the related district or provincial informant, but at other times much effort could be required to confirm the information. For example, one teacher reported she was currently taking a set of two free on-line university credit courses from Harvard University. She had responded to a federation advertisement but no longer knew which agency was paying her tuition. Calls to various ministry departments and to the federation finally tracked the program, the department responsible, and the ministry policy behind it.

**Step 5 Developing the Interpretation and Analysis**

Interpretation and analysis were on-going and cumulative during the months of data collection. Lists of needs, supports, and challenges, and interpretation and question notes were made as data came in. As informants were interviewed, insights appeared, and some of these guided the next interview. District and provincial interviews were subsequent to most of the teacher interviews. This proved useful. Patterns of supports and challenges affecting teachers were coming into focus as a result of LAT reports, and questions could be included in district and provincial interviews which solicited interpretative comments and discussion of policies. Where noted, items of need, support, or challenge, were related to particular policies, programs, or factors of context. These patterns would be explored later in more detail. Notes of possible patterns usually came from me but in some cases were suggested by an informant. Thus, by the
time the data had been collected, much work on the interpretation and analysis had already begun. It remained to review the entire Case Record from the beginning several times, refine the analysis in terms of the study questions, and develop the interpretation.

Step 6 Reporting the Results

Chapter IV addresses the study questions to present a clear account of the needs, supports, and challenges LATs reported together with information about contextual patterns. Response tallies and informant reports together explored any patterns, particularly in relation to years of LAT experience, provincial use of standards, and distance from a full service university. I attempted to present only evidence from the LATs themselves, though some interpretation due to organization patterns and especially in the choice of information to highlight in summaries was unavoidable. My own interpretations appear in Chapter V.

Summary

This qualitative exploratory study asked learning assistance teachers in BC and Saskatchewan about their needs, supports, and challenges with respect to knowledge about reading instruction. Their needs for such knowledge were explored by gathering published data and by using semi-structured interviews to ask LATs, their district administrators, and education ministry informants about LAT job expectations in relation to reading instruction. Further information was collected from LATs about their perceived preparedness to teach reading when they began LAT work, and about their current perceptions about their needs. The study then asked LATs about supports and challenges related to their access to knowledge about reading instruction. Their information was enriched, clarified, and confirmed by district and provincial informants, and by secondary sources referenced by primary informants. During data analysis, attention was paid to possible patterns or connections between factors of context and LAT
responses. Especially, the role of distance from a major university, use of provincial standards for LAT qualification, and years of LAT experience were considered in relation to LATs’ perceived needs, supports and challenges in developing reading instruction expertise.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of my exploration of Saskatchewan and British Columbia LATs’ perceived needs, supports, and challenges in relation to their acquisition of knowledge about reading instruction. Detailed descriptions regarding their needs, supports, and challenges are provided based on the Case Record interview transcripts and other data. Frequencies and comparisons of frequencies help to identify and quantify particular factors associated with needs, education and PD choices, and the affordances and constraints teachers perceived in each teaching context.

To identify quotations from the Case Record, a system of numbering links individual LATs to their responses to each interview question. The first number (before the slash) is each LATs’ personal identification, numbers 1 to 26 for BC LATs, and 27 to 50 for Saskatchewan LATs. The last digits are the number of the question from the interview guide where their comment can be found. For example, reference 14/28.7 is the response of LAT 14 (from BC) to question 28.7. Reference 43/26 refers to the response of LAT 43 (from Saskatchewan) to question 26.

District informants were identified first by province followed by D for district, and then by personal identification number and the number of the interview question. Thus, SKD1/9 refers to Saskatchewan district administrator number 1 responding to question 9. Similarly, the reference number BCM/2.3 refers to the provincial ministry informant (there was only one) from BC responding to question 2.3. Few direct quotations appear from district and ministry informants, but their information was used extensively to confirm and clarify LATs’ responses, strengthening study validity and reliability.
The intention of the study was to explore the widest possible range of needs, supports, and challenges from LATs working in the similar contexts of Saskatchewan and BC. There were some differences between provinces and among districts and these are described as appropriate, especially as they relate to distance from educational and profession opportunities, and the use of standards and experience in hiring LATs.

Needs

Some questions asked explicitly about perceived need for knowledge about reading instruction. Others gathered data that implied a need. LAT responses provide the first level of organization in this section. Following that, data are synthesized in terms of the study questions.

Number of Expert LATs

The LATs were asked how easy it was to get an LAT position in their district to give some indication of the extent of the demand for teachers with the qualifications for learning assistance. Table 4.1 displays frequencies for LATs’ responses.

Table 4.1

How Easy is it to Get an LAT Position? (N = 49; Response Rate of 87.7 % or 43/49)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent (%)</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nearly 70% of the LATs reported it was easy or very easy to get an LAT job in their district. LATs in BC perceived it was easier to get a position than LATs in Saskatchewan. While districts preferred teachers with specific qualifications, some LATs perceived less qualified applicants had been hired (2/35.4). Some of the Saskatchewan teachers who said it was difficult to get a position were from districts (all of them rural) where decreasing enrolments made it difficult to get any teaching position (39/35.4, 42/35.4), though as 31/35.4 explained, “A qualified LAT could more likely get hired.” LATs perceived that several factors impacted the number of qualified teachers available for LAT positions. Two of these factors, distance from a major university and provincial application of standards, will be noted again later.

LATs perceived the LAT position had recently decreased in desirability in some districts in BC. Where this occurred, they said few teachers would choose LAT work, and districts struggled to find qualified job candidates (4/35.4). The LATs in that situation perceived that various government, district, university, and union policies and actions had interacted to make the position less desirable.

LATs reported a major problem with the position was workload. Inclusion policies had gradually broadened the responsibilities of LATs to involve a wider range of special needs students. Recent provincial changes in funding and student designations and in accountability processes had resulted in even more job responsibilities (11/35.4). Case loads were huge and much paperwork related to accountability was required. “The workload is crazy,” 4/35.4 said, “and now it is the most undesirable position in the system and therefore not easy to fill. The staff turns over every year.” LAT 19/35.4 knew of instances where classroom teachers directed their frustration towards inexperienced LATs. She found the situation uncomfortable and discouraging.
Another problem reported was that qualified university graduates for LAT positions were scarce. “There aren’t any available,” said 23/35.4. “We have 38 new [LATs] this year. They are not training those at [BC] universities.” She said these universities required only one special education course in their certification programs. An LAT said, “When teachers are not qualified they may be less successful in the position. They feel discouraged because they aren’t successful or because it requires so much effort to prepare when they have so little background,” (23/35.4). The perception of another LATs was, “They get overwhelmed and quit” (5/36.3).

A further difficulty related to contracts. In her district, 2/35.4 reported LAT jobs were part time and the district did not offer a permanent contract for less than full-time work. The BC Ministry informant explained how funding was tied to number of students, and boards “could not” (BCM/1.10) provide a permanent contract as LAT hours at a school might be reduced next year. “If you want to be assured of your job,” said 23/37, “You need to be not an LAT.”

Some LATs faulted the lack of required standards at the provincial level for their perceived decrease in the professional status of their role. They said the lack of required standards suggested LATs did not need to have special expertise. Because of this some LATs said expert teachers would choose other jobs (14/35.4). One LAT perceived that districts in BC were free to use less expert teachers for LAT work, and where standards of education were not required provincially districts might not feel as obligated to give LATs support to acquire more qualifications compared with regions where there was a provincial requirement for such standards (16/23). However, one LAT explained it was the insistence of her union that prevented the requiring of provincial standards (16/20).

Under these circumstances, the LATs reported that the professional status of their position or what they termed its ‘image’ (16/35.4; 14/35.4) spiralled down in some BC districts
LATs themselves were uncomfortable when colleagues were not expert. An LAT said, “In other districts they looked at my qualifications. Here they take you if you have a teaching certificate. Frustrating!” Another summarized, “When you hire anybody who applies this lowers the image.”

### Tasks Related to Reading

The study examined LAT tasks related to reading instruction by asking, “What are you expected to do in your job in relation to reading?” A large number of tasks were reported with much similarity among them. High school LATs reported slightly more administrative tasks while elementary school teachers reported more responsibilities related to instruction and assessment. One elementary school LAT described her tasks as:

Assess students, screen for psych-ed. assessment needs, request/follow through with hearing and vision checks, select students who would benefit from support in reading … provide/plan materials for these—a grey area—on IEP’s, provide/plan modify students’ materials according to their IEP’s, monitor students who are not seen on a regular basis, track students reading levels, accuracy, self-correct rate, and comprehension words per minute 3 times per year (minimum), track specific students phonics and phonological awareness, consult with teachers re students at risk, new students, IEP’s, report cards, programs, etc., consult with educational assistants re students’ programs, duties, timetables, set up, etc., consult with psychologist, principal, speech pathologist, counsellor regarding progress, keep self and colleagues up-to-date on reading, and teach. (15.13)

Other LATs described the same tasks with some adding the selecting and purchasing of student and staff reading materials (14/15). Supervision of teaching assistants could also be part
of the role, especially at higher grades (14/15). There could be unique tasks. In connection with a student, one LAT (35/15) had been appointed by the court as “a Guardian at Liteum … and attended AA meetings with [the student].” She explained, “We do our part as much as we can.”

Leadership responsibilities related to reading in and beyond school were reported by almost all LATs. Several (21/19) acted as their school’s literacy coordinator, a role involving teacher consultation and mentoring but no direct service to students. LATs also worked with parents (24/15). One LAT said, “In our school introduction program, I arrange stories for the kids and a speaker for the parents” (15/15). “I helped design the Literacy Diploma with the Dean of Education” said another (16/15). LAT 28/15 worked with specialist staff doing “workshops and consultations and even [interacted with people] at the government level, all about reading.”

**Time Spent on Reading**

As shown in Table 4.2, LATs reported extensive time on reading instruction. Their work included teaching, assessment, reporting, and planning. All of the LATs indicated at least half of their time was on tasks related to reading; the remaining LATs estimated reading tasks took up 80% or more of their time.

Table 4.2

*Time Spent on Reading (N = 49; Response Rate of 98.0% or 48/49)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent (%)</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 – 79%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80% or more</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The roles of those with the lowest and highest time spent on reading differed. LAT 10/16 used all her time for instruction because she task-shared and in her school the literacy teachers did math support. An LAT trained in Reading Recovery focused on younger students (21/15). Reading was emphasized by one LAT (16/16) because literacy was her school goal, and another (1/16) found reading instruction was how the job was arranged when she arrived so she retained that model. Teachers observed that when working with math (9/16) or language development (28/16) their tasks often related to reading. As 23/16 reasoned, parents, even if they were ESL, could help with math, so she chose to address reading. Spelling and written language were the second most commonly noted task areas.

Among those spending the least time on reading, 22/16 explained half of her time was spent on ESL instruction, but the remaining time was all on reading instruction. One LAT (37/16) supervised 11 teaching assistants. Some high school (3/16) and middle school (4/16) LATs used an assignment support model where they helped students with assignments across subjects. One high school LAT reported no direct student contact as she was only responsible for special needs funding paperwork. High school LATs who used a remedial model (involving basic skill development) spent more time on reading.

**Prior Education and Experience**

Nearly half of the LATs reported they had met their province’s LAT education qualifications when hired (Table 4.3). This proportion was slightly higher for LATs in Saskatchewan than in BC. A difficulty here was that some BC LATs (1/17, 4/17) were unaware their province had any standards, recommended or otherwise. With these, through discussion we were able to deduce whether they would have met the current standards when they were hired. Teachers in Saskatchewan were all aware of their standards, and several (29/10.1, 37/10.3) had
been asked to achieve these after hiring. One BC teacher (20/17) had to complete an M. Ed. to meet her district’s requirements. In 9/18’s BC district, “Three years in a job and you were considered qualified.”

Table 4.3

**Provincial Education Standards Met (N = 49; Response Rate of 100% or 49/49)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approximately 70% of the LATs in both provinces reported they had met their province’s experience standards when hired (Table 4.4), a larger proportion than met standards of education. One LAT reported her first board made her teach classroom for two years and then move to the LAT job (42/18). Not all useful experience took place in public schools. LAT 45/18 felt her private school experience and tutoring work prepared her, and 24/18 said, “My music background showed me practice led to improvement.”

Table 4.4

**Provincial Experience Qualifications Met (N = 49; Response Rate of 100% or 49/49)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent (%)</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many teachers reported they had been asked to take the LAT position because they had some, though not all, of the qualifications (4/17). Also shared was the experience of 8/17 said she got the job because she would work part time. Most frequent was the use of staff already at the school (20/17). “I didn’t actually apply,” said 23/17 whose principal asked her to take the job.

**Formal Education After Certification**

Nearly all LATs sought sources of additional knowledge about reading after their initial teacher certification. As Table 4.5 shows, half of the LATs reported choosing both formal and informal means. In a separate question, 41 (82%) of the LATs reporting had taken at least one formal course specifically on reading/literacy after initial teacher certification. Four of these took one class, 17 had two to five classes, and 20 had more courses specifically about reading or literacy.

Table 4.5

*Reading Education/PD Taken in Service (N = 49; Response Rate of 98.0% or 48/49)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although additional courses taken suggests a perceived need for more knowledge about reading, one could not conclude these teachers were now satisfied with their knowledge. Even 2/19, with more than ten classes in reading/literacy, said she currently felt unprepared for her job. Of those reporting no formal classes taken, 7 of 9 also said they felt unprepared.

Informal Professional Development After Certification

Study teachers reported extensive use of informal sources of knowledge about reading (Figure 4.1). Most teachers (98%) reported regular use of these informal sources and 96% had accessed more than one source. Teachers most frequently received knowledge from workshops, followed by conferences, professional memberships, informal certificates, and journal subscriptions, respectively. In terms of other sources of knowledge, that is, those apart from the ones listed as a checklist in the interview guide, teachers most commonly added colleagues as other knowledge sources but also said they learned from books and on-line information sources, from parents, and from their students, too.

Feeling Prepared

Half of the LATs responding said they had not felt prepared for the reading instruction tasks when they began LAT work (Table 4.6). This was more likely the case for respondents in BC than in Saskatchewan. One teacher had felt prepared when she began but had a different view now. “I was too young to question my skill!” 42/19 said. Indeed, one of the two first year LATs (46/19), three months into her very first teaching year, reported she felt prepared.
Figure 4.1. Informal Professional Development Access by LATs (N = 49).

Table 4.6

Feeling Prepared for LAT Work (N = 49; Response Rate of 95.9% or 47/49)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Knowledge Needed

Teachers described the knowledge they lacked when they began. Information about assessment was an immediate need that had been lacking from their initial teacher education (10/19, 40/19). Also needed was information about teaching special needs children and about reading programs and materials. As 4/19 said, “We are all flying by the seat of our pants.” LAT 5/19 wanted “to know the main instruction methods of the time; at university it was all whole language so I missed.” And 6/19 complained, “Students from [my university] have no idea … of how to adapt or modify.” One LAT wanted time to assimilate new methods, to think: “Will it improve what I’m doing now? What can I drop in order to add?” (13/19).

Formal education needed. Teachers were also asked what formal education and/or less formal PD about reading they believed LATs needed (Table 4.7). The majority of LATs, and especially those in BC, said extra education (beyond teacher certification) was needed to be an LAT. Almost a third of the LATs (e.g., 3/20, 47/20) mentioned reading assessment information as an immediate need, including the use of standardized and informal tools, how to assess fluency and phonological skills, and how to use and interpret Informal Reading Inventories. Several wanted current reading research and new instruction methodologies (e.g., 22/20). Most were quite practical. LAT 24/20 asked, “Give us more tools to use in the classroom,” and 6/20 wanted “explicit instruction.” Several wanted more education on both phonics (6/20, 43/20) and Whole Language (5/20, 42/20) and on commonly used programs such as Reading Recovery (1/20, 29/20) or Guided Reading (20/20, 29/20). As 5/20 stated, “You need knowledge of the main instruction methods of the time so you can … fit your students.” Reading skills for older students were of interest as “intermediate teachers … need to teach reading metacognitive
skills,” (23/20). Still, as 3/20 said, “Language Arts is always changing. I am not sure teachers can learn all they need before they begin.”

Table 4.7

*Formal Education Needed for LAT Work (N = 49; Response Rate of 95.9% or 47/49)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Informal professional development needed.** All of the 41 teachers responding believed some informally acquired knowledge was needed to be an LAT. LAT 18/20 believed informal education was valuable because, “the research information [at universities] gets to so few.” LAT 3/20 had changed her views since starting LAT work and was “not as stressed about training now because if you’re motivated you can learn all you need without it.” As informal learning opportunities, LATs most recommended semi-structured workshops and conferences. “Workshops focus,” said 19/26, “Others are there and you can work together and develop with an expert or at least a colleague.” LAT 12/26 said, “I attend conferences … to seek out new ideas, strategies, and programs.” LAT 49/26 recommended “at least three sessions of in-service, conferences, etc., a year to stay current.”
Other informal means were also suggested. LAT 3/21 found mentoring provided “critical information that can’t be taught in a class.” LAT 13/26 combined supports and mentoring to update her computer skills. Others watched videos (21/21), used action research (23/21), read research (20/21), joined a focus group (26/21), joined an association (20/21), or networked (26/21). LAT 42/21 suggested, “Get on a bandwagon. Take the pieces that work for you.” One special education director read articles and sent them to the LATs with question and comments written on them, and passages underlined and starred. “It was invaluable,” said LAT 6/21. One LAT (18/21) wrote his own book on reading. He was considering publishing it.

**Experience needed.** Experience was highly recommended (by 90% of LATs responding; see Table 4.8). LAT 36/21 said, “You can’t understand until you have a kid to attach it to.” LAT 20/19 explained, “If you are talking to teachers, [classroom experience] gives you credibility. The job was tough, 4/24 said, and “you need experience to gain … a thick skin to handle … attitudes.” LAT 9/19 learned administrative skills, saying, “You can’t teach all that at university.” LAT 12/19 said, “Brand new teachers … struggle.” Administrators valued experience, too (SKD1/1.9) The type of experience mattered with primary school experience especially valuable (14/19, 1/9). When experience was missing, 10/19 restructured her tasks to fit what she knew. For 7/19, experience outside school helped, “Kids, life, other jobs—all those prepared me.” Mentors supported when experience was lacking (17/19).

**Motivation for Further Education and Professional Development**

Almost all LATs completed additional coursework and/or participated in PD to further engaged in further their knowledge and understanding of reading instruction. Their reasons for engaging in educational or professional development are shown in Figure 4.2. Most felt the information was needed for the job (e.g., 7/27.5). Some were motivated by the possibility of
Table 4.8

*Experience Needed for LAT Work (N = 49; Response Rate of 87.8% or 43/49)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

increased salary. Few teachers hoped their PD would lead to more leadership roles (e.g., administrative or consultant positions). Some insisted they did not want such a position in any case (10/27, 43/27), a view confirmed by a district administrator (SKD1/18). Some engaged in further education to meet provincial or district standards (42/34) following a board request. Other motivations described included wanting to acquire knowledge to help their students (19/27.5) or to sound confident with parents or other colleagues who expected information (22/27). They were curious, too (6/13.6). Other LATs said that more knowledge made the job easier (30/27.5). Workshops of free ideas and resources were appreciated, as was “meeting … those who can help you,” (14/25.5). One LAT reported that additional education allowed her to use standardized reading assessment tools (14/27.5). Another found it beneficial to take formal courses after some LAT experience (27.5.37). More knowledge provided still another with an edge so she could “be sure to have a job” (4/27.5).
Summary of Needs

Research Question 1: Job Expectations and Reading

The first research question asked, “What are the tasks of LATs regarding the education needs of students who struggle with reading?” LATs indicated that work related to reading instruction was, by far, the most important part of their job. All the LATs reported spending at least half of their time on reading instruction, and some spent 80% or more. Teachers who spent less time on reading typically were teaching middle or high school and following a model of assignment support (i.e., they assisted students with their assignments from other teachers, or had a primarily administrative role, or mentorship/supervisory roles. Elementary school LATs
usually followed a remedial model which addressed reading instruction directly. No LATs mentioned spending much time on other subject areas. One LAT explained that even ESL parents could help their children with math, so she focused on reading and language support.

Specific tasks related to reading included reading instruction for special needs students at every grade level, conducting assessments and planning, and supervising and delivering programs. LATs reported heavy consulting and mentoring demands in their schools and beyond. Their administrative tasks were extensive, discouraging experienced teachers and overwhelming newer LATs. When they were confronted with particular instructional problems with which they were unfamiliar LATs had to be prepared to quickly locate reliable, current, research and knowledge about reading instruction.

**Research Question 2: Feeling Prepared**

Here the research question asked, “Do LATs feel their education and experiences have prepared them to meet the expectations of their jobs in relation to reading instruction? Half of the LATs reported that they did not feel prepared when they started in the role, even thought almost half of them had met their provinces’ LAT education standards upon hiring, and nearly three-quarters of them had the recommended experience. Almost all LATs reported taking further coursework and/or PD about reading instruction after LAT employment. They were motivated not by leadership advantages or increased salary, but because they believed the information was needed for their job, and because they had not previously developed that necessary knowledge. LATs also participated in informal PD because they believed all they needed to know could not be gained through formal means. The teachers’ heavy involvement in further education and PD indicates a strong and on-going perceived need for more and current knowledge about reading instruction.
Research Question 3: Perceived Needs for Reading Instruction Knowledge

The final research question about needs asked, “What are LATs perceived needs, if any, with regard to education and professional development about reading instruction” LATs perceived they needed more knowledge about reading instruction before taking the job and would continue to require information to remain current with new research and methods, programs, and materials. LATs said they most needed more knowledge of assessment, including both standardized testing tools and their interpretation, and informal classroom assessments. They also wanted theoretical information about the reading process, its components and development, and much more practical information on instructional methods, programs, and materials and where to use each with special needs students and with their teachers.

LATs less frequently reported needing additional formal education than either experience or informal learning to prepare for LAT work. LATs said less formal information sources and experience could give them knowledge about reading programs and materials, research, and where to find more information (and who could help). They also perceived a need for information to assist them with the administrative and consultative aspects of their work before they began, including setting student learning goals and speaking confidently about current approaches to reading instruction.

The teachers’ actions were consistent with their perceived needs. Once in LAT positions, all but two very new teachers quickly involved themselves in both coursework and continuing informal PD that focused on reading instruction. They remained strongly motivated to learn because the information was needed for their work, not because it might increase salary (though that helped), and certainly not because it would lead to leadership opportunities (which it was unlikely to do). Most enjoyed the challenge of working with exceptional learners and wanted to
enhance their qualifications for their students and for parents and colleagues who depended on their expertise.

**Supports**

Teachers described the affordances impacting their attempts to gain knowledge about reading instruction. Their responses indicate policies, programs, agents and agencies and circumstances of context that offered support. Here, LATs’ responses are reported in relation to support sources. Study questions about supports are addressed directly at the end of the section.

**Feeling Supported**

Teachers were asked if they felt supported to get any additional knowledge they needed to do their job with regard to reading instruction. Most LATs did indeed feel somewhat or completely supported in their search for knowledge about reading (Table 4.8). Some did not.

LATs said that feeling supported was critical to their knowledge development. It inspired them and indicated that their colleagues expected them to be expert and wanted to help them to gain knowledge. Such a feeling depends on the school and administrator said one LAT, and simply being listened to was important (5/25). LATs could feel supported despite the simple nature of the support or their own hard work or expense to get it.

**Reasons for Extending Support**

Concrete supports such as funding or permissions were often extended because of a need for greater numbers of knowledgeable teachers in a province, district, or school. One ministry provided bursaries and worked to make programs available because there were not enough expert special education personnel in the province, including LATs (28/25, SKM1). In a BC district, two hours (by air) from a university, one LAT explained it was difficult to recruit and maintain expert staff, so her administration developed a policy of training their existing
teachers (20/10.3). Another LAT received support from her school “because so many middle
school LATs here don’t have training,” (4/25). Policies such as those in support of increasing
literacy could also lead to support (2/25).

Table 4.9

*Perceived Support for Education/PD. (N = 49; Response Rate of 98% or 48/49)*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Response</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
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<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>49</td>
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</table>

**Provincial Support**

Approximately half (49%) of study LATs reporting perceived they had received support from the provincial level, either from the legislature and politicians or from the government education ministry. A rationale for provincial support was given by an LAT who said, “There is a need to provide supports for the changing landscape of education …to educate people how to do this,” (36/30). Teachers received direct financial awards such as bursaries, or information made accessible through websites, workshops, and presentations. Less direct support came from research and from general encouragement for teachers to learn more about reading instruction such as through the use of standards of education for LATs.
**Provincial policies.** One LAT described how the ministry could set policies (such as those around inclusion) that directly influenced LAT services and resulted in learning opportunities designed to enable teachers to meet these policy objectives (30/30). Such policy construction was described by ministry informant SKM1. It involved yearly visits by ministry staff to all districts to talk extensively to educators and gather information about needs. Reports and drafts of potential solutions to address problems were publically discussed and a final policy set. It was a lengthy process but one which this informant said served the ministry well in terms of public awareness and educator support. The informant noted it had also resulted in very functional policies. One such policy was around the establishment of an Extended Studies Certificate in special education that allowed teachers such as LATs who undertook to acquire the necessary coursework for this certificate to receive increased salary (Saskatchewan Education, 2008). Courses about reading instruction could be part of the certificate program (University of Regina Centre for continuing Education, n. d.).

One policy that many LATs from both provinces believed encouraged and enabled them to gain knowledge involved requiring standards for education and experience for LATs (e. g., 6/30, 48/30). One LAT explained how she thought it worked. “The ministry required the certification. They are saying that teachers need to have that. They want a level of competence,” said 30/30. Another teacher said, “[Requiring] qualified people means that colleges of teachers and universities would have to set courses that prepared teachers” (6/30). No LATs reported any difficulties getting jobs as a result of the standards, though several LATs in both provinces had been asked to take further courses after hiring to meet the standards. Indeed, over half (53%) of LATs had been hired without having met their provincial education standards, and even in
Saskatchewan where such standards were required, one LAT reported she still had not achieved them after five years of LAT experience.

**Provincial financial support.** Ministries offered LATs direct and indirect funding for education or PD about reading instruction often related to literacy improvement policies and programs (1/30). BC had done this in the past, and Saskatchewan LATs reported that grants were currently available for attendance at workshops about literacy improvement. Money might also come for grants for conferences (13/30) and workshops (33/30), or for PD money given directly to LATs for specific coursework or attendance at workshops on particular topics (45/30). They also provided other supports.

**Other provincial support.** Both provincial ministry information websites allowed LAT access to valued knowledge. A Saskatchewan LAT indicated, “The Sask Learning website is phenomenal!” (38/30). The equally well received website of SET-BC offered education materials and instruction through webcasts, demonstrations, and presentations to help teachers use technology with special needs students (2/30, 16/30). This BC site was even recommended on the Saskatchewan ministry website. Several LATs, however, though aware of these sites, said they did not use them (e. g., 1/30).

Provincial curricula offered LATs information about reading instruction through performance standards and a common language that might be used with parents (5/30, 33.30). In BC, a separate manual of reading supports for special needs students and information on exam adjudication for struggling readers were reported as helpful (24/30), while in Saskatchewan, the built-in reading accommodations were valued (33/30).

New language arts curricula in both provinces came with supports which some LATs said helped to improve their knowledge of reading instruction (SKM2, BCM1.1). In BC, this support
was described as primarily on-line. No BC LATs said they used it, but several said it was useful to have should they need it. Saskatchewan teachers and administrators reported varied learning opportunities were offered by the ministry in relation to their new curriculum, and said the majority of LATs would have participated in a set of curriculum workshops (SKD2/25.2, SKD1/4.8, 28/1, 32/25). These were presented over two years in partnership with university students who developed and led them and with the teachers’ federation which advertising them and supporting them financially (40/30).

No BC teachers listed provincial literacy assessments as a source of support, but one Saskatchewan LAT said her province-wide Assessment for Learning helped her to focus on the instruction required for the knowledge tested as it presented questions linked to curriculum learning objectives (36/30). Teachers who wanted data on individual students or on their classroom had to score it themselves. This approach presented no discomfort to teachers in terms of possible comparisons between students or between colleagues.

The Saskatchewan ministry offered workshops about topics of current interest in reading instruction. These provided experts (32/30), used local facilitators (35/30), or imported popular specialist presenters such as Dawn Reithaug from BC (43/30).

A provincial focus on research had resulted in a unique support program in Saskatchewan. One LAT explained, “They [the ministry] wanted better educated special education teachers across the province so they tried this policy to improve access to distance education” (44/30). A study LAT (38/30) described receiving tuition for special education online courses from the WIDE World program of Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education. In return she provided feedback to the ministry on the suitability of the courses for recommendation on the provincial website. Ministry informant SKM/2.3 explained it was a pilot
project whereby the ministry paid the fees, supported attendance at start-up workshops, and provided texts. The goals were to determine whether online forms of education could meet educators’ needs, and if collaborating online with teachers in similar jobs was effective. The ministry also wanted to see if and how the program might offer support for teacher knowledge development. A final goal was to develop a cadre of teachers who have experienced and been trained as coaches in effective online education. She confirmed the program was the result of ongoing department policies designed to support the development of expert teacher availability in special education.

**District Support**

Most LATs received help from their district (see Figure 4.3). Commonly, they were supported to attend workshops and conferences, but they also used mentoring programs or took courses with financial support. They more commonly received paid leave than unpaid leave. One third used support for certificates such as Reading Recovery. One summarized: “This district has great mentors, fabulous consultants, opportunities to go to workshops or join a reading group” (21/25). Support received was returned in loyalty. An LAT said, “They let me leave an hour early every Friday for six weeks for a course. You remember that forever and are ready to go extra for them as a result,” (30/27).
Financial support. Districts offered several kinds of financial support. Funding for university courses had been received by 44% of the LATs responding, with varying tuition policies—10% (9/28.4) to 100% of tuition (3/28.4)—negotiated by local teacher unions (27/28.8). Mileage and accommodation could be included (37/28.4). Most LATs received money if courses pertained to the LAT job or a university degree that was relevant for their work, or were of benefit to the district (5/28.4). One LAT described a restrictive policy: “Our district will pay up to $400 to take non-credit courses, but we can’t get funding for anything that would lead to an increase in salary” (1/28.4). A colleague confirmed this (3/28.4). Money might also come for informal certificates such as Reading Recovery, or Phono-Graphix.
Workshops. Most teachers had also received money for workshops (90%) and conferences (80%). Policies varied by district. One LAT said, “If I wanted to go to see somebody somewhere, money would be found” (15/28.8). Local workshops were usually provided free. A list of workshops from all sources mentioned by name was made and entered into the Case Record. Districts employed local leadership expertise, imported experts from elsewhere (47/13.4), or sent out ‘reading missionaries’ (2/28.8). One LAT explained that reading missionaries were teachers who received support to attend an event with the understanding that they would bring back information to pass to their colleagues though sharing opportunities (2/28.8). However, some publishers and workshop presenters would sell materials only to those with certification gained from personal attendance (28/13.4).

Printed information. Districts also provided information on-line or in hard copy. Central resource libraries held books and journals for and about reading instruction and offered circulating journals, site licenses for journals on line (35/25, 8/28.8, 44/28.8), and presented book talks on new reading instruction materials for teachers (44/28.8). Most districts had restricted websites, but some like the Saskatoon Catholic Schools’ site on reading was open to all and was recommended by several study LATs (e.g., 31.38).

District leave. Teachers reported a variety of paid and unpaid leave arrangements, most of these used for formal coursework or to achieve special certificates. Some leave provisions were the result of union bargaining. One LAT received a year with partial salary to complete her M. Ed., as the district required that for the job (23/8.8). Another received permission to leave class an hour early for a course (30/27.5). Some districts had a deferred salary/year off plan (17/28.6).
Special certificates. Over half of LATs (67%) had obtained certificates from various programs. Reading Recovery was the most commonly mentioned of these. Most LATs had one or two certificates, but one LAT had ten. The Literacy Tutor certificate from Frontier College in Saskatchewan, meant for those with no formal teaching credentials, was praised for its coverage of reading instruction (38/13.5, 39/13.5).

District central office. Teachers perceived encouragement from district staff was a strong support (2/28.8, 22/28.8). One LAT said, “Our district is very encouraging; they keep telling us, “You guys are doing a wonderful job. We want to give you the things you think you need,” (2/28.8). Teachers appreciated central administrators for their encouragement but especially for permissions to attend PD events (8/29). Specialist staff, such as psychologists (2/28.8, 38/25), speech and hearing pathologists (38/25), and occupational therapists (28/15) offered collegiality as well as information about teaching students with particular needs, and sometimes they led workshops. The most common comments were about coordinators or consultants (17/25, 44/25):

They do in-servicing for us like for our literacy thrust. They come once in a while to our staff meeting and will bring things up like what did you try and how did it work. It works quite well. Its increasing the amount of Language Arts we are doing plus our vocabulary on LA is improving. [Our usual coordinator] is away in BC to do her doctorate. She was phenomenal. She did in-servicing on how to locate web resources. She had thematic websites set up. Now the superintendent is messing with them, because they want them set up as a library. She sent us three tubs of books on all subject areas for our autistic kids. She came to us through shared services from [another district two hundred of kilometres away]. I have the
huge three-inch thick book [of helpful information] she prepared and sent out to every school. She arranged computer workshops and this binder through her funding. She did model teaching methods too (27/13.4).

**District mentoring.** Mentors were used by half of the LATs and were especially appreciated by new teachers enmeshed in unfamiliar paperwork (19/19). One district’s term, ‘side by side teachers’, suggested partnership rather than hierarchy (2/28.8). Mentors might be other LATs in a school (38/28.1, 1/29) or from elsewhere (9/28.1), a resource teacher (37/28.1), a literacy support person (1/28.1), or a coordinator (35/28.1).

Mentoring tasks varied. Some roles were formal and extensive, others unstructured. “They watch me demo. One teacher didn’t know what to do in reading. I worked with them every second day for three months” said one mentor (3/28.8). One district employed a single mentor for all new LATs to help with caseload and forms (19/19). Any chances to meet and talk with colleagues were valued for the knowledge (2/28.8), the feeling of trust (244/8.8), and for contacts for future support (41/25). “Sharing time at the end of meetings,” said one LAT (44/28.8), “I have learned more than anything else that way.”

Mentoring relationships could benefit from formal support. Some districts offered mentor meetings (3/28.1), paid substitutes, or set time off for observation (20/28.2), but most partners were left to themselves to establish a plan. Some mentors felt insecure in their own knowledge (4/28.1). One LAT where the position was an entry level job felt overwhelmed (23/28.1). She explained there were too many new LATs (38 of 54), and even existing ones were inexperienced.

**District professional learning communities.** A professional learning community of various forms could be a learning support. LAT 29 reported the development of just such a group (29/28.1). She describes the group’s establishment and the kinds and sources of knowledge it
provided. The district strongly supported the group with time, money, materials, consultants and coordinators, food, and encouragement and respect. But it was begun and led by teachers, snowballing from a hesitant start into a rich learning community, encompassing adjacent districts. Another LAT said her central office was attempting to establish just such a learning community, but not much was happening (27/28.1). LAT 29 said she believed teachers themselves must lead for such a group to be successful (29/28.1).

**District incentives.** Few LATs mentioned districts as providing incentives for PD apart from food (17/29.8). One district, working with the local teachers’ union, did offer vouchers for PD attendance and mentoring (16/28.8) which could be used for further PD costs.

**School support.** School based support took the form of encouragement and collaboration more often than money. Figure 4.4 displays the proportions of teachers using various school initiated supports. Those most commonly reported were workshops, followed by support (not necessarily financial) for conferences and mentoring. Paid and unpaid leave were seldom granted at the school level. LATs said that some funding for school based PD came form their districts and other money might come from special literacy thrusts or even from grant applications such as to publishing and education technology companies. In the Other category, LATs said supportive administrators and enthusiastic colleagues who took an interest in LAT learning actually provided the strongest school based support in terms of incentive to be knowledgeable.

**School funding.** Schools did not have the same access to financial resources as districts and governments which had tax based funds (44/29.8). Still, many teachers received some money from schools for attendance at workshops and conferences (14/29.8). These funds usually came through district grants but some could originate from outside sources such as the IRA
associated BC Reading Council (23/29.8). Parent advisory committees might raise money for materials such as reading tests, if that benefited the entire school (19/29.8).

![Figure 4.4. School Support Accessed By LATs (N = 49).](image)

**School leave.** Support for leave was reported most often as permissions or arrangements for time away. Flex time (7/29.8), release time (10/29.3), and internal coverage (4/29.8) were used. Few teachers received formal leave from schools.

**School workshops.** Districts assigned some days each year for PD at schools. Half of the LATs reported their schools had used this at some point for reading related workshops. Topics had to serve the staff as a whole (4/29.2), so were not often about reading (9/29.2). Some LATs said they could find themselves leading rather than listening, but that could be a learning opportunity too (10/29.2).

**School administrators.** School administrators provided powerful, constant, and creative support. The most helpful of these, according to LAT reports, was encouragement (3/29.8,
“The principal encourages me. They think I’m brilliant. They say they love working with me,” said one. Another explained the support rationale: “They want you to be successful and your students to do well.”

**School mentoring.** Mentoring at the school level was usually informal. Any formal mentoring was not typically about reading instruction, as when a new LAT was assigned a buddy to help her learn to use the Xerox machine. Usually LATs arranged mentoring partners themselves, which was easy if the school had more than one LAT. Or the previous LAT would help. LATs most often were the mentor, which took time away from their own work.

**School colleagues.** Colleagues were sources of inspiration and knowledge. Some schools in both provinces used formal teams to address academic problems and share information, usually the result of a successful funding application from a ministry TEAM program for this purpose.

**University Support**

Approximately 60% of the LATs responding reported universities had been a source of support to them in gaining knowledge about reading instruction. Practicum experience was most often identified as a support with respect to pre-service education, and programs that enhanced access through distance education were most commonly praised as supports for working LATs. A number of LATs also described collaborations between their district and particular universities, which enhanced their access to coursework and programs about reading.

**Initial teacher education.** LAT attitudes varied regarding the value of initial teacher education. In his single year of teachers’ college (47 years ago!) one LAT had been required to take three separate classes about reading instruction and said he still used what he was taught.
(3/11). Several LATs said their pre-service education did not prepare them for LAT work (3/31). Another said that new teachers were arriving “highly qualified but poorly trained for in-school situations” (24/31). Still others reported experience to be of greater utility. “Lots of classes were available but it was after the first few years of teaching, working with other teachers, that I started to get to know how to do it” (1/31). “The university needs to step up their program to meet the realities of today’s classroom: diversity, ESL, inclusion, behaviour,” concluded one LAT (4/37).

**Practica.** One new LAT reported, “My practicum was incredibly valuable!” (6/31). Her perspective was broadly shared (14/31, 43/32). Teachers valued their relationship with supervising teachers (43/32), which in some cases continued past graduation (15/31). “Methods courses could only take you so far;” explained an LAT (18/31).

**University education after certification.** Many LATs took and valued further coursework about reading beyond initial teacher certification. Some reported further education offered them little of value (2/32, 24/32), as more up-to-date information was to be found through informal means (3/31, 10/31). “Our schools are sending teachers to universities to teach the folks there, not the other way around” said one (3/31).

**University accessibility.** Some universities offered evening and Saturday courses about reading (40/31) and involved themselves in partnerships to offer courses in smaller centres. Eight study LATs were currently enrolled in distance courses or programs (e.g., 1/31, 39/31). Some LATs had reported special partnerships arranged with universities though these were not from the provinces studies here.

**University personnel.** Individuals at universities received high praise from the LATs as some could make exceptional effort. One LAT reported:
I took an M.Ed. in Ed. Psych. and Counselling right away through a university down East. They had a prof at the University here on exchange. I drove to see him every other day and he, once a week, drove to see me to supervise the required practicum credits. I paid all travel expenses (18/10.3).

Advisors, practicum supervisors, and cooperating teachers were all reported as helpful. One LAT said she had three majors “because I had a gifted counsellor” (36/10.1). Another found her supervising primary teachers especially helpful (34/32). Three years after university, one LAT still contacted to her cooperating teacher for advice (8/32) and another working LAT consulted her practicum supervisor (15/31).

**University research and information.** Teachers said scholarship and knowledgeable professors were valuable supports, and that information could flow both ways (12/31, 47/31). The LAT who taught a class on learning disabilities said, “I am learning from the students, as all are seasoned teachers,” (13.4.22). Speaker lists were useful (40/31), though, as the PD half day had to be completely filled, “It totality kills a [one hour] speaker on reading,” (27/31). Access to libraries was appreciated for journals (40/31).

**Other Support Sources**

**Colleagues.** Colleagues were a strong source of support according to 19 LATs. One explained her own supportive attitude, “We have a responsibility to encourage other teachers’ talents,” (15/24). Although other LATs were typically the sources of collegial support, classroom teachers were also regarded as potentially knowledgeable, especially primary teachers (34/32). Teachers of ESL and speech-language pathologists were helpful (5/32). Supervising teachers helped newer LATs (34/32). Friends were a support (38/32). “A lot of word of mouth stuff happens. That’s where I get the good stuff” (36/13.6).
**Teachers’ federations.** Teachers’ federations could be a powerful support (20/32, 28/32). Federation support was most commonly reported from subject associations such as the English Teachers Association (28/32) in Saskatchewan or LATA in BC (20/32). For example, LATA offered in-service education and had extensive web resources. It also had a chat line, conducted its own research projects, published a newsletter and other publications, put on conferences, and contributed to curriculum development and advocacy thrusts including work on ministry committees.

**Community groups.** Over half of LATs (68%) joined one or more professional associations or community special interest groups. Those most commonly mentioned focused on learning disabilities, reading, autism, or literacy. A range of supportive services were presented. For example, the Learning Disabilities Association offered conferences, scholarships, research, publications, and information websites (40/13.1, 13/13.3). Participation could give LATs an enhanced a feeling of shared endeavour (10/32).

**Workshops.** Approximately 90% of LATs indicated they had attended workshops on reading instruction. A list of those mentioned by name was entered into the Case Record. Teachers in both provinces attended workshops by some of the same presenters. “Workshops help unify instruction so we are all doing the same practice” said one LAT (17/13.4).

Districts were the primary source of workshops, with LAT coordinators gathering needs and arranging or conducting events. Other workshop sources included ministries, federations (38/13.4), community groups, publishing companies, and individuals (13.4.28). Workshop topics covered all aspects of the reading process (47/13.4).

**Conferences.** LATs said conferences offered a rich source of current information and a networking opportunity. A lists conferences mentioned by name was entered into the Case
Record. Those frequently reported as attended in BC were Cross Currents (from LATA), and the reading conferences from local IRA groups. Teachers in Saskatchewan most often mentioned the Council of Exceptional Children (CEC), the Saskatchewan Reading Council (IRA), and from the teachers’ federation, the English Teachers and Early Childhood Education conferences. Some LATs attended “as many as the budget allows” (2/13.1); others went to something “every two years depending on needs” (20/13.1).

**Online support.** Many teachers used electronic resources to access both formal and informal sources of reading instruction information (e.g., 9/32, 11/32, 46/32). It is “quick and easy once you know where to look,” one LAT explained (6/13.3). Useful websites were suggested by colleagues, district personnel, or links from one web site to another. On-line journals might be accessed at personal expense through memberships in organizations, or could come through much appreciated site licenses from federations, districts, or provinces. Community groups offered sites about reading instruction and links to other helpful sites. The IRA website was frequently praised, as was that of the Alberta LD Association (18/13.3). No LATs reported using blogs or chat tools, though some groups (e.g., LATA), provided such opportunities to interact with other users. The majority of the electronic information sources used were local in origin, associated with ministry, district, federation, or local associate groups of national organizations. Some teachers reported using international sites, primarily from the United States, but also from Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. One website, Reading On-line, using LATA as a provider was appreciated because it advertised itself extensively so LATs could find it (16/13.3).

**Professional reading.** LATs reported reading professional materials to enhance their knowledge (11/32, 39/32). “Books,” stated one, and cited her district resource centre as useful
(16/13.6). “I get publishers to send me stuff,” said another (1/13.6) who needed information for her literacy teacher role. One LAT had a book sharing tree: “We do book talks. We started buying and sharing materials. There is a traveling kit. We don’t get together enough, but it is a wonderful way to learn,” (28/13.6).

Approximately half of LATs reported subscribing to a journal or newsletter. Most of these subscriptions came with membership in an organization. Some were respected academic journals, like those from the IRA; others were brief newsletters. Journals could be in electronic form (e.g., the BCTF Teaching to Diversity website gave access to several journals [2/13.3]). District resource centres subscribed to journals following LAT requests (17/13.3). Journals were shared at meetings (21/13.3) or among friends (24/13.3). “But if your name gets out there you get junk mail,” said one LAT (16/13.3).

Useful binders that collected reading information might come from a ministry, workshop presenters, or federation associations like LATA (22/13.6). District coordinators might prepare a binder perhaps together with experienced LATs who shared their own rich collections of information (18/21). One LAT led a committee of parents to build a binder locally using a grant which they presented at an international conference (26.15). Each of these binders differed in focus. Provincial binders were clear about protocols and where to get student support; local and LATA binders focused on reading and special needs instruction (22/13.6). The binder from the LAT and her parent committee was about reading instruction in French (15/26).

**Collaboration and partnerships.** LATs said collaboration was a source of support with broad positive effects, sharing examples from several levels of the education system. Working together could save resources, build loyalty, and produce results that were acceptable to all. At the provincial level, collaboration was most often reported from Saskatchewan, but BC had
many examples too (most were reported by the ministry informant). Ministry policy in Saskatchewan deliberately emphasized partnerships and collaboration and it appeared to be effective. “There is good dialogue between us,” said one Saskatchewan LAT (43/25).

Dialogue was the key to collaboration, according to the Saskatchewan ministry informant (SKM1). To accomplish this, teachers were carefully informed about ministry activities, including the reasoning behind policies and programs (30/30, MSK2). Ministry staff was made visible to teachers who then knew them personally and considered them as colleagues (27/30). Partnerships and collaboration were made evident in ministry discourse and documents. In turn, LATs’ discourse, e.g., “our department” (43/25, 36/30) itself suggested a collaborative attitude. All of this developed from the ministry policy of sharing responsibility for special education and for supporting LATs to gain expertise.

LATs in both provinces reported extensive collaboration between districts, often in relation to saving money, such as the sharing of expert staff or holding joint workshops (e.g., 36/28.8). Collaboration could create a feeling of shared respect: “The district provides a collaborative, supportive consultant who uses not an authoritarian approach but our knowledge and expertise. She allows us to be professionals,” (40/28.8).

At the school level, collaboration among colleagues was most often informally arranged. One LAT commented, “You buy this, I’ll buy that, and then you share” (36/28.8). Formal collaboration could be orchestrated through roles such as the literacy teacher role which required teachers to work with each other in an effort to learn more about reading and its instruction (2/25).

Universities could be full collaborative partners, too, strongly supportive of LAT access to knowledge. Universities collaborated with the ministry and the federation in Saskatchewan to
develop and ultimately provide for the creation of the Additional Qualification Certificate (Thompson, 2008). Universities from outside a province (e.g., Lethbridge, 20/10.3), or even outside the country (e.g., University of Oregon, 4/31) worked with districts to offer programs suiting LAT and district needs. Graduate classes were offered in several Saskatchewan towns through an arrangement between as few as five to eight teachers who asked for specific courses, and both of the provinces’ universities, which sent instructors, though finding one was a challenge (30/31, 6/33.8). Practica could be a successful collaborative information exchange as this LAT reported:

They [the university] had interns out here and the university was really good at coming out to set up the process for the student teachers. It was a valuable interplay between the university and their knowledge and the teachers here. They were out in the classrooms to observe, participate, and talk. (30/22)

LATs collaborated extensively with colleagues. The learning community described by LAT 29 (Appendix D) shows several information sources and agents operating together in an eminently satisfactory collaborative PD system.

**Literacy programs.** Policies that focused on improving literacy could originate from various education system levels or from community groups. Having a goal of improving literacy drew attention to the importance of reading along with the need to develop provincial, district, or school expertise in its instruction (2/32, 3/37, 21/37). Extra funding might come for materials, for staff such as a literacy coach (2/25) or for a literacy consultant (6/28.8), and for workshops, speakers, conferences, and release time (20/28.8). Universities responded to literacy thrusts by mounting extra courses about reading instruction (26/31). Community literacy organizations offered their support through conferences, libraries, and websites, and with grants, scholarships,
and bursaries (26/31). They also drew attention to the importance of knowledge about reading instruction.

**Summary of Supports**

**Research Question 4: Supports**

The research question asked, “What supports do LATs use and want to help them acquire any desired further knowledge about reading instruction? Nearly three-quarters of the teachers (71%) said they felt somewhat or fully supported in their attempts to gain knowledge about reading instruction. They seldom referred to specific policies as supportive. Rather, teachers attributed the support they received to particular individuals, though these people would likely have been following policy directives. Types of support included direct funding or materials, of which there was never enough, enabling supports such as permission to attend events, and setting PD events at accessible times and locations. The most important support LATs said was the general feeling of encouragement that came from the approval and attention schools, districts, provinces, universities, and associations paid in listening to and attempting to address teachers’ expressed needs. Support was primarily given for the purpose of increasing the number of expert teachers available for learning assistance positions with the ultimate intention of improving the reading progress of special needs students.

Half of the study LATs said their province had helped them gain reading expertise. Most of these teachers reported policies promoting standards of education and experience were useful. In both provinces LATs said they believed that requiring standards gave their role respect and forced the entire system to provide information and support LATs to access it. LATs also noted ministerial level collaboration and/or partnerships as a support. They valued curriculum support received and web-based information provided.
Districts were described as the most common source of support and the primary source of what teachers reported was their most basic need—to feel their expertise was valued and encouraged. Free workshops and conferences, or permissions and financial support to attend events, were the most commonly received district supports. Administrators, and especially LAT coordinators and consultants were praised for their encouragement, facilitation, and information. What LATs called ‘networking’ among colleagues was reported as essential, including some means for information to flow in both directions between LATs and their boards. Incentives were not relied upon broadly. Paid substitutes encouraged PD event attendance. Smooth PD application processes saved LAT time.

School support was more important for encouragement and access to colleagues than for its funding, which more commonly came from districts. Still, over half of LATs reported attending school workshops on reading instruction. Supportive administrators were the key. School colleagues were an inspiration as well as knowledgeable mentors.

Universities also offered support, and 60% of teachers said they received such assistance. This was most often noted as a personal connection between particular instructors, practicum supervisors, cooperating teachers, and student teachers, with useful information flowing in both directions. Some universities, primarily those outside the province (or the country) worked with districts to arrange useful programs about reading. Online courses were reported to be increasingly used and preferred by many LATs.

Teachers reported a number of other sources of support. Many agents worked in partnerships or collaborated to achieve support, offering joint programs and building or supporting programs others would deliver. Teachers said such collaboration was a support in itself. Federations organized associations related to reading and helped with bargaining for in-
service education and PD supports. Literacy development goals initiated at any level in the education system or by community organizations resulted in more reading instruction information being made available to teachers. A large range of events and structures supported making connections with colleagues, a support LATs reported as essential, including conferences and workshops, participation on committees, formal and informal mentoring programs, federation and community interest organizations, and newsletters and journals. Some support came from education publishers and technology companies or professional workshop leaders, usually in connection with purchased programs and materials. LATs chose to read for information, as well, subscribing to or sharing journals, using site licences, and purchasing books. Most LATs had taken special training that gave them some kind of informal certification.

As is evident, teachers reported receiving learning support from a diverse and complex set of information sources both within and outside of the education system. One LAT, in summarizing her support sources, said: “The district provides workshops, the university provides courses, and associations support us with information in various forms,” (22/25). Still, LATs felt that it was their own responsibility to develop the knowledge their job required. An LAT said, “We feel self sufficient and can go out and find what we need. But it is just nice to know you are supported,” (43/25).

**Challenges**

LATs reported the challenges faced in accessing information about reading instruction. The study LAT interview guide had presented a list of possible challenges and LATs indicated which they had encountered, explained how these impacted their knowledge access, and described additional challenges (Figure 4.5). In general, the absence of, or any impediment to, the supports LATs wanted were considered challenging. LAT actions in the face of impediments
illustrate how creativity and effort could overcome constraints. One LAT explained this. She said, “If it was really important I just managed a way over it” (15/33.8).

Figure 4.5. Challenges Met in Accessing Reading Instruction Knowledge (N = 49)

**Time.** Time for education and PD was the most frequently reported challenge. LATs said time was necessary for planning, attending, and implementing (4/25). One BC LAT explained that the job was always onerous, but this year had been her heaviest. “Our district says we are to have 45 [students]; I have 100,” (16/33.8). She attributed this to Bill 33 which capped regular class size but said nothing about LATs. New LATs struggling with unfamiliar protocols reported little time for PD just when information was most needed (8/33.2.1). Family responsibilities led
some to favour PD during school time or in shorter after school meetings (30/33.2.1). Travel for PD extended the time (30/33.4).

Finding the best time for workshops was hard. The provincial reading workshop in November was when report cards came out (27/13.1). Districts set workshops on PD days or after school or by using a shortened school day. One district bought the Phono-Graphix kit, paid for the workshops, and encouraged LATs to attend by setting the workshop in school time (40/13.4). Another LAT felt “lucky to get chosen” for a five-day district seminar during the summer (14/3.4). Workshops might be set before the school year, “so we get two weeks off at spring break,” (17/13.4). A rural LATs’ district rotated workshop sites; “Staff is coming here for the first time, and I do not have to travel” (17/13.4).

**Costs.** Many teachers reported receiving at least some financial support for formal education. This might be full or partial tuition from districts, the province, or elsewhere. But accessing such funding could be a time-consuming and awkward process (40/33.1.1). Some LATs were discouraged from PD attendance because they had to pay the salary of their substitute teacher (2/33.1.5). Others found access to electronic journals expensive (18/28.8). Financial support was not an incentive for an LAT who believed it was her own responsibility to meet the required job standards (35/33.1.5).

One Saskatchewan LAT noted a challenge around financial support from her province: “They keep restructuring their funding—it feels like cuts” (36/30). The BC ministry faced a challenge in offering direct support. The ministry informant explained how a policy had been established some time ago divorcing the ministry from direct programming in special education, so, “Our dollars are under the radar and very strategic in their placement” (BCM1.2). As a result, the special education branch offered indirect support through judicious use of grants from a small
budget, partnering with other agents who did the work (BCM1.2). “It was a way of leading without prescribing,” (BCM1.1).

**Distance.** Teachers said distance increased time, effort, and costs (30/33.4, SKD1.23). While distance presented a challenge, even long distances could be overcome. An administrator said, “I took my masters driving two hours in every Wednesday night with a group. We got home at midnight. We have more access than you might think here” (SKD1.22).

**Transportation.** Other transportation challenges were also noted. University parking was problematic and expensive (6/33.1.4), and traffic made travel frustrating, and lengthened travel time (38/33.4). Isolated campus parking lots could be frightening (12/33.8).

**No advertising.** Busy LATs had no time to research the best places to find coursework about reading. Local universities did not advertise their programs (4/33.8). Universities from elsewhere did (21/28.8), showering staffrooms several times a year with brochures, portfolios, and e-mail advertisements about programs and courses offered (17/38.8).

**Lack of support.** Teachers needed to feel supported and encouraged to acquire knowledge. Any ‘disconnect’ between their views of effective reading instruction and those of their province, district, or school were discouraging. One LAT encountered a poor understanding of reading instruction on the part of a district administrator as she and her colleagues moved toward a balanced literacy approach with its greater emphasis on phonics the previous Whole Language approach had used (23/25). Another LAT had been unable to support her board and said, “I just did not agree with the philosophy during Whole Language,“ (43/33.8). She spent uncomfortable years unable to find PD not related to Whole Language. An LAT in BC said the government (not necessarily the ministry) did not support teachers in the media. She said, “All I
find is teachers getting bashed. The province could help here. The government and province should be with and for teachers and for helping teachers and students” (12/30).

One LAT told of starting an LAT group because his board would not. He and his colleagues arranged presentations and discussed issues. Their efforts were unwelcome:

We asked our coordinator to attend but [she] stopped. We meet and talk about programs, concerns, district initiatives. We made a list of our roles and responsibilities. A lot of time was spent on IEP’s. We tried to get something going. We are a force – young, dynamic. We met a lot of resistance. We sent letters to the superintendent and the Board. We had the superintendent and the person in charge of reading instruction in to tell us what was going on in the district and expressed our concerns. Nothing changed so we wrote a letter about support for more knowledge on instruction. The superintendent never replied. (24/28.8)

Access to colleagues. LATs particularly noted the difficulty of finding opportunities to be together with their LAT colleagues to discuss, to mentor, to pass information to and from their districts and ministries, and to share learning opportunities so that they might build their knowledge in collaboration with others. This need was so strong that if not met by district initiatives LATs would set something up themselves—a study group (30.32, 21/37), a community of practice (29/13.6), an interest group (34/22), or a mentor group (29/21.1). They could be very proactive. Many district supports such as LAT meetings, mentor programs, coordinators, and committees were designed in part to meet this need.

Access to pre-service education on reading. LATs perceived university graduates did not come with the knowledge about reading needed for LAT work. Some attributed this to a lack of extra or optional reading courses available in their initial teacher education. Also, many came
to the position by chance and had not prepared. Neither province mentioned reading/literacy in their LAT standards, so even teachers who met these would not necessarily have taken courses on reading. LATs were also concerned by the absence of practicum experience in special education which might develop interest in the area (2/21) and appeared desired by students (43/31). It might also help them get teaching positions.

LATs said universities provided a limited selection of offerings about reading instruction, especially for special needs students (45/31, 47/31). Courses required unavailable prerequisites (48/31), or a prior teaching certificate, so you couldn’t take the class as an undergraduate (46/27), or they were full, or not offered every term, every year, or in the evening or summer (37/11.3). Teachers wanted universities to come right to them. Even those close to a major university complained about access (4/31). One LAT took coursework from an Arizona university, “because they came into our community” (3/10.3). Another reported about distance education: “I haven’t run across anything in reading” (31.25).

LATs also noted course content courses did not suit their needs as adult and/or employed learners. They want more coursework on topics such as reading instruction for special needs students, and assessment. Generally, local programs focused on leadership or on technology, not reading. They complained courses did not present recent research or talk of current and new programs and materials. LATs wanted practical information that applied directly to their work and they wanted time to try out the new ideas.

Access to PD during employment. Many LATs already in service also complained of a lack of available reading related workshops and conference presentations, and had the same concerns mentioned above about coursework or formal education programs on reading instruction (10/13.4, 36/33.8). They said district in-service concentrated on procedural matters of
most use to new LATs (9/28.2). School PD events were even less likely to focus on reading, and, since these had to be attended, valuable time could be wasted for LATs. Involving LATs in PD planning was suggested as a way to encourage the provision of more topics about reading instruction.

**Research Question 5: Challenges**

The fifth research question asked, “What are the challenges LATs encounter in accessing desired knowledge about reading instruction?” Some of the reported challenges were associated with particular agents. At the provincial level, not requiring standards of education and experience for LATs was most commonly reported as a missed opportunity to support learning and enhance the professional status of the LAT job. At any system level, not offering LATs a feeling of encouragement and support or facilitating LATs’ efforts to access information were considered to present a challenge. Despite their extensive involvement in formal education, LATs found many current higher education practices were ill adapted to their learning needs as working adults. They needed what was new and current and practical. They reported a paucity of suitable courses and programs, and those that were offered were not accessible for a variety of reasons. Universities from outside their provinces and country advertised effectively and came right into districts with partnerships that built programs suited to district and working LAT needs. Local universities did neither. Teachers turned to online means to improve course and program accessibility, but even there they found it difficult and time consuming to locate what they needed from among the few offerings available about reading. LATs said that if they were able to work in collaboration with universities these issues might be addressed.

In addition to challenges associated with agents, LATs reported a number of other issues that impeded their access to information about reading instruction. Time and costs for education
and PD were the most frequently reported of these, followed by distance to learning events. They were also discouraged by an attitude around them that did not support their learning or that did not expect LATs to be expert in reading instruction. LATs also wanted opportunities to discuss LAT issues and learn together with their colleagues and perhaps to participate in decisions about their learning supports. Despite their impediments, LATs said they held the major responsibility themselves for overcoming challenges to gain the knowledge they needed. But they appreciated any support.

**Suiting the Context**

A final research question asked how LATs’ perceptions of their needs, supports, and challenges were affected by three contextual factors: (a) distance from a university offering undergraduate/post graduate courses about reading, (2) provincial application of standards by province, and (3) LAT experience. Such an examination might suggest circumstances where study recommendations might most usefully be applied and enable supports to be created that more closely suit particular contexts. The three contextual factors were examined using tallies of LAT responses together with their comments about their choices. A summary of the impacts of each of the contextual factors organized by study question follows the data presentation.

**Impact of Distance**

To enable comparisons, LATs were assigned to three groups according to the approximate driving distance of their district’s central office from a full service university, that is, one offering post certification and/or graduate courses about reading instruction. Thus 19 LATs’ district offices were approximately one hour driving distance from a university, 11 LATs districts were, on average, two hours drive from a university, and 19 LATs worked, on average, three hours away or more. Tallies of relevant choices regarding LAT needs, supports, and
challenges are reported, grouped by LAT distance. Observed patterns suggest that distance from a full service university does impact LAT access to reading instruction knowledge.

**Distance and needs.** The proportions of LATs who had met their province’s education and experience standards before taking the job were higher at one or two hours distance from university than at three hours distance. Similarly, a higher proportion a one hour or two hours distance said they felt prepared for LAT work when they started. LATs at all distances reported similar proportions of both formal coursework beyond certification and coursework about reading after beginning their job with the exception of those LATs at a one hour distance who reported having somewhat less formal education about reading than LATs in the more distant groups. No LAT reports explained this possible anomaly. Thus, while LATs at farther distances came with less formal education overall (not the same question as having met the education standards), some LATs at all distances appeared able to access formal education later.

Table 4.10

**LAT Education Needs by Distance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>1 hour average distance</th>
<th>2 hours average distance</th>
<th>3 hours average distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met education standards</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met experience standards</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt prepared</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education after certification</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education about reading</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%+ time on reading</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group.
Distance may also have influenced the LAT role. The proportion of LATs who spent 80% or more of their time on reading instruction decreased with distance from a university (Table 4.10). An LAT who worked at a three hour distance reported her position was split between supervising 11 teacher assistants and providing direct service to students (32/9). Her administrator explained the scarcity of qualified LATs led his district to use less qualified but supervised teachers for instruction (SKD1.13). LAT needs for knowledge about reading instruction might be affected by role differences such as this.

**Distance and supports.** LATs at varying distances chose to participate differently in informal learning about reading instruction, i.e., in learning activities that did not lead to university credit (Table 4.11). LATs at all distances attended workshops in equally high proportions, perhaps, as LATs reported, because districts put on many workshops locally. All LATs also acquired similar proportions of informal certificates such as Reading Recovery Teacher certification. However, a higher proportion of LATs at two and three hour distances attended conferences, held memberships and journal subscriptions, and reported using more ‘Other PD’. Other PD most frequently referred to information from colleagues. One LAT explained she acquired journals in connection with memberships in federation or professional associations (2/13.3). These results might relate to a reduced access to colleagues for LATs in more distant districts. Attendance at these event types and the use of memberships and subscriptions may have facilitated or provided a useful alternative to access to colleagues. Access to colleagues did appear to be less convenient at farther distances. In Saskatchewan where I attended LAT meetings to request research volunteers, the district at a one hour distance held monthly meetings for its 35 to 40 LATs; at two hours distance two meetings were held each year for 14 LATs. The three hour district also held two meetings a year.
Table 4.11

LAT Informal PD Accessed by Distance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>1 hour average distance</th>
<th>2 hours average distance</th>
<th>3 hours average distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memberships</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other PD</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.

To access learning opportunities, LATs reported using a variety of supports from their schools and districts. Tallies of school support showed little difference across distances. LATs reported using district support for conference attendance, paid and unpaid leave, and ‘Other’ support in relatively equal proportions across distances. The highest proportion of support was reported for conferences and was similar across distances (Table 4.12). Some of this conference support would have been in the form of permissions to be away from the classroom to attend PD events. Most PD funding support for conference attendance and other PD was bargained for by teachers’ unions by province in BC and by district in Saskatchewan. This funding appeared to be allotted to each teacher, though unused funds could be shared with others near the end of the school year. Such funding might been more easily available and more suitable for use for conferences than for some other forms of PD. LATs at the one hour distance used relatively less district support for workshops and mentoring and proportionally more for coursework and certification. Since LATs at all distances reported relatively equal use of both formal education
and informal certification, the difference for these PD choices relate to other factors perhaps less access to financial support from districts at greater distances. In support of this hypothesis, mentoring, relatively inexpensive for districts, appeared to increase with distance.

Table 4.12

District Support by Distance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support used</th>
<th>1 hour average distance</th>
<th></th>
<th>2 hours average distance</th>
<th></th>
<th>3 hours average distance</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>89.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>94.7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>78.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coursework</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.*

Some of these differences in district support may have been related to differences in district tax bases and therefore district funding flexibility. Some LATs reported declining populations in their more rural districts, that is, those at farther distances from a university. These were the same districts from which LATs reported receiving less financial support for education and PD (20/28.8, SKD1.13) (Table 4.12). Such districts with a smaller and declining taxation base may have had less money available to support education and PD. They may also have had to pay more for importing expert presenters and workshop leaders, as one LAT in BC reported, (11/13.4). This would have further impacted funding available for the more costly forms of education and PD and could lead to increased use of less expensive supports such as mentoring.
Also, teachers traveling the farthest distances to such events as conferences, usually held in central locations, might have more expenses and require more funds in order to be able to attend.

Support from other agents, primarily the province and universities, showed some differences by distance (See Table 4.13). LATs in the one hour distance reported the most support from provincial sources, that is, the government or ministry. No other data explained this pattern. LATs at the two farther distances reported receiving proportionally more support from universities than LATs at the nearest distance. This might relate to the use of distance education by those far from a university, a support many LATs had mentioned in their discussion. No figures were gathered that related distance from a university and distance education, but teachers working close to a university might well find it easier to attend courses in person as some had indicated they preferred. Still, almost half of LATs at the one hour distance also reported receiving university support. They may have been considering their undergraduate university contact especially their practicum experience which many had valued. Support from elsewhere was reported most from those at one and two hour distances. LATs described such support as coming from colleagues and from federation and professional associations such as the IRA or LD groups. Those at closer distances appeared to have more access to these support sources, but again, no LAT comments explained this.

**Distance and challenges.** Respondents at all distances perceived distance, costs, lack of time, and lack of suitable learning opportunities about reading as strong challenges. Distance was most challenging for all those farthest from a university (See Table 4.14). LATs said it hindered travel to courses or to centrally offered PD events such as conferences. It was especially problematic in winter. It added cost to importing expert leadership for PD events.
Table 4.13

*Other Support by Distance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support source</th>
<th>1 hour average distance</th>
<th>2 hours average distance</th>
<th>3 hours average distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province/ministry</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsewhere</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.

Table 4.14

*Perceived Challenges by Distance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>1 hour average distance</th>
<th>2 hours average distance</th>
<th>3 hours average distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No classes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.

A high proportion of LATs at the nearest distance in comparison to those at the other distances reported lack of time as their strongest challenge while a similarly high proportion of LATs at the two hour distances reported costs as their greatest impediment. I found no data to explain this difference. Those LATs farthest away reported the fewest challenges in proportion to the others. Few LATs at any distance reported other challenges.
Impact of Provincial Use of Standards

Initial study demographic and contextual data suggested much similarity between the two provinces in terms of general factors of the LATs’ working contexts: their education systems, population demographics, funding for education, and similar standards of education and experience for teachers in the LAT position. The use of standards was part of a set of policies used by each province; those policies differed. The hands-off policy espoused by the BC Ministry of Education gave districts within that province considerable responsibility for special education services including teacher qualifications and in-service education and PD for teachers. The ministry in Saskatchewan saw its role as a partnership or collaboration with districts and all other partners in serving special needs students and in supporting their teachers to be knowledgeable. Its goal was to make decisions in collaboration and it hoped all partners might follow a similar policy. This policy difference between the provinces impacted their application of the LAT standards. In BC the standards were applied as guidelines; districts decided whether or not to follow them. In Saskatchewan, districts were required to follow the provincial standards or financial penalties in terms of funding withheld were imposed. The next section explores how this variation in the application of standards impacted LATs’ perceived needs and their learning supports and challenges.

Provincial use of standards and needs. The differing application of LAT standards in the two provinces impacted LATs’ need for knowledge in a number of ways. First, in both provinces there was a shortage of teachers who met the standards, but the scarcity appeared somewhat greater in BC. In Saskatchewan, 22% of the LATs reported it was difficult to get an LAT position compared with 4% of teachers in BC. Other study evidence appears to confirm this. Slightly fewer LATs from Saskatchewan were in the least experienced LAT category, and,
in contrast to LATs in BC, no Saskatchewan LATs spoke of the position as an entry level job, mentioned that a high proportion of newer LATs required mentoring, or reported it difficult to find experienced LATs for mentoring roles, all of which had been noted by BC LATs. Saskatchewan LATs explained that, with the rural population declining and fewer teachers needed there, it was difficult to get any position in some districts, though a qualified LAT might have the best chance (38/36.3, 39/36.3). This scarcity of teachers with the qualifications for LATs positions suggests more teachers in both provinces might need formal education to develop the knowledge of reading instruction needed for LAT work. The indications of greater scarcity in BC would mean that teachers there might have even less qualification and greater knowledge needs than those in Saskatchewan.

A slightly higher proportion of Saskatchewan teachers said their experience and education had prepared them for their reading related LAT work (BC: 40%, Sask: 55%). In this respect, one LAT noted she took her basic certification at one of the two major universities in Saskatchewan, and it required a four month (one semester) internship after completion of all other requirements which had already included several months of practica (46/14). Teachers from such a program might well feel more prepared than teachers whose practica were shorter.

LATs who reported meeting their province’s standards of education for the position when hired also tended to report feeling prepared for their job when they began LAT work (61% of those meeting standards also felt prepared). These results suggest the education required by the standards somewhat positively impacts teachers’ feelings of preparedness for their job. Those who have met the standards might have less need for further education and PD about reading. On the other hand, the standards do not mention reading, and a teacher might meet them without having taken a course in reading instruction beyond those required for certification.
Other contextual factors also impacted LATs’ needs for knowledge about reading instruction. Some BC LATs perceived there was a disproportionately large cohort of teachers very new to LAT work in their BC districts. One experienced BC LAT said that 38 of an estimated 54 LATs in her district were new to LAT work that year, and many of the others had been new in the preceding year (23/28.1). This large number of inexperienced LATs was the case in the BC districts at both one and two hour distances from a full service university and was also reported by some of the BC LATs accessed through LATA. It was not the case for all BC districts, however. This pattern of a relatively larger cohort of newer LATs was not mentioned by Saskatchewan LATs.

A large cohort of LATs who were new or relatively new would have several impacts on education and PD needs as well as on supports required. I reported earlier and will discuss in further detail in the next section on LAT experience how new teachers reported having particular knowledge needs such as about reading assessment. They also make choices about education and PD that appear to differ from those of more experienced teachers in that they report having little time for learning about reading instruction and choose more informal sources of information. Those who are experienced LATs also reported some negative impacts on their own learning time from working with a large cohort of new LATs. In the district where 38 out of 54 (70%) of the LATs were in their first year, and most others in their second LAT year, the informant LAT reported her time spent on mentoring was overwhelming (23/28.1).

The reasons for the shortage of qualified teachers for LAT positions appeared complex. Most LATs said they felt that recent provincial policies were related to and perhaps had helped to cause a lack of job desirability. Inclusion, for example, had presented BC LATs with an increased range of special needs for which LATs said they did not always have the required
knowledge. Saskatchewan had a similar inclusion policy, and its impact might have been expected to be similar, but in BC there were additional impacts.

Teachers in BC reported their workload was intense because recently reduced funding for special needs resulted in increased case loads (5/35.4). The ministry requirement for paperwork related to accountability had also recently increased. This paperwork was onerous and unsatisfying for experienced teachers (4/22, 7/24), and overwhelming for those who were new (14/20). Saskatchewan LATs reported paperwork as heavy but none said it was overwhelming.

This data shows that when knowledge and experience are lacking, it appears to adversely impact the system in several ways. Teachers in some BC districts were adamant that over the longer term, not requiring the standards gave their job less status such that expert teachers then preferred other positions (14/35.4). When the number of expert LATs thus decreased, the loss of status was exacerbated by the hiring of less qualified, inexperienced teachers as LATs (16/23). A lack of knowledge for their job tasks meant these new LATs could not always work in a manner they found personally satisfactory. Some became discouraged and quit LAT work, requiring the hiring of still more inexperienced teachers (23/35.4). The position’s professional status or image spiralled downward. “Our job has lost its professional role,” concluded one LAT (13/17).

But the cause of the problem could not be attributed solely to the policies and actions of the provincial government. There were other players and impacts from other sources involved in the policies around standards in BC. Some of these sources were policies and conditions with a negative impact. One LAT heard the new UBC Literacy Diploma might be required as a standard of education for LATs but, “The BC Teachers’ Federation is against this [the use of particular standards for certain teacher roles] vehemently. Their position is that a teaching certificate is good across the board, that it covers both developmental and remedial programs,” (16/20).
Another impact was associated with district contracts for part-time, temporary assignments. One experienced LAT was in her eighth year in the same BC school, but she had to bid for her job again, as every year, because her district did not grant permanent status for less than full time equivalent positions of LAT work (14/9). She worked full time, but not all of it as an LAT. Her seniority did not transfer across districts either. The result was that most LATs, new and experienced, quickly moved into classroom positions to receive a permanent contract (14/9).

These related factors and perhaps others not noted by study informants, established a pattern that left a large cohort of inexperienced and often less qualified teachers in LAT positions in some BC districts. Their needs for knowledge about reading instruction would be extensive, and, because of their time constraints and the high turnover among them, the needed learning opportunities and the supports required to access these needs would be very difficult to supply.

Where this complex interaction of contextual factors reduced the availability of expert teachers for LAT work in BC, LATs reported its effect on the entire student services program was disastrous. “Student Services support is now hard to establish,” reported one LAT (8/20). Another told how parents of struggling students who could afford to do so, moved their children to expensive private schools (13/17). The BC provincial special education goal of supporting students with mild to moderate learning difficulties in their regular classroom is compromised.

A shortage of teachers for LAT roles existed in Saskatchewan, but different factors had more dominant impacts on their availability there than in BC. Of the teachers who said it was difficult to get an LAT position, five were from rural Saskatchewan districts where decreasing enrolments made it difficult to get any teaching position (39/35.4, 42/35.4). There was no mention by Saskatchewan LATs of problems with professional image, excessive workload, or a high turnover. In fact, one LAT declared, “This is a great profession! It is true teaching” (32/37).
District administrators reported, “LATs fight to improve their image” (SKD1/1.18), and, “Their image is of teachers very supportive of kids and teachers” (SKD3/18.4). There also was no mention of problems achieving full-time, permanent contracts. In the study districts these were required through union bargaining to be awarded to all teachers after two consecutive years of district service even in part-time positions, though the contracts would only be for the amount of time the LAT had worked (SKD4/13.2). Some difficulty did arise from the reported lack of enough new qualified teachers graduating from teacher education facilities. A Saskatchewan administrator explained, “We advertise ahead of time as a matter of course every summer to try to build up our supply, hoping we will get some …. We have to use classroom teachers and coordinators to cover what should be a special education certified person” (SKD1/11). He said they hired as close to the qualifications as they could get and used them as a second special education person, paired with an LAT who had the qualifications and who supervised and collaborated with them. The ministry informant confirmed that not enough new teachers were graduating in special education for the positions available, and so they gave some districts flexibility in the requirements for personnel who met the standards (SKM1.3).

It seems that having standards and abiding by them leads to a more confident and knowledgeable workforce who are less likely to leave their jobs. A willingness to allow the use of required standards, graduating enough teachers with the expertise for, and interest in, LAT work, having a job workload and opportunities for permanent contracts comparable to those of other system teachers, also contribute, though less directly, to the number of expert teachers available for and in LAT positions. When LAT knowledge and experience are lacking, it seems to strain the system in a number of ways and can compromise the entire student services program. Formal education and PD and some experience are needed for LATs, not only for the
particular knowledge these might offer, but to improve the LAT program and preserve the intent of inclusion through a functioning support program for special needs students.

**Provincial use of standards and supports.** Relatively equal proportions of teachers in both provinces declared they felt supported. Reported support came from the province, from districts and schools, and from other sources such as universities, federations, and professional interest groups like the IRA. There were some patterns of difference between provinces in the education and PD choices LATs made and in the supports they chose or were able to access.

Table 4.15 indicates BC LATs had more formal education beyond initial teacher certification than Saskatchewan LATs and more formal education about reading, though neither of these had necessarily been taken after LAT service began. LATs from BC also reported having taken very slightly more formal education and informal PD (combined) about reading after they began LAT work than Saskatchewan teachers. While each of these patterns did not show large differences, taken together they suggest that BC LATs might have more formal education than Saskatchewan LATs.

Table 4.15

*LAT Reading Education and PD Taken After Service by Province*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Proportion (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Education</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>73.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Education</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>84.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Reading Education/PD</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(combined)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.
A similar proportion of LATs across both provinces said they were motivated to access learning opportunities primarily because they needed the information, but several Saskatchewan LATs (29/10.1, 46/10.4) took courses at their district’s request to achieve their provincial education standards after hiring. One BC LAT (17.20) was asked to get a Masters degree to meet district requirements. Some Saskatchewan LATs also reported being motivated by the possibility of increased salary through the Extended Certificate in special education.

In terms of informal learning choices, BC LATs reported using slightly more PD than Saskatchewan LATs. Table 4.16 shows they attended slightly more conferences and workshops, held slightly more memberships in professional organizations, subscribed to more professional journals, and participated in more “Other” professional development activities. Saskatchewan LATs held more informal certificates.

Table 4.16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Proportion (%)</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Proportion (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>73.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>87.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memberships</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificates</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.
To facilitate their access to learning opportunities, LATs received support from a variety of sources including their province or ministry, their districts and school, and universities, federations and other agents. Support from the provincial level was reported more commonly in Saskatchewan (See Table 4.17). This might be expected, since that province viewed its responsibilities for teacher knowledge development as that of a partner with districts and other interested parties (Saskatchewan Education, 2002). In BC, districts held responsibility for support of teacher on-going education and PD (BC Ministry of Education, 2006).

Not all LATs were comfortable with the amount of support they received from their provincial level. In B.C., 22 of the 26 teachers made critical comments about provincial support while 3 of the 20 responding Saskatchewan teachers were critical. Most criticisms targeted omissions, such as not enough funding. Two BC teachers perceived the province not only as unsupportive, but actively in opposition to their attempts to acquire knowledge. “I can’t think of anything [the government did to help] except get in the way,” said one (19/30). And another very experienced teacher declared, “Change the government! They destroyed the whole construction of special education that had been laboriously built over decades,” (30.18).

Table 4.17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response</strong></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Proportion (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No/detriment</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some/much</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.*
But, while some teachers did not feel supported by their provinces, others did, and a fair proportion of teachers in both provinces said their province had offered them ‘some’ or ‘much’ support. Those from BC, while reporting that their ministry had provided more in the past, cited items such as helpful workshops on new curricula, informative websites, and support to learn about special education technology. Saskatchewan teachers mentioned direct financial support, collaboration or information sharing information which allowed LATs to give and receive ideas to the ministry and to feel supported, and policies such as the required use of standards which they said encouraged them to gain more knowledge and for the system to support them in that goal. Saskatchewan LATs said they felt they, their education ministry, and the government that set the direction for its policies, were working in collaboration for the benefit of students (43/25, 30/30, 40/30). “Sask Learning is great!” said one (43/30), “They bring in good speakers and workshops with both Catholic and Public boards together.” “They required the certification,” stated another (30/30) with emphasis, and many others agreed that requiring standards had supported their learning (28/25, 35/30, 36/30, 37/36, 44/30, 46/30, 48/30). A Saskatchewan LAT summarized her support from the provincial level and the reasons for it:

It was the province [that helped] when I first started here. There were not enough expert personnel, so the province made bursaries available, and districts added more money. They both probably worked with colleges to make programs available. I wouldn’t have been able to do it without that major support. (28/25)

One policy received opposing opinions in each province. Teachers in BC are known to dislike their province’s required provincial assessment program (Vancouver Sun, Monday, January 18, 2010). Saskatchewan’s provincial Assessment for Learning program, also required, was cited by one study LAT as one of her supports in understanding reading instruction (38/30).
Most support for gaining knowledge about reading instruction came from districts, with some differences between provinces (See Table 4.18). Teachers in BC reported an excellent selection of workshop presenters centered in the Vancouver area and these were easily accessed for district learning events. Saskatchewan used many of the same BC experts (39/13.4, 41/13.4), but access was more challenging as they had to import the experts and pay costs. Saskatchewan LATs acquired more informal certificates which allowed them to use particular methods and the accompanying materials, for example, Reading Recovery, or Phono-Graphix. Saskatchewan LATs reported some districts had enabled their entire LAT staff to acquire Phono-Graphix certification (44/13.4, 47/13.4). Their ministry also offered (or made available by working with partners) some certificate programs centrally and offered financial support to attend (43/30).

Table 4.18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Supports Accessed by Province</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.
In BC, PD funds had been negotiated provincially to which districts or local associations could add (28.3.23). In Saskatchewan, PD funds were locally bargained (28.8.27). While confirmation of the amount and conditions of this funding was only available to current federation members (and therefore not to me as an outside researcher), from LAT reports it appeared Saskatchewan teachers in at least one of the study districts received a higher dollar amount than the amount set in BC. But districts in BC could add to the funds, as one LAT had reported. In addition, LATS in two of the Saskatchewan districts reported being released from teaching to attend PD events while substitute teachers covered their classes at district expense. Several BC LATs had complained they had to pay substitute teachers themselves and so could not afford to attend more PD events such as conferences elsewhere. In both provinces, PD funding could have been added to through local agreements. This would have varied by district.

Some patterns of support from schools were also evident in relation to province (Table 4.19). In BC, LATs reported more use of school support than Saskatchewan LATs for workshop and conference attendance, paid and unpaid leave, and ‘Other’ support. From LAT comments, it appeared support given by schools for both workshops and classes was generally not financial (that came from districts or the province) and was more likely less formal than that given by districts. Such informal support could come from sharing information with colleagues, from encouragement with colleagues and administrators, or from permissions or arrangements made to cover absences (2/29.7). The tallies of supports used indicate a pattern of greater support offered to or accessed by BC LATs from their schools than LATs in Saskatchewan.

Over half of LATs in both provinces reported receiving support from teacher education facilities to gain knowledge about reading instruction (BC: 62%; Saskatchewan: 61%). Many of the supports described came from universities outside those provinces (or the country) and were
in outreach or distance education. Supports described included offering and advertising potentially useful courses and programs, and various forms of collaboration with districts to bring courses and programs to teachers. One Saskatchewan LAT described a well received district/ university collaboration established through the activities of practicum supervisors.

Table 4.19

*School Supports Accessed by Province*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>BC Frequency</th>
<th>BC Proportion (%)</th>
<th>Saskatchewan Frequency</th>
<th>Saskatchewan Proportion (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid Leave</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid Leave</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.

LATs in both provinces reported much learning support came though other agents such as their federation associations and organizations such as the IRA or LD associations. However, no tallies were developed for these agents and few comments related to provincial differences.

**Provincial use of standards and challenges.** Saskatchewan LATs reported the higher proportion of challenges in accessing knowledge about reading instruction according to the tallies, most frequently listing time and cost impediments followed by distance and course availability (See Table 4.20). BC LATs more often reported no challenges than Saskatchewan LATs. Still, time and costs were the most frequent challenges for BC teachers, too. The previous
discussion of LAT needs in each province described the serious strains to the system resulting
from a complex interaction of impacts from a number of factors most of which related to the
absence of required standards and resulting use of less qualified LATs and subsequent reduction
in the professional status of the LAT job.

Table 4.20

*Perceived Challenges by Province*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>British Columbia</th>
<th></th>
<th>Saskatchewan</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent (%)</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>56.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No classes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No ads</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No support</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not online</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.

In their comments, LATs reported additional concerns. The previous discussion about
needs by province illustrated a number of challenges that BC LATs perceived as related to their
lack of required provincial standards and the resulting negative effect on their professional status
or what some LATs called their image. These included problems around workload, contracts,
union opposition to standards, and insufficient graduates qualified for special education positions such as LAT.

LATs in both provinces insisted there was a lack of accessible, post graduate and undergraduate programs and courses about reading. Few were offered within the two provinces and few from anywhere were presented on-line. LATs in Saskatchewan complained of the difficulty of taking all of the courses required to meet their standards inside their programs and before graduation. Some courses required unavailable prerequisites (48/31) or a prior teaching certificate, so you couldn’t take the class as an undergraduate (46/27).

**Impact of Teacher Experience**

Research has shown that teaching experience influences the kind of knowledge teachers want and the education and PD they choose (Smaller et al., 2001). Less experienced teachers have been found to favour formal education to build knowledge. Experienced teachers, while still accessing some formal education, are more likely to choose less formal means of gaining job related expertise. In this study, LATs’ years of experience and choices of education and PD reflected these patterns.

To facilitate comparison, LATs were grouped into three experience categories (5 years or less LAT experience, 6-15 years, 16+ years) based on LAT teaching experience (See Figure 4.6). LAT experience was used rather than total teaching experience as the focus of the study was on LATs and their needs, supports and challenges. Many LATs would have had one or more years of prior classroom teaching experience.

**Teacher experience and needs.** The needs of those in the three varying LAT experience groups appeared distinct in several respects. First, BC appeared to have a slightly less experienced LAT population than Saskatchewan which would impact knowledge needs and supports required. A
somewhat higher proportion of LATs in the least experience group worked part time compared with those with 6 – 15 years experience and those with 26 years or more experience (See Table 4.21). This least experienced group had also reported higher proportions of further education beyond their initial certification than other LATs, but they had less education overall about reading instruction (See Table 4.22). In the current job market it could be difficult to get a first teaching job, and new graduates sometimes took further coursework while they waited for employment, hoping to enhance their chances of obtaining a position. But the coursework they took was not necessarily directly related to the knowledge needs of LAT positions as might be the case with more experienced LAT whose LAT experience might have shown them what they needed to know.

![Figure 4.6. Teacher Experience by Province](image-url)
Table 4.21

*Time in the LAT Position by LAT Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>5 Years or Less</th>
<th>6-15 Years</th>
<th>16+ Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.

Table 4.22

*Further Education and Education on Literacy/Reading by LAT Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>5 Years or Less</th>
<th>6-15 Years</th>
<th>16+ Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further education</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education on reading</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.

In confirmation of this pattern, the least experience group of LATs also reported having fewer qualifications for LAT work when hired compared with those who had been hired six years ago or more (i.e., LATs in the two higher experience cohorts). A lower proportion of the least experience group had met their province’s education and experience qualifications at hiring, and they also reported feeling less prepared for their tasks (Table 4.23). These figures suggest the least experience LAT group might have a greater need for job related knowledge than those in other experience groups and that it might be greater than past LATs would have required.

Table 4.23

*Perceived Preparation for LAT Tasks by LAT Experience*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>5 Years or Less</th>
<th>6-15 Years</th>
<th>16+ Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education met</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience met</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt prepared</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.

**Teacher experience and supports.** LATs had been asked to identify those informal PD activities from which they might obtain knowledge about reading instruction and which they usually chose to attend. Table 4.24 displays the number and proportion of their choices in relation to the three categories of LAT Experience.

LATs in the 5 years or less category accessed fewer informal PD activities about reading instruction overall than more experienced colleagues. First year LATs said they struggled to learn procedural and administrative tasks and had little time for PD about reading instruction which they said often required extended blocks of time (14/20). Also, less experienced teachers might not yet understand their knowledge needs with respect to the LAT role as one had mentioned (42/19).

LATs with 6 to 15 years of experience appeared particularly active in relation to the other LATs, participating more strongly in both education about reading (See Table 4.24, above) and most forms of informal PD (Table 4.10). As will be discussed below, they also used more of most forms of support from districts, schools, and universities for formal education. While individual comparisons between this experience group and their participation in one type of learning event or a single support category might indicate an area of possible relationship, finding a similar pattern of high participation across types of support and types of learning
choices, strengthens the indication of a pattern. Consistent with the literature about adult and teacher learning patterns (e.g., Smaller et al., 2001), study LATs in the mid career experience level (6 – 15 years experience) participated in education and PD in higher proportions than teachers in either very early or very experienced career stages. Their needs and supports desired might both be more extensive than those of the other experience groups.

Table 4.24

*Involvement in Informal PD by LAT Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>5 yrs or less</th>
<th></th>
<th>6-15 yrs</th>
<th></th>
<th>16+ yrs</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memberships</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificates</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.

The support LATs used from their districts varied somewhat according to their experience (Table 4.25). Beginning teachers used district support for workshops, conferences, and financial support for coursework. Some LATs had indicated district workshops focused on topics of most interest to new teachers. More new than experienced LATs used district financial support for courses, all but one of these from Saskatchewan where they had to upgrade to meet standards (SKD1.11). Their classes might not necessarily have been about reading. Financial support for a course required a permanent contact, and that required two years of district service.
so new LATs would not qualify (BCD4.11). Perhaps related to a greater informal PD use, the 6 to 15 years of experience cohort used somewhat more district support for mentoring, workshops, and conferences. The most experienced LATs continued to use district support of all types. They used a higher proportion of paid leave and ‘Other’ district supports. They did not explain their paid leave use, but regarding ‘Other PD’ supports, they commonly spoke of information, encouragement, and permissions received from district central office colleagues and administrators. Perhaps experienced LATs had had time to make good district connections.

Table 4.25

*District Support by LAT Teaching Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support used</th>
<th>5 yrs or less</th>
<th>6-15 yrs</th>
<th>16+ yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>6 40.0</td>
<td>17 68.0</td>
<td>4 44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>12 80.0</td>
<td>23 92.0</td>
<td>9 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>13 86.7</td>
<td>23 92.0</td>
<td>7 77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coursework</td>
<td>9 60.0</td>
<td>8 32.0</td>
<td>5 55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification</td>
<td>4 26.7</td>
<td>8 32.0</td>
<td>3 33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid leave</td>
<td>6 40.0</td>
<td>9 36.0</td>
<td>6 66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid leave</td>
<td>5 33.3</td>
<td>5 20.0</td>
<td>2 22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10 66.7</td>
<td>12 48.0</td>
<td>8 88.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/ cohort.

Regarding school support, few if any LATs reported use of either of financial support for classes or support for certification from schools, and these were omitted from the table above. In explanation, LATs had indicated that the support schools had available to give was not usually
financial such as would be used for both coursework and certification. In relation to experience and school support (Table 4.26) teachers with 6-25 years of LAT experience again appeared to be relatively active in accessing all types of school supported informal PD, and, with the exception of paid leave and workshops, had used the highest proportion of support across most support categories including mentoring, workshops, conferences, unpaid leave, and other PD. New LATs used the least support except for paid leave and workshop attendance. The most experienced LATs also accessed supports from their schools but in lower proportions than the least experienced group. With the exception of mentoring, overall, school support proportions tended to be less far apart than was the case for district data. Some of the patterns here may therefore be less distinct.

Reported support from the provincial government and/or its ministry increased with LAT experience but the proportions were close (Table 4.27). The differences, however, suggest that support from this source might have been greater in the past. One LAT said it seemed that provincial support was being cut, but, because of its restructuring, she could not be sure (36/30).

The 6-15 years of experience group reported the highest proportion of support from teacher education institutions, again appearing the most active in accessing support, this time for formal education. Universities offered a range of supports both pre and post service according to LAT comments. The most comments related to pre-certification practica and offering courses and programs about reading that were accessible to in service LATs such as through partnerships or electronic learning.

Table 4.26

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Support by LAT Teaching Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 yrs or less</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Support used | \(N\) | \% | \(N\) | \% | \(N\) | \% \\
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- \\
Mentoring | 5 | 33.3 | 14 | 56.0 | 2 | 22.2 \\
Workshops | 10 | 66.7 | 13 | 52.0 | 2 | 44.4 \\
Conferences | 6 | 40.0 | 11 | 44.0 | 2 | 22.2 \\
Paid leave | 2 | 13.3 | 2 | 8.0 | 1 | 11.1 \\
Unpaid leave | 2 | 13.3 | 3 | 12.0 | 0 | \\
Other | 7 | 46.7 | 14 | 56.0 | 4 | 44.4 \\

*Note. The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.*

Table 4.27

*Other Support Sources by LAT Teaching Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support source</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Province/ministry</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsewhere</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohort.*

A relatively high proportion of teachers at all experience levels reported using support from elsewhere. Teachers had described this support as coming from colleagues and friends, books and the internet, and parents and students and special interest groups like the IRA.

Overall, the data indicates that LATs with 6 to 15 years of experience appeared most active in both accessing both education and PD, while, with some category exceptions, the least experienced teachers appeared the least active. Teachers of more than 15 years of experience also continued to search for new knowledge as one with 22 years of experience describes: “I still
need to be aware of the current expectations and reading instruction methods,” (13/19). And the LAT with 32 years of experience said, “The field is changing so fast that we must be continually open to new learning as well as using our existing knowledge,” (42/19). LATs of all experience levels would continue to require access to new knowledge about reading instruction and they would use a variety of supports to do so.

**Teacher experience and challenges.** Time, costs, and distance/travel impediments appeared to impact close to half of LATs, with slightly more of these in the least experience category (Table 4.28). Few challenges of any kind were reported by those in the most experienced category, though as reported earlier, they continued to use both formal and informal learning events and to access a range of supports.

In relation to challenges, a larger proportion of part time LATs were in the least experience category (Table 4.21, above). Some new part-time teachers who said they preferred full time work but had taken the LAT job as an entry level position, reported finding it difficult to attend events on their days off as they also had other jobs outside the school system (14/27.5). Other part-time LATs with family responsibilities, which might relate more to younger LATs who would also likely be in the least LAT experience category, described difficulties with PD that required travel and absence from home over night (17/13.1). In terms of impact on learning events, LATs reporting time constraints had several suggestions for support. They preferred formal education that came right to them in their district and wanted shorter, more focused informal PD events held at least partly inside the school day (4/34). LATs had also mentioned needing specific information when they first began LAT work such as about assessment (17.12), knowledge that more experienced LATs might no longer require. Experienced LATs explained they wanted to keep up with new research in the field and with new programs and materials
Taking this collection of factors of need and support into account, arranging education and PD for the least experienced LAT group would be challenging. And certainly, LATs of varying experience would need different types of education and PD events and require different support in accessing it. These considerations would continue across all experience levels.

Table 4.28

*Perceived Challenges by LAT Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Less than 5 years</th>
<th>6 – 15 years</th>
<th>16+ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No classes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No ads</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not online</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The percentages in each column reflect the number of participants in each group/cohoot.

**Summary of Suiting the Context**

**Question 6a: Distance**

The research question asked, “What patterns exist between LATs’ reported needs, supports and challenges, and the distance of their district from a full service university?”

Distance from a full-service university appeared to be related to differences in LATs’ need for
knowledge about reading instruction. LATs in districts three or more hours from a university were less likely to have met their provinces standards of education and experience when hired and were more likely to have felt unprepared for their LAT job. Distance also appeared to impact the LAT role. LATs at three hour distances reported less time on reading instruction and more on supervision. LATs at all distances reported taking similar proportions of formal coursework about reading instruction after beginning their job. However, LATs who worked at farther distances reported using proportionally more informal PD including journal subscriptions, memberships, conference and workshop attendance, and Other PD (usually information from colleagues), perhaps in relation to their need for access to colleagues which these PD options would allow.

A somewhat higher proportion of LATs at the closest distance reported receiving financial support from districts for courses, conference attendance, and for certifications. Some of these differences in reported district support may have been related to more access to centrally located PD events. Another impact may have been district funding flexibility. More rural districts (at farther distances) reported declining in enrolments and may have had less money for support. A greater proportion of the PD budgets of more distant districts may have been used to pay travel costs for importing expert presenters and paying teacher travel to centrally located events.

No patterns of difference in relation to distance were noted in the support LATs accessed by schools. Provincial level supports were most reported from LATs at a near distance for which they offered no explanation. LATs at the farther distances reported proportionally more support from universities. LAT comments suggested this might relate to the use of distance education.
LATs at all distances reported distance as a challenge in accessing courses and centrally offered informal PD events. It added to PD costs. Those LATs at the closest distance reported lack of time as their strongest impediment, those at two hour distances reported costs were their highest challenge. LATs at the farthest distance reported the fewest challenges overall, a result unexplained by other data.

**Question 6b: Provincial Use of Standards**

There research question here asked, “What patterns exist between LATs reported needs, supports and challenges, and provincial use of LAT standards of qualification as guidelines or as requirements?” The tasks of LATs in both provinces appeared similar according to reported time spent related to reading instruction. A slightly higher proportion of Saskatchewan teachers said their education and experience had prepared them for the LAT position, but many in both provinces still felt the need for more knowledge about reading.

There appeared an insufficient quantity of teachers qualified for LAT positions in both provinces, but especially so in BC. LATs there said a number of factors had made the position less desirable, including government policies regarding inclusion, special education funding, accountability, paperwork, and the lack of required provincial standards for LATs. The problem was exacerbated by district policies that did not award a permanent contract to LATs who worked part time in the role. Additional negative impacts came from the opposition of the BC teachers’ union to the use of required standards, and the difficulty in accessing courses and programs about reading instruction at universities. The large cohort of inexperienced and less qualified LATs in BC would have particular needs in terms of knowledge about reading instruction and in terms of the supports they needed to access it.
A shortage of teachers for LAT positions also existed in Saskatchewan though not to the same extent as in BC. Standards were required and the professional status or image of the LAT position remained high. Contracts there were awarded to part time LATs. Still, it was hard to find enough job applicants who met the LAT qualifications. LATs reported difficulty accessing university courses and programs which gave them the needed knowledge. Teachers in both provinces were motivated to learn more because it was needed for their job, but some, mostly in Saskatchewan, had been asked to take courses to meet their provinces’ or districts’ standards.

Provincial support was much more commonly reported from Saskatchewan, a not unexpected finding, as the ministry there had a policy of shared responsibility for special education and of using collaboration and partnership to support it. Some BC LATs (71%) said their province was not a support, some even calling it a detriment. But LATs in both provinces appreciated ministry support for new curricula and for informative websites. Saskatchewan LATs valued the use of required standards, workshops on reading, direct financial support, collaboration toward building suitable programs, and encouragement to gain knowledge.

LATs in BC reported receiving slightly more district support of almost all types than LATs Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan teachers received more only for formal education and certificates. School support was generally similar across the two provinces, consisting primarily of encouragement and arrangements to cover absences rather than money. BC LATs reported using more support from their schools to attend conferences, while Saskatchewan LATs used more school support to attend workshops (some of them provincially sponsored), and for coursework. Universities, most commonly those outside the LATs’ provinces, had offered them support, primarily in the area of distance education.
**Question 6c: LAT Experience**

This research question asked, “What patterns exist between LATs’ reported needs, supports and challenges, and their years of LAT experience? The data shows that the needs, supports used, and challenges faced by LATs of different experience levels appear distinct. LATs in the 5 years or less category came to the position with more formal education than other groups, but less of it was about reading, fewer of them had met provincial standards of either education or experience, and they were less likely to report feeling prepared for the job. This group in particular faced serious challenges related to time for learning as well as costs and distance. They appeared to depend most strongly on their district for support. These LATs would likely need much information about reading instruction to develop their knowledge, likely more than new LATs had required in the past. The type of learning events and the support offered to access these would need to carefully consider time, costs, and distance to enhance access.

LATs with 6 to 15 years of experience were most active in accessing both formal and informal learning events. They already had much knowledge about reading, but appeared to strongly desire more. They were heavy users of supports from all sources and were only somewhat challenged by considerations of time, costs, and distance.

LATs with over 16 years of experience continued to use both formal and informal sources of knowledge about reading, explaining they wanted to learn about new research in the field and about new programs and materials. They appeared to have found ways to enhance their access to what they needed, using supports from a variety of sources. They reported little challenge now in their search for knowledge about reading instruction.
CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter begins with a discussion of the major findings organized by research question. The three questions relating to LAT needs are addressed first, followed by comments concerning supports, and then challenges. Finally, the discussion about relationships related to distance, provincial use of standards, and LAT experience is presented. Summaries of the responses of the LATs in relation to the research questions appeared in the previous chapter and will not be repeated here. Rather, this section attempts to illuminate or further explain relationships between actions or circumstances that appear to influence LATs’ needs, supports, and challenges, and to present possible rationales for LATs’ perceptions and interpretations of the relationships, as well as my own.

The analysis of findings by question is followed by two sections of recommendations. The first of these presents a discussion of LATs’ recommendations concerning specific actions and programs that could be undertaken by the various agents and agencies that deliver support: the province, district, school, university, teachers’ union/federation, colleagues, and others. The full list of LATs’ recommendations appears in Appendix E. These recommendations reflect the data reported by the study informants, and they are elaborated upon and supported by the secondary data and the response tallies.

The second set of recommendations presents overarching policies or principles that characterize useful types of support which might apply across agents and perhaps even in other contexts. These overarching recommendations are more interpretive. Together the recommendations suggest practice and policy actions that would enhance access to knowledge about reading instruction for BC and Saskatchewan LATs. Implementing them could potentially
impact the number of expert teachers positively in these (and perhaps in other) contexts where students who struggle with reading are supported by teachers with reading instruction expertise.

Several brief topics close the report. The first of these suggests directions for future research, following one of the purposes of an exploratory study. Accordingly, areas are described where deeper examination of issues related to LATs’ needs, supports, and challenges might develop more precise and useful information. Two other sections discuss study applications and limitations respectively. The chapter ends with a summary and concluding statement.

**Analysis**

**Research Question 1: Job Expectations and Reading**

What are the tasks of LATs regarding the education needs of students who struggle with reading? Results indicated that the LATs’ job was primarily about reading instruction. LATs reported that even the knowledge they needed to teach special needs students, the most common reading related need reported by LATs, was in relation to their reading instruction. Reading instruction and reading related assessment, program planning, and consultation, reportedly made up 50% to 100% of the LAT role. Time spent on reading instruction may have been even higher than some teachers reported, as a good portion of those LATs who spent less time on it also reported having other responsibilities that still would have involved reading, such as remediation in math problem solving, ESL reading support, or the supervision of less qualified colleagues who provided reading instruction to students. The data showed that LATs were, in practice, primarily teachers of reading. Thus expertise in reading instruction would be the area where they would need the most instructional knowledge and the most support for developing their expertise.
Professional organizations such as the International Reading Association have prepared extensive lists of what they believe are the educational and experience requirements for teachers who provide reading support. LATs in this study said they depended on their provincial standards to tell them what they needed to know for their job. However, despite the findings reported here about the high portion of the LAT role devoted to reading instruction, and the knowledge needs of reading support teachers as suggested by the IRA, neither BC nor Saskatchewan made specific mention of reading in their respective standards of education or experience for LATs. Those standards did include room for optional courses that might have been used to include coursework about reading or literacy. However, the standards could be attained in both provinces without a single course in reading instruction beyond that required by pre-service teacher certification programs and without having any specific experience with reading or literacy instruction in classrooms beyond that required by pre-service practica.

**Research Question 2: Feeling Prepared**

Do LATs feel their education and experiences have prepared them to meet the expectations of their jobs in relation to reading instruction? Only half (49%) of the study LATs indicated they had felt prepared for their tasks when they were hired. Nearly 61% of that portion (i.e., 61% of the 49% who felt prepared) had met their provinces’ standards of education at the time they were hired. The small number of teachers interviewed did not permit reliable calculations of statistical significance, but the above figures suggest that those who had met the education standards tended to report feeling more prepared for the LAT role. Of the LATs who had met their provinces’ experience standards (70%), approximately 47% of these also reported feeling prepared. Despite the view of some LATs and their administrators that experience was
valuable, perhaps even more valuable than education, no positive relationship between experience and feeling prepared was evident.

Other results confirm that many LATS felt unprepared to teach reading instruction. After becoming an LAT, 98% of LATs chose to take some further education and/or PD about reading, claiming to have been motivated by a perceived need for the information in their job rather than for other potential advantages such as increased leadership opportunities or higher salaries. Some was also taken because school boards had asked LATs to meet their provinces’ LAT education standards. The LATs said that most of the knowledge they needed was basic information that had not been provided in pre-service learning opportunities. The remaining information was needed to keep abreast of recent developments in the field. Continuing education and/or PD would be required regardless of what knowledge LATs acquired in teacher preparation or before taking the job. Thus, to feel prepared and to be prepared for their LAT tasks, LATs need both increased amounts of specialized knowledge related to reading instruction taken before LAT service and ongoing access to further education and/or PD once they are teaching to fill in knowledge gaps and to keep abreast of current thinking in the field.

**Research Question 3: Perceived Needs**

What are LATs’ perceived needs, if any, with regard to education and professional development about reading instruction? To develop needed expertise, LATs indicated that they wanted both theoretical and practical knowledge of reading instruction. Even their need for knowledge of exceptional learners was related to reading instruction. They wanted familiarity with what they termed current reading vocabulary and with currently used and new instruction methods and materials, and much more information about assessment, especially informal assessment. LATs said that not all the needed knowledge of reading instruction could be gained
through formal coursework; they also perceived a need for access to informal sources of knowledge, and they wanted more practical experience with students, especially special needs students. LATs reported that it would be important to have acquired this knowledge before beginning LAT work. They wanted more information and experience about reading instruction to be available in their pre-service education.

With the inclusion of special needs student in regular classrooms, even experienced LATs reported encountering students with unfamiliar learning impediments. Thus, another set of needs is related to the efficient location of information about reading instruction for special needs students and about how and where LATs might improve their expertise in a needed area. Who were the best authors? Which internet sites were reliable? What universities offered suitable programs on reading instruction? An LAT would also find it advantageous to have a personal set of ‘mentors’ available, met during past education, PD, and teaching experiences, who could be consulted on short notice. Both pre-service and in service learning opportunities might address this need by including information about how to find reading instruction knowledge and by facilitating connections with potential mentors.

There was some suggestion of a difference between the role, and therefore the knowledge needs, of some junior and high school LATs in comparison with elementary LATs. Some LATs in higher grades provided remedial support for assignments across subjects. These LATs might require more knowledge relating to reading in subject areas such as math problem solving, science, or other content areas.

In districts where there was a shortage of expert teachers for and in LAT positions, several hiring options were used by boards when qualified candidates were not available. If standards were required, new LATs not meeting these might be asked to pursue additional
education immediately. Teachers who were willing to work part-time, were employed in other district positions, or were applicants for unrelated jobs, might be offered an LAT position, especially if they had some of the required qualifications. Candidates with classroom teaching experience appeared easier to find as 70% of LATs had met their province’s experience standards when hired. Districts could also alter the LAT role using Teaching Assistants or less qualified LATs to deliver programming under supervision and mentoring by qualified LATs. These options left many new LATs with an immediate need for both informal PD and formal education about reading instruction. Unfortunately, new LATs reported they had very little time for either. Supporting new LATs to gain needed knowledge would be essential but difficult.

In summary, given the importance of the knowledge about reading instruction required of their job, it is not surprising that so many LATs felt unprepared for their reading related tasks. It is also understandable that virtually all LATs in both provinces found it necessary to engage in much formal and informal learning about reading instruction after taking the LAT job. LATs want to develop a thorough knowledge of reading instruction in their initial teacher education programs and report they need to keep abreast of current knowledge throughout their careers.

**Research Question 4: Supports Suggested**

What supports do LATs use and want to help them acquire further knowledge about reading instruction? Many supports were used and suggested by the LATs. These supports fell into two groups: specific programs of support that might be delivered by particular agents or agencies, and principles and policies that might underlie support.

**Programs of support.** Practical supports for LAT access to education and PD about reading instruction could come from inside or outside of educational systems. At the ministerial or government level, small amounts of support from policies or programs had the potential for a
broad positive impact in practical support. Requiring standards for LATs is an example of such a policy, but even a simple support program such as providing a website stocked with resources offered broad support.

Districts working together with LATs could offer information specific to local needs and could provide easy access to less formal reading instruction knowledge through workshops, coordinators, and access to local expertise. Much of this came at relatively little or no financial cost to LATs. Support reported from schools was surprisingly strong considering that schools themselves did not have much funding available for teacher education and PD. But schools could provide the encouragement and accommodations that built the feeling of support that inspired LATs to learn. Such support might also have little cost.

Universities offered both the formal knowledge LATs wanted and the pre-service education and practicum experience on which LAT initial and continued teaching success depended. LATs reported that support for their access to formal education was critical. In this study, much of the university support that LATs used came from programs offered by universities outside the two study provinces. LATs wanted more courses and programs to be offered about reading instruction, enhanced access to these through distance courses and programs, and district-university partnerships to help tailor post degree education to LAT and district needs. What LATs valued most from university pre-service education appeared to be the practicum experiences and the support of individuals (who were most likely to be encountered in relation to practica). Individual university staff members counselled, mentored, facilitated, and collaborated with LATs during pre-service programs and beyond, and their support was much appreciated. LATs, as adult learners, had particular and specific knowledge needs that
universities also needed to accommodate such as course content that related to practical classroom issues.

LATs reported that teachers’ federations and their unions offered useful help primarily through their teacher associations (e.g., LATA in BC) which might provide LATs with a range of learning supports. These professional associations could tailor their support precisely to LAT needs, since they took their direction from the teachers concerned. Federations also responded to LAT concerns with research and investigative projects and reports on LATs’ needs, thus helping with challenges. They led collaborative decision-making and lobbying to develop and present LATs’ perspectives. The examples of federation activities emphasized how the participation of LATs themselves in planning support services could lead to the development of very pertinent and accessible supports for gaining knowledge about reading instruction.

LATs mentioned a variety of other sources such as literacy goals or mentors that provided or enhanced the likelihood of support as the LATs sought to improve their knowledge. Surprisingly, LATs did not suggest additional supports from outside the education system such as through professional associations (e.g., IRA) or community interest groups (e.g., learning disability associations), though these sources had reportedly provided them with much information through workshops, conferences, information websites, materials for sale, opportunities to meet with colleagues, scholarships, research, and advocacy. Such groups responded to their own interests rather than to LAT or district needs, but their goals in terms of serving student needs through supporting teacher access to knowledge overlapped with those of education systems. More collaboration between LATs and these groups might improve access to their information.
Missing from the LATs’ reports were comments indicating their preferred models of learning and the learning theories or paradigms on which these might be based. LATs reported attending a variety of both formal and informal learning events and these used a variety of instructional approaches. When learning, LATs asked for a combination of theoretical and practical information about reading instruction, and for time and opportunity to practice. They put an emphasis on supports involving collaborative learning. Thus, consistent with literature reports, LATs appeared to learn from a variety of instructional models, but the models they preferred appeared to be based loosely on social constructivist theories of learning.

**Principles of support.** Several principles of support were directly suggested by those interviewed in the study. Two of the most important of these will be described here as examples along with discussion or explanation of why and how these might offer support. These and further principles of support appear as recommendations later in the chapter.

First, LATs said they most wanted to *feel* supported. LATs reported feeling supported when they perceived their knowledge was valued, when their province, district, school, administrators, and colleagues expected and wanted them to be expert at reading instruction. That expectation alone, they said, encouraged and inspired them to gain knowledge. LATs advised that helping them feel supported might begin with listening to their needs, followed by facilitating application procedures and granting permissions that would smooth their access to learning opportunities. They said that using standards of education and experience for teachers in LATs positions indicated an expectation of expertise that gave them a feeling of support.

At provincial levels, collaborative decision-making and public support for teachers in the press created a feeling of support and of collegiality. LATs said they considered it their own professional responsibility to gain the knowledge needed for their job, but they were inspired
toward this goal by perceiving that they were expected to be knowledgeable, and that when and where possible, their education system would support them to increase their expertise. Interest, encouragement, and respect from their province and from administrators and colleagues in districts and in schools left LATs with the feeling that they were counted on to have the expertise necessary to contribute to the student services team. Providing LATs with a feeling of support would not necessarily require much (or any) financial cost. Furthermore, money spent enhancing LAT feelings of support for gaining expertise would be returned in teacher loyalty and effort to learn.

A second prominent support that many LATs said they valued could be described as the principle of using collaboration, especially when making decisions that might impact teacher access to knowledge. This is consistent with the literature (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hargreaves, 2003; Singer, 2008). LATs in the study did not always describe collaboration using that term, though they did use it. But they spoke of partnerships, of arrangements made for learning in company with colleagues, of cooperative two-way information flow between LATs and their partners in ministries, districts, school PD committees, and universities, and of sharing knowledge resources and decision-making among all participants in education. These are all collaborative endeavours.

Collaboration was strongly related to the feeling of support LATs said encouraged them to strive to become expert. They appeared to equate this feeling of support with opportunities to participate in collaborative decision-making about education and PD, about what was needed, what should be offered, who should have access to it, and how to present equitable support. They also described collaboration in terms of sharing knowledge about reading instruction such as might occur between an education faculty and a school or among LATs as students in a course or
workshop. Opportunities for collaborative thought may be why LATs at a distance chose to subscribe to journals, why LATs asked for closer ties with universities, and perhaps why opportunities to learn together with colleagues were described as essential.

As with nurturing a feeling of support, collaboration might entail little overt cost, though resources would be required to orchestrate collaborative endeavours. Still, considerable time and money could also be saved. As the Saskatchewan ministry informant pointed out, working collaboratively with partners was a longer and somewhat more costly process at the front end, but it resulted in effective policies and programs that were more likely to be supported by those involved in the process. Thus, resources were saved at the end rather than at the beginning of decision-making processes, and loyalty to ministry, boards, schools, and children was more likely to be developed among participants.

**Research Question 5: Challenges**

What are the challenges LATs encounter in accessing desired knowledge about reading instruction? The pursuit of reading knowledge could be impeded by several complex barriers. LATs reported challenges related to their access to almost every kind of learning opportunity, but they highlighted some areas where major impediments could occur. In this latter category were any impediments to the establishment of a feeling of support such as administrators at any level who did not understand the reading process or the LATs’ need for expert knowledge about it. LATs also reported the critical nature of their need for access to colleagues and to administrators with whom to exchange information about their learning needs. Thus, system administrators who viewed their role as “sole decision maker” could be a challenge, offering neither a feeling of support nor a collegial decision-making process such as might lead to the provision of supports that met the needs of all partners.
LAT work was intense, and a lack of time was the most commonly identified specific barrier to the LATs’ ability to acquire knowledge about reading instruction. The job’s workload and their own strong sense of responsibility for students left them little time for further education and PD. New LATs, many of them employed part time, worked under particular constraint, with much to learn immediately and only small windows of opportunity for learning about reading.

Because of this time constraint, some LATs said it would have been better for their students and for teacher retention if they had come into the job with greater expertise. A high proportion of LATs began teaching with what they perceived as insufficient knowledge of reading instruction, a primary knowledge need in their role, and they felt, in hindsight, that this lack might have been more efficiently addressed during pre-service education. But there, they had been frustrated by issues that involved a lack of, or a lack of access to, courses and programs that addressed reading instruction as well as too little or no opportunity for practicum experience in special education. Programs did not permit much choice regarding reading coursework, and some LATs reported that, in their experience, no program in either province had included all the courses required by the provinces’ education standards for LAT work. Some distant universities brought courses and programs right into LATs’ own districts. Given their workload and the job’s intensity, LATs wanted their local universities to do the same.

One issue that caused much LAT concern, especially in BC, was the teachers’ union and federation position on the requirement of special standards of education and experience for teachers in LAT positions. The BC union and federation might find it useful to explore this issue further and especially to gather reliable information from LATs, regular teachers, and other sources regarding the impact on teachers of the use of such standards for LAT positions. For example, not one of the 50 LATs in this study expressed any concern about the requirement of
standards for the LAT position, and many LATs (30% overall, most of these in BC) said required standards were a critical support. In addition, over half of all LATs had been able to access the LAT job without meeting the standards, and indeed, at least one experienced Saskatchewan LAT reported working many years without achieving them. Clearly, requiring standards did not appear to negatively impact teachers’ access to LAT jobs in Saskatchewan. Some reported it positively impacted their sense of efficacy and job satisfaction. Additional reliable evidence on the impact of requiring standards and at what system level might help federations and unions make decisions that more effectively help LATs to both prepare for and maintain the expertise needed to do their jobs.

Research Question 6(a): Relationships with Distance

What are the patterns of interaction between LATs’ reported needs, supports and challenges, and distance from a full service university? As anticipated, working in districts near a major university appeared to enhance teachers’ access to formal education after employment, but teachers in those proximal districts also appeared to have more education before service. In confirmation, proportionally more teachers working closer to a full-service education facility reported they felt prepared for their tasks when they started LAT work. LATs working close to a full service university also reported taking more formal education specifically about reading instruction than LATs who worked three hours away. Thus, higher proportion of the LATs who worked closest to a full-service university met their province’s education qualifications when hired, and more of them took formal courses after employment. While other factors such as living in a large city (universities were all in large cities) might also impact these results, this set of relationships does indicate that working at a close proximity to a full service university may
impact an LATs’ access to formal education positively. Those working farther away might require additional or more specialized supports to access needed formal education.

Perhaps as a result of more limited access to formal education, LATs who lived further from a full service university made proportionally more use of informal means of acquiring knowledge about reading instruction. They were more likely to subscribe to journals and reported proportionally more memberships in reading-related organizations. They attended proportionally more conferences and workshops, acquired more informal certificates, accessed more ‘Other’ informal PD, and were more likely to be involved in mentoring, compared to those who worked closer to a full service university. All of these suggest an attempt to be together with colleagues and their ideas.

The use of, or access to, financial support also appeared to be impacted by distance from a university. Relatively equal proportions of LATs at all distances received paid leave and financial support to attend conferences from districts. However, the ‘Other’ support received by LATs who worked closer was more likely financial than for those who worked at greater distances. LATs in some distant districts mentioned declining enrolments and a diminishing district tax base as their area population moved to larger centres, so it may be that nearer districts (which were in larger cities) had more funds available for financial support. Importing experts for workshops and sending teachers to conferences (most often held in larger centres) might well increase PD costs for distant districts, limiting their available funds for individual LAT support. It is possible LATs at the farthest distance might have chosen more diverse forms of financial support had they been available.

More LATs at the farthest distances from universities reported receiving support from education institutions. Some of this was in relation to distance education, as some LATs
described. Taken together, this evidence suggests that both formal education and financial support may be more difficult to obtain for LATs working far from a major university, and these teachers may require additional and/or different support to access both formal and informal learning opportunities.

The role of the LAT appeared to differ by distance from a university, and that role differential might impact their needs for knowledge about reading instruction. It might also impact the supports they might prefer for accessing it. Some administrators from distant districts reported difficulty finding qualified teachers for LAT positions. They overcame this difficulty by using qualified LATs to supervise less qualified personnel. Thus, a greater proportion of LATs at a far distance delivered proportionally less reading instruction than those at a near distance and instead had more administrative responsibilities related to the supervision of less qualified education personnel. Their knowledge needs might differ.

All of the patterns described above need further examination to clarify the direction, extent, and circumstances of the relationships. The results do suggest that support that does not require extensive travel to access formal education will be needed by LATs who work farther away from universities. Alternatively, these LATs might benefit from accessing more information provided less formally, as well as additional financial support for conference travel or access to experts.

**Research Question 6(b): Relationships with Provincial Use of Standards**

What are the patterns of interaction between LATs’ reported needs, supports and challenges, and provincial use of LAT standards of qualification as guidelines or as requirements? Several patterns emerged from comparisons of teachers’ responses by province that might suggest an impact from provincial variation in the application of LAT standards. Both
provinces had similar standards, but BC applied them as guidelines, whereas Saskatchewan required them. Many other factors might also be related to these patterns of difference. LAT tasks appeared to be similar in both provinces in terms of amount of time spent on reading instruction. Most other factors related to access to information appeared to differ by province.

Regarding LATs’ reported needs, a higher proportion of Saskatchewan LATs perceived that their experience and education prepared them for LAT work. While this might suggest a relationship with standards, it could also be associated with the relatively extensive practica programs, including a 16 week internship, required by some Saskatchewan teacher education programs. Certainly, a higher proportion of Saskatchewan teachers had met their provinces’ education standards at hiring, though the proportion of LATs who met the teaching experience standards at the time of hiring was similar between provinces.

In both provinces, there appeared to be a greater need for both formal and informal education and PD about reading and its instruction among teachers who had the least amount of LAT experience compared with teachers with greater experience, a circumstance that might be anticipated among teachers new to any role. This was especially true in BC, however, where a high teacher turnover in some districts had resulted in over half of the LATs there being in their first year of the job, and indeed, many of these were in their first year of any form of teaching. Saskatchewan teachers therefore appeared to be somewhat more experienced in the LAT role, and this could have impacted their reported education and PD needs. A higher proportion of BC teachers had pursued more formal education after their certification and had taken slightly more courses on reading and reading instruction overall, which may indicate that they had easier access to these. However, teachers in both provinces reported difficulty finding and accessing
appropriate university courses and programs on reading instruction and LATs in both provinces equally had said they wanted special education practicum experience.

Both provinces had problems with shortages of teachers qualified for LAT positions, but the scarcity appeared to be more severe in some districts in BC. A higher proportion of BC LATs reported that it was easier to get an LAT position in their district than was the case in Saskatchewan. BC LATs were less experienced overall; this may be due to the large cohort of BC LATs who were also new to teaching as was reported by the LATs in the study. In Saskatchewan, no particular explanation for the LAT scarcity was reported other than not enough teachers graduating with special education qualifications and some difficulty in accessing reading instruction courses as undergraduates.

In BC, LATs reported the scarcity problems were impacted by a complex set of factors; some, though not all, were related to the province’s application of standards as guidelines rather than requirements. In some districts, LATs reported that the professional status or what they termed the image of the LAT role had deteriorated, and it was now difficult to find any teachers who would take the position, qualified or not. Some LATs said this was due to the lack of requiring standards of education and experience at either the provincial or the district level, and they faulted the ministry and/or government for not requiring standards there. But according to one LAT, it was the BC Teachers’ Union that opposed the use of required standards rather than the ministry. That teacher reported that her union believed that standards would restrict teachers’ access to the jobs to which the standards applied. She said that the union maintained that initial teacher certification applied equally to any teaching position, and to require otherwise would unfairly restrict access to jobs for teachers who were already certified for all teaching positions. LATs from both provinces, however, indicated that they were in favour of requiring standards
for the LAT position. They said required standards would encourage them to gain expertise, would force teacher education faculties to offer appropriate, accessible courses, and would encourage all system levels to support LATs to become expert. They said they believed that expert LATs would improve the position’s professional status or image so that more teachers would desire it and that fewer would leave, thus increasing the quantity of qualified teachers for and in LATs positions.

No Saskatchewan LATs indicated the required standards had impeded their access to LAT jobs. In fact, 52% compared with 42% of the BC LATs reported being hired for LAT positions without having met their respective province’s provincial education standards\(^1\). This relatively high proportion hired without meeting those standards must have been the case for some time, as only about half of LATs in all groups save the one having the least experience reported meeting the standards when hired (27% of LATs with 5 years or less experience had met the standards, 60% of LATs with 6-15 years, 44% of LATs with 16+ years). This suggests that a lack of required standards alone would not likely have caused all of the recent changes in the position’s professional status or image and the related severe shortage of expert teachers available for LAT jobs in some BC districts.

Saskatchewan LATs and administrators also reported a scarcity of expert teachers for LAT positions. Although the scarcity did not appear as severe as that in BC, it also seems to indicate that requiring standards will not, by itself, solve the problems of expert teacher quantity for LAT positions. Where standards might have an impact is in the number of expert teachers available for LAT jobs in some BC districts.

\(^1\) Two BC teachers reported being asked to meet district standards at hiring, as districts had responsibility for standards there. No study questions further explored this.
who have been in the role for some time, as more experienced LATs would have had time to take the courses to match their standards and hopefully gain expertise. The requirement of standards in Saskatchewan did appear to be associated with the ministry’s work with its partners, including districts and universities, to support education and PD that would positively impact the number of expert LATs. In this way, required standards may have elevated the professional status of the LAT to a level suited to more expert and more respected teachers. The literature suggests more teachers might desire a job with such a reputation and fewer might leave it.

Another factor impacting the professional status or image of the position in BC was the LAT workload. Study LATs from both provinces reported that their workload had always been a heavy one but it had recently become especially onerous in BC. Newer provincial policies affecting funding, student designations, and accountability requirements had resulted in heavy caseloads and very extensive paperwork generated largely for the purpose of accountability. Regular classroom teaching now appeared to be an easier job in BC, and the results of this study indicate that in some districts, teachers used the LAT job as an entry-level position and transferred to regular classroom positions as soon as they could.

A further impact was related to contract policies which precluded some BC teachers working part-time as LATs from receiving permanent positions. Provincial special needs funding was tied to the number of special needs students, as was also the case in Saskatchewan, but BC boards would not give a permanent contract to LATs whose time in the role might be reduced the next year due to reduced caseloads. Teachers who wanted a permanent contract in BC left LAT for regular classroom teacher work. Teachers who wanted a permanent contract in Saskatchewan could remain in their part-time LAT role, the result of policies gained through union bargaining.
Together, these factors appeared to present a set of circumstances that left few teachers desiring an LAT position in some BC districts (but not all). It also contributed to a high turnover among existing LATs as vacancies were filled with new graduates having still fewer of the necessary qualifications for the job. Some less qualified new LATs were reported to leave the position (or teaching) when they became either discouraged by work for which they were unprepared or otherwise became overwhelmed by the excessive demands of the position. The most successful new LATs moved into classrooms when they could. As the image of the learning assistance teaching role deteriorated the job became less attractive and the LAT teaching specialty became an entry-level position. With so many less qualified LATs in the position every year, LATs reported that the entire student support program was at risk.

A shortage of teachers for LAT roles also existed in Saskatchewan, but LATs there did not appear to attribute this to any particular cause other than to some difficulty accessing appropriate courses and programs. Paperwork was extensive but not onerous. Part-time positions existed in somewhat greater proportions than in BC, but after two years of district service, the LATs interviewed reported that their districts’ policies (bargained for by their union) required that teachers receive permanent contracts, even for portions of full time work. If they lacked the qualifications for their job when hired, teachers were asked to upgrade to meet the standards. Teachers did not object, noting that if they wanted the job they felt responsible to meet its professional qualifications. The professional status or image of LATs in Saskatchewan was reported to be that of caring and competent teachers, and the position was desired, especially by those who preferred part-time work.

It appears that if current shortages of expert teachers for LAT positions continue in BC, the learning assistance program itself will be at risk as teachers in some districts indicated. The
BC education system will need to make some decisions about the value and form of its existing student support program. If continued learning assistance support is deemed desirable, the issues adversely affecting the quantity of expert teachers for and in LAT positions will need to be addressed collaboratively, with policy changes at a number of system levels including the BC Teachers’ union.

The use of required standards appears to be a primary issue. It seems that having standards and abiding by them leads to a more confident and knowledgeable workforce, one that is less likely to leave the job. A willingness to allow the use of required standards, graduating enough teachers with the expertise for, and interest in, LAT work, having a job workload and comparable opportunities for permanent contracts that other teachers enjoy, contribute, though less directly, to the number of expert teachers who are available for or who will choose LAT positions. When LAT knowledge and experience are lacking, it seems to strain the system in a number of ways that can compromise the entire student services program. Formal education and PD and some experience are needed for LATs, not only for the particular knowledge these might develop, but to improve the LAT program and thus preserve the intent of inclusion policies through a well-functioning student support program.

**Research Question 6(c): Relationships with LAT Experience**

What are the patterns of interaction between LATs’ reported needs, supports and challenges, and length of teaching experience in an LAT position? Although all LATs reported using a range of education and PD learning opportunities, when they were grouped by experience, some patterns arose that suggested that the LAT experience cohorts had different needs and made or had opportunity to access different education and PD choices. For example, a somewhat higher proportion of teachers in the 6–15 and 16 and over years of experience groups
appeared to have met their provinces’ education qualifications at hiring than LATs in the least experienced LAT group (5 years or less: 27%, 6–15 years: 60%, 16+ years: 56%). These more experienced teachers reported feeling better prepared for their tasks than did the LATs with the least experience (5 years or less: 33%, 6–15 years: 52%, 16+ years: 44%). These differences might reflect contextual conditions at the time of hiring such as a greater number of well qualified job candidates. However, the second experience group, coming to the position with greater formal qualifications already, also appeared to access some forms of informal PD (e.g., conferences, journals, and informal certification), and to use district and school supports for PD events more after hiring, as well. These patterns were not explained by LAT reports.

Another pattern that would impact knowledge and support needs differentially by experience was the fact that teachers currently new to LAT work reported feeling less prepared for the job than new teachers had in the past. According to LATs, there were several implications of using under qualified teachers for LAT work. First, LATs reported that a high portion of those who arrived in the position with insufficient qualifications left it as soon as they could. LATs said they believed this was because less successful LATs wanted to move to a job where they would experience more success with less effort, and the already onerous LAT workload was made heavier by attempting to pursue additional expertise immediately. It might also relate to the use of the position by new graduates as an entry level job which they took regardless of their possible lack of interest in this teaching field. Thus, by hiring teachers who lacked expertise for their tasks, a district supplied potentially less effective teachers for their more vulnerable students whose progress might then be further delayed, perhaps resulting in these students subsequently continuing to require support. Further, the district might have spent effort and money on education and PD support for less qualified teachers to gain expertise only to lose
them and have to begin again with similar or even less qualified teachers the next year. This is surely unsatisfactory for students and their parents, and for district budgets. The situation confirms the results of Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) who found that hiring teachers with high academic qualifications was more cost efficient three years out than using less qualified teachers.

More LATs in the 5 years or less experience group worked part time as LATs. Part time teachers explained that their time available for PD outside school hours or at a lengthy travel distance was limited. Support for the least experienced LAT group would need to accommodate these circumstances. It would also need to take into account a potentially high turnover rate.

With respect to other needs, a somewhat higher proportion of LATs in the least experienced group had taken additional education over and above that which was required for initial teacher certification. In explanation, in my UBC graduate courses I met many new teachers who had so far been unable to obtain a first teaching position and had chosen to take further education in the hope that additional qualification would help them get hired the next year, though the courses they took did not necessarily relate to reading instruction. In this study, the courses new LATs reported taking did not relate to reading in as high a proportion as with more experienced teacher groups (who would have had time to judge the needs of the job and take possibly more appropriate education and PD). University advisors who knew of the need for expert LATs might be able to direct more of these teachers into special education or at least advise them to take more coursework on reading instruction. Fortunately, almost half of new LATs worked at a one hour distance from a major university facility, which might make further coursework more easily accessed.

In terms of supports, tallies indicated that beginning LATs took part in fewer reading instruction related informal PD activities overall than did their more experienced colleagues.
New LATs reportedly found the administrative aspects of their job onerous and said they had little time for education or PD about reading. One LAT, a former social studies teacher, said he had been asked to take the position because no other teacher was available. He did not access informal PD in relation to LAT work as he still felt committed to social studies. Similar reasoning might have influenced the PD choices of other teachers using the LAT position as an entry level job. Some new LATs said that less formal PD events held during the school day, even if they went into after-school time, were more readily attended than were events held at other times.

New LATs appeared to use support differently from other experience groups. They used proportionally less mentoring, yet they would most likely benefit from such immediate and practical support. Using mentors or working under the supervision of experienced teachers were suggestions recommended by many LATs, but it is not clear how or why new LATs did not take more advantage of this kind of support. Perhaps, because much mentoring was informally arranged by LATs among themselves, new teachers simply did not know how to find a mentor, especially if they had to look for one in another school as did most LATs. Another hypothesis suggested by one LAT was that she did not want others to find out how little she knew when she began. More new than experienced teachers used support for classes; all but one of these was from Saskatchewan where all new LATs who did not already hold the required qualifications were asked to take coursework meet provincial standards within five years. New LATs also reported receiving more district support to attend formal courses, perhaps because they attended more of them. The support they received might have been other than funding, as district financial support for coursework was usually only available once a permanent contact was achieved.
(usually after two years of service). A lower proportion of new teachers used district support to attend workshops, perhaps because they attended fewer workshops overall.

The most experienced LATs chose proportionally more informal PD compared to newer teachers though they still accessed some formal education. The second category, teachers with 6–15 years of experience, appeared to be the most active in accessing both district and school supports. Interestingly, the mid-range experience group, those with 6–15 years of LAT experience, seemed to make quite independent support choices. The proportions of their choices sometimes closely match beginning and sometimes very experienced teachers, and sometimes they show a gradual shift. Their support needs thus appear distinct. This confirms patterns found in the literature (e.g. Livingston, 2001; Smaller, Clark, Hart, et. a., 2000).

These patterns suggest that for optimal access to reading instruction information, teachers of differing experience cannot all be presented with the same choices. Until more precise information is developed, a variation in PD topics and supports that accommodate a range of needs should be offered. The most critical area of need related to experience is that of the LATs with the least experience. With less formal qualifications and less experience than teachers in the past, the current group of newer LATs in both provinces, but in BC in particular, may need much reading instruction knowledge, and they will need it immediately. To access it, new LATs will need extra and very specialized support. To accommodate the needs of these teachers, education and PD events will have to be planned to meet the time LATs have available and to account for their travel needs. Assistance with finding mentors might also encourage new LATs to make more use of that effective support opportunity. New LATs, sometimes overconfident of their skills, might benefit from the kind of guidance mentoring provides so effectively in order to
choose wisely the kinds of learning opportunities that most match the requirements of their new job. Standards that mentioned knowledge of reading instruction might promote this process.

**Recommendations**

As described in this chapter’s introduction, there are two sets of recommendations, one group of relatively practical supports based directly on study informants’ suggestions and a second policy oriented set of support principles that is more interpretative. Both recommendation sets arose from information gathered about the LATs needs, supports, and challenges and from the interaction of factors in the contexts of LAT work in the six selected school districts in Saskatchewan and BC. They offer information of potential use elsewhere, though they should not be applied without research and adaptation to ensure their suitability in other contexts.

**LAT Recommendations**

Throughout LATs’ comments about needs, supports, and challenges and also in response to one direct question asking about how their access to knowledge concerning reading instruction might be improved, the LATs and other informants recommended possibilities that they believed could support their attempts to develop greater expertise. These practical recommendations are grouped in relation to specific sources of support such as provinces, districts, universities, etc. They are discussed generally here, but over fifty specific suggestions are listed in Appendix E. LATs tended not to mention existing supports; rather they described improvements. Many recommendations address perceived challenges to knowledge access. The relative importance of each recommendation was not established, and their presentation does not reflect a ranking.

**Provincial governments and ministries.** Actions at the provincial level could have a broad positive impact. LATs most commonly recommended that standards of education and experience for teachers in the LAT role be required at this level. They said such standards denote
an expectation that LATs would be knowledgeable, encouraged system support for LAT learning, and improved the professional status of the LAT role thus positively impacting the quantity of qualified teachers for LAT positions. Standards that identified the knowledge needed for the job could assist with teacher preparation and with planning systematic education and PD for LATs in service. LATs also commonly recommended using collaborative interactions with system partners around education and PD issues, something LATs said could more easily be generated at provincial levels. LATs also suggested that many useful supports be continued. These included the provision of on-line information databases with lists of trusted sites and perhaps some site licences, and curricula that suggested possible adaptations for special needs students. LATs also wanted provincial workshops (or workshops presented with partners) on critical topics, because the small number of LATs in some districts made it impractical for districts to offer this important but expensive source of information.

**Districts.** Although policies and programs at the provincial level could potentially provide a broad platform of support for LAT learning, results indicated that districts had the most immediate positive impact on LAT access to knowledge. LATs said that even simple and inexpensive district arrangements such as permission to leave an hour early on Friday for travel to a class could substantially increase their perception of support. The most critical recommendation was that LATs wanted to feel that the district valued their knowledge, something that could result from listening to LATs and from including them in collaborative PD planning (and something that need not be expensive). With LAT input, accommodating policies might be developed to encourage and support their access to desired knowledge. LATs suggested that a systematic or long-term learning program be developed and used to ensure that the needs of both the district and the LATs were met, and to provide the variation in learning opportunities
necessary to support various LAT experience levels. District reading or literacy improvement goals could bring additional support. LATs needed opportunities to be together with LAT colleagues to discuss issues, to exchange information, and to participate in collaborative learning experiences, perhaps thereby developing the powerful support that is so often facilitated within communities of practice. LAT coordinators or consultants were essential facilitators.

**Schools.** Schools did not have much financial support to offer, but could still give LATs excellent (and cost free) support through administrators and colleagues who expected and encouraged LATs to be expert and who shared their own information about how to teach literacy and reading. Especially, school level administrators set the tone by encouraging LATs to get involved in professional development and by giving permission for them to attend learning events. LATs wanted collaborative input in PD planning and school goal setting as it increased the likelihood of accessing useful knowledge about reading instruction. Many school PD events on reading instruction could be led by LATs, a learning opportunity in itself. LATs recommended developing partnerships with other schools, districts, or universities. Such collaborations could enable schools to gain information about theory and research about reading and universities to learn more about successful classroom practice. It could also help conserve resources. Within-school mentoring could provide a positive learning opportunity for all, though it might require support at the district level to establish and nurture.

**Universities.** Teachers had much to say about improving their access to formal education. This learning option was critically important to them, and they had reported encountering many challenges at that level. Most commonly, LATs recommended more preparation for reading instruction in initial teacher education. They said it was much more difficult to acquire the needed knowledge while in service. Also they said they believed that
prepared teachers might be more interested in LAT work and might stay longer in such positions. To improve pre-service preparation, LATs wanted more coursework and programs about reading to be offered, especially its assessment and its instruction with special needs learners. They wanted better access to such offerings and more opportunity for practicum experience with special education. LATs already in service also wanted more courses and programs on reading and improved access to them, including increased use of on-line educational services and more effective advertising of course offerings. LATs, as adult learners, recommended that course and program content have a strong practical strand. LATs suggested the solution for many of the challenges around formal education might be closer school/university collaboration where universities would work with teachers, schools, districts, federations, and ministries to make courses, programs, and reading research more available (23/37).

**Professional associations and community interest groups.** LATs reported that their professional associations (e.g., LATA, IRA) and other community interest groups offered valuable information, much of it accessible on-line. These groups also presented inexpensive informal opportunities for learning and connecting with colleagues. But LATs offered few comments about how these groups might enhance their already much used support.

**Teachers federations and unions.** Teachers reported that their federations were particularly effective in supporting their learning about reading instruction, partly because they responded to teacher direction. Subject area associations were encouraged to continue to offer subject associations, informal courses and conferences, and to enhance their support especially their on-line resources and opportunities to connect with colleagues. Some of the policies from unions and federations opposing the use of standards were considered by LATs to constrict their access to information and to contribute to a reduction in the professional status of their role.
More detailed and context-specific research information around this issue might guide decision-makings in the direction of stronger policy support.

**Teachers.** LATs suggested that they, themselves, might be more proactive in collaborating with all system levels and with others to ensure their knowledge needs were understood. They recommended that they continue to help their LAT colleagues to gain knowledge, for example, through generating additional mentoring opportunities. They also suggested that LATs should embrace new instructional ideas, using their classrooms to cautiously experiment and examine practices for what might be usefully added to their teaching repertoire. Administrative support would be an essential component.

**Policy Recommendations**

As Creswell (2007) described in his discussion of case study research methodology, layers of analysis may begin to arise that form larger units of understanding in terms of themes, categories, or dimensions of meaning. In this study, such themes emerged among the support recommendations. These themes could be described as implications for policy or as overarching principles for support. Such recommendations are presented here, together with some explanation and rationale for their use, and with examples of where each might be usefully employed.

1. **Value reading instruction expertise for LATs**

   Education systems cognizant of the overwhelming importance of LAT expertise in reading instruction will more likely set policies and programs that encourage and support its development. Standards that mention reading knowledge specifically could offer support through the establishment of set bodies of necessary expertise. LATs might use these in education and PD planning, while system partners might design programs of support with these in mind.
2. Collaborate

Teachers wanted to work together with their partners such as ministries and districts, in order to share objectives and thus to plan better and more efficient access to suitable education and PD. They wanted more collaboration so that they could share knowledge among learning participants with one another; between program planners and teachers for coherence among courses; within programs to prevent the omission of critical information; and between and among teacher education institutions, schools and other partners. LATs were willing to take responsibility for their own expertise, but they perceived that their participation in planning would produce the most suitable options for all partners. Such collaboration would need leadership, i.e., some agent to call partners together and to support teachers while they learn to assume responsibility. This leadership might more effectively be accomplished by the highest system agent involved. The BC Learning Assistance Teachers’ brief to their ministry (Hurd, 2001) was an example of a request for greater collaboration and associated leadership.

The study found several examples of useful collaboration. The ministry’s collaborative policy-building process in Saskatchewan spent time and financial resources at the beginning of the process but that approach reportedly saved money and produced effective policies in the end. The system-wide literacy assessment was useful to teachers in Saskatchewan because they had been heavily involved in its construction. One school/university collaboration and LAT reported brought valued information to and from the university through knowledge shared in relation to practicum supervision. Even collaboration between individual teachers increased knowledge and saved money on materials. This kind of effect can be magnified in schools, districts, or provinces. Complex problems, the result of an intricate interaction of policies, agents, and circumstances, can only be effectively addressed through the collaborative efforts of all who
might impact the solutions. Many LATs offered suggestions regarding what caused the BC LAT image problems, each teacher offering his or her perception of one or two main impacts. Only when information from all came together did the problem’s complexity became evident. Collaboration saves resources, engenders respect among all concerned, and builds loyalty. It can develop insight into complex problems involving multiple causes and agents and can result in effective decisions that serve the needs of all partners.

3. **Make time**

Teachers reported that finding time for additional education and PD was their biggest challenge, as so much knowledge was needed, and their workload was already heavy, especially for newer LATs. If the knowledge needed for the LAT job was better understood, time might more readily be found for the development of expertise in reading instruction, perhaps more frequently within regular school hours, as LATs recommended. Front loading more of it into pre-service programs might help. Time spent planning and coordinating PD might well save time later. Time made available for LAT collaboration with classroom teachers and for mentoring reduced student case loads overall. Accommodating procedures for applications and registrations, and broad and repeated advertising of university courses and programs all saved LATs time. Lists of useful information shared across districts or provinces helped, including scholarships, trusted websites, resource centre materials, relevant conferences and workshops, publishers seeking pilot sites, community organizations with information, and effective presenters on current topics. Each small support increases time for LAT learning.

4. **Support LAT connections with colleagues**

LATs reported that their colleagues were invaluable information sources because their knowledge, gained through both formal and informal learning sources, had already been related
to immediate classroom concerns—it was practical. LATs preferred learning in conjunction with other teachers of reading. Colleagues made excellent presenters and workshop leaders, formal and informal mentors, and sources of encouragement and inspiration. Such colleagues could be found among district central office staff; in schools, districts, federation subject and grade councils; in professional associations and community interest groups; through conferences and committees; during university classes and practicum experiences, or on-line. The resultant mentoring offered exceptional opportunities to make connections. LATs perceived a strong responsibility to share and to learn from each other, and asked for more opportunities to do so.

5. **Front load reading instruction education**

Changes in teacher preparation programs might be used to positively impact the number of qualified teachers for LAT positions. In their pre-service education, teachers wanted more emphasis on literacy and reading instruction, especially regarding assessment and instruction for special needs learners. They said even regular classroom teachers now need such skills. A strong practicum experience, including some work in special education, is also important. Efforts directed toward generating undergraduate interest in the field of special education may help prepare more teachers adequately for these jobs and increase their chances of obtaining teaching positions in this area of qualified teacher scarcity.

6. **Facilitate formal learning**

Formal learning after service is a critical information source for LATs as indicated by how often they accessed such courses, and by the number and quality of their concerns and suggestions for improved access to formal coursework and programs. Finding formal learning opportunities that suited their needs, getting permission to attend them, traveling to them, and paying for them, were all problematic. Perhaps partly because enrolments were lower in those
courses, universities seemed to offer few suitable, accessible courses about reading at either graduate or post-graduate levels. What they do offer needs to be advertised repeatedly and directly to LATs. Partnerships between districts and universities and the use of distance education are valued even by teachers situated close to universities. Course content must accommodate adult learners, most of whom value learning about methods and materials of direct relevance to their jobs. Teacher participation in course and program planning may help. LATs said they wanted a mix of current theory and practical information presented with a clear view of today’s inclusive classroom, delivered right in their districts, taught through multiple methods of instruction, and offering much opportunity for collaborative learning.

7. **Value informal learning**

Formal learning is vital, but informal learning—at PD events, and through experience in the workplace, home, and community—is also important. LATs said workshops and conferences, classroom experience, and other informal sources of knowledge can improve technical skills, impart specific knowledge, and develop the more subtle but essential administrative and personal interaction skills demanded by their work. Informal learning and the significance of its contribution to the development of expertise are not always recognized and supported, yet some study LATs said they valued informal PD and experience above formal course work for LAT job preparation and post-service learning. They grasped at informal certificates, lobbied (if necessary) for networking opportunities, and spent personal energy, time, and financial resources to acquire knowledge through informal means. Administrators, too, saw this source of knowledge as valuable. Experience gives insight into instruction methods, as well as adding credibility to interactions with colleagues and parents. Informal learning events can compensate for limited access to more formal sources of knowledge for LATs working far from
a university. The critical importance of informal learning must be supported, even if it cannot be formally recognized.

8. **Present a Range of Support Strategies**

   No single strategy, action, or type of support will address all the support needs of LATs of varying experience and education who work at different distances from sources of formal education and who have different students. The best support must encompass a combination or range of features. This is consistent with the literature (e.g., Turbill, 2002). One LAT recommended, “We need more information before coming, and we need more PD after, and more access to mentors and experience” (4/43). The system might think in terms of professional growth across teacher careers and establish long-term, system-wide planning toward such a goal to ensure needs for knowledge are addressed in a systematic rather than fragmentary manner.

9. **Continue some financial support**

   Money for education and PD was greatly appreciated by LATs and was returned in the development of expertise and in the LAT perception of support. Costs impeded access to education, but they did not stop determined LATs from learning. The financial burden fell more heavily on those in districts where travel expenses and the need to import PD expertise added cost. These districts and the LATs there could use additional funding or other forms of support such as provincially sponsored PD events.

   At all distances, teachers suggested creative ways to allocate funds while maintaining financial responsibility. The provision of substitute teachers was costly but such a program would allow LATs to attend critical learning events. Sending a colleague to distant workshops or conferences to bring back information was another useful strategy that was regularly mentioned. Using local expertise and sharing it with neighbouring districts saved money, too. Scholarships
and bursaries were available if LATs knew where to look. Provincial or even national literacy goals resulted in programs and policies that provided additional monetary support from outside the immediate education system. Publishing companies needed pilot sites for new materials or technologies. Despite their suggestions, teachers believed that developing expertise was, in the final analysis, their own professional responsibility. They felt a powerful drive for knowledge, and wanted as little impediment as possible while they learned. They considered even small amounts of funding to be a supportive gesture.

Future Research

An exploratory study such as this cannot develop conclusive evidence. It may, however, prove valuable in identifying a number of issues for further research, several of which are presented here, expressed as potential research questions. There are many others.

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the requirement of standards of expertise for LAT positions? Information about this issue would be useful for those setting policies around the use of standards.

2. What knowledge and supports do LATs need about areas other than reading instruction? Some portion of LAT tasks did not relate to reading but to other subject and student needs.

3. What teacher preparation information, if any, did LATs believe to be less useful? Most teacher certification programs are already heavy with course content. If more information about reading instruction were to be included, what might be left out? Alternatively, what are the costs and benefits of extending the length of teacher preparation programs to incorporate additional reading instruction information?

4. Why did nearly one third of those LATs who had met the standards of education and experience suggested for LAT work still report feeling unprepared for their tasks?
Adjustments to the standards that mentioned reading might enable a greater portion of those LATs who achieved them to have confidence in their expertise.

5. What exactly are the relationships between teacher experience and needs, supports, and challenges regarding access to reading instruction information? Understanding the relationships between teacher age, education, or experience and between higher needs or preferences for particular education or PD forms, topics, or supports might help the system provide more appropriate choices and supports.

6. What might support the development of a better professional status or image of the LAT role in those places where it is deteriorating? This issue is complex; understanding relationships within it would be a first step to solving the problem.

7. What might be the potential long-term impacts of the persistent use of inexpert LATs? Such information might inform planning regarding current Student Services models and would prepare the system for such impacts.

Limitations

There are several potential limitations of the present investigation:

Participation was voluntary and the self-selected teachers interviewed may not have been representative of all LATs in their districts and provinces, nor were districts necessarily representative of their provinces. Thus the interview data may not be generalizable to the entire set of LATs even within the regions surveyed nor to the entire set of districts in each province.

In BC, some of the study volunteer LATs were acquired by a request to LATA. This differs from the approach used for other teacher volunteers requested through districts. Study design, as much as possible, guarded against the impact of threats to validity by using extensive triangulation. The LATA president was interviewed, and the other study triangulation activities
were applied including checking of LAT references made, interviewing with provincial ministry informants to confirm policies, and taking care not to make generalizations beyond what the data supported. However, as a result of the difference in recruitment there will be some impact on validity.

This exploratory study is descriptive. More quantitative and explanatory research is needed to ascertain the relative power of each of the needs, supports, and impediments, as well as the patterns of relationships identified.

Any relationships suggested are associations only and should not be interpreted in terms of cause and effect. The working context of the teachers interviewed was multi-faceted and its components intricately related. Further exploration using different methodologies would be necessary to establish causal relationships.

**Summary and Concluding Statement**

This study used interview reports from LATs that were clarified and confirmed by district and ministry informants in order to identify and describe LATs’ needs for knowledge about reading instruction and the affordances and constraints that impacted their access to such knowledge. LATs’ reports indicated that their work was primarily reading instruction, and that it required deep and extensive knowledge, especially in relation to special needs students. Most LATs came to the job feeling unprepared for it. Some suggested it would be more efficient to have had opportunities to gain more knowledge about reading instruction and its application to the learning needs of special needs students in pre-service education and practica.

To gain needed expertise, LATs made extensive use of both formal education and less formal PD both before and after taking the job. They found access to these information sources challenging. They valued a wide range of supports from both inside and outside education
systems to help them gain knowledge. Their needs and the learning events they chose differed by their district’s distance from a university, by variation in their province’s application of standards of qualification for LATs, and by their own LAT experience. To positively impact the number of expert teachers for and in LAT positions, programs of support must attend to the recommendations from LATs, themselves, and must accommodate the range of differences in their needs related to distance, the application of standards, and LAT experience levels.

The study is particularly valuable in that the information reported comes from LATs themselves. These teachers revealed the importance of expertise about reading instruction in their jobs, a need described in the literature but not reflected in either province’s standards of qualification for LAT work and perhaps not fully realized by education system administrators and policy-makers. In addition to a clear report of their needs, LATs described what might best help them overcome impediments in their attempts to access to knowledge. To a large extent their perspective has been missing from the literature. The best arrangement of supports is dependent on the context in which they are required, and little has been reported about what works best in the types of contexts examined here. This factor also increases the value of this study’s findings.

The LATs in the study very clearly described what they believed would help increase the number of expert teachers for and in LAT positions in their regions. They want the system to value and support expertise for LATs. They suggest that interested education partners work together, not only for efficiency, but because complex problems cannot be understood, much less solved, by one or two partners alone. Collaborative effort is essential. The construction of a full range of appropriate LAT supports and the mitigation of challenges follow from these two principles, to value LAT expertise and to collaborate in support of its development. When LATs
themselves are included among the decision-making partners, their exceptional needs for knowledge about reading instruction will be better understood, and the policies and programs of support most suitable for all partners will be arranged. LATs work exceptionally hard to develop the professional knowledge required for their job. They do this because they want to offer the best possible instruction to their students. Supporting LATs to develop expertise in reading instruction will benefit students.
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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF REQUEST FOR INTERVIEW AND CONSENT

UBC Letterhead

Letter of Request for Interview

To:

I would like to interview someone in your district office/department for my study “Exploring learning assistance teachers’ professional development needs, supports, and challenges in accessing knowledge about reading instruction”. I am conducting this study for a University of British Columbia PhD degree, Language and Literacy Department. I need to interview someone with responsibility for learning assistance who could tell me about programs and policies that support LAT education and professional development.

The study will examine learning assistance teachers’ roles in two provinces with respect to reading related tasks, perceived needs for information about reading, and how they access education and professional development about reading. One informant from the provincial education department in B.C. and in Saskatchewan and one learning assistance program administrator from each of three school districts in each province will be asked about the general teaching context in their area with respect to support for access to knowledge about reading so I may gather information about provincial and district policies that relate to learning assistance. Elementary, middle, and high school learning assistance and/or resource teachers (who may also reading support instruction to students who remain in their regular class) will be asked about their tasks with respect to reading instruction, their perceived need for professional development about reading in particular, and their suggestions about how their access to reading related education and professional development may be enhanced or impeded. The resulting composite list of supports and challenges will serve as a resource for education institutions and others with responsibility for teacher training and professional development.

This interview should take less than an hour and may be made up of a combination of brief interviews shared among several people, phone conversations, and e-mail responses. Personal identities, districts, and schools will be replaced with a code to ensure confidentiality but provinces will be identified. Original data will be kept locked and later destroyed. Published reports will contain no personal, district, or school identifying information. You do not have to answer all my questions and may withdraw from the project at any time without negative consequences.

I may be reached for more information through my phone numbers and addresses below or at (address). Dr. Jon Shapiro, my faculty research advisor, may also be contacted for information at his UBC office in Vancouver (address/phone number). You may also contact the Director of the UBC Office of Research Services if there are any concerns about participant rights in this project (phone number).

Sincerely,

Carolyn Thauberger
(contact information)
Consent Form

(teacher, district, and provincial administrator informants)

I have read the letter describing Carolyn Thauberger’s PhD graduate thesis research project, “Exploring learning assistance teachers’ professional development needs, supports, and challenges in accessing knowledge about reading,” and the nature of my participation in it. I understand that my participation is voluntary and confidential, and that I may withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequences.

My signature indicates my willingness to participate in the project.

Signature: _______________________________________________________

Printed Name: ___________________________________________________

Phone or email contact information: _________________________________

Date: __________________________________________________________

To receive a summary of the investigation please indicate your preferred means of contact:

Name: __________________________________________________________

Address: _______________________________________________________

Email: _________________________________________________________

Carolyn Thauberger

(contact information)
APPENDIX B: TEACHER INFORMANT INTERVIEW

Exploring learning assistance teachers' professional development needs, supports, and challenges in teaching students with literacy difficulties

Contact me at (email address/phone number). Return questionnaire to Carolyn Thauberger, (address).

Demographic information
1. Date: ___________________________________________________________
2. Name: __________________________________________________________
3. Gender: 3.1 Male ______________________ 3.2 Female ______________________
4. District name: ___________________________________________________
   Number: __________________
5. Total years of teaching experience? ________________________________
6. Title:
   6.1. LAT (learning assistance teacher)
   6.2. RT (Resource Teacher)
   6.3. Other _______________________________________________________
7. Years if experience as a learning assistance or resource teacher?
8. What percent of full time do you currently teach in this in this position?
9. What teaching or school responsibilities, if any, do you have other than this position?

A. CONTEXT

Education and training
10. What is the highest level of education you have and what are your areas of specialty:
   10.1. BEd ___ specialty ________________________________
   10.2. BA ___ specialty ________________________________
   10.3. Master’s degree ___ specialty __________________________
   10.4. Doctorate ___ specialty ____________________________
   10.5. extra classes ___ specialty(s)_______________________
   10.6. Other (describe) _______________________________________
11. What formal education do you have that is specifically about reading instruction?
   11.1. one class beyond that required for basic teacher training.
   11.2. two to five classes beyond that required for basic teacher education
   11.3. Other (please give the number) _______________________________
12. (deleted)
13. Tell me about other professional development have you done that might have added to your expertise about teaching reading?
   13.1. conferences (List those you typically attend)________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________
13.2. Professional memberships (list)

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

13.3. Professional journals (list)

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

13.4. Workshops (list topics)

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

13.5. Special certificates (list)

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

13.6. Other

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Teaching experience
14. Tell me about any past reading instruction teaching experience you have.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Literacy and reading support
15. What are you expected to do in your job in relation to actual instruction in reading (including 
assessment, planning and consultation specifically about reading instruction)?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

16. What portion of your time in this job would you estimate is spent on work related 
specifically to reading instruction?
______________________________________________________________________________
Guidelines and requirements
17. When you first began teaching in your current job how did your qualifications match any 
provincial guidelines or requirements for the position? Which ones?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

18. When you first began teaching in your current job how did your experience match any 
district guidelines or requirements for the position? Which ones?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

B. NEEDS
Professional development
19. Has your training and experience prepared you for this job in terms of its expectations about 
literacy instruction and about reading instruction in particular? Explain.
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

20. What, if any, formal training about reading instruction do you believe teachers in your job 
need?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
21. What, if any, informal training, programs, or other professional development in relation to reading instruction do you think teachers in your job need?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

22. What, if any, teaching experience related to reading instruction would you advise for those preparing for a job like yours?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Benefits of learning assistance/resource teaching
23. Why did you go into this teaching position?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

24. Would you advise other teachers to consider going into this position? Why?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Support for training
25. Do you feel supported to get any additional knowledge you need to do your job with regard to reading instruction? Explain.
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

26. What, if any, additional training or professional development in reading instruction did you take after you began teaching in this kind of position?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
27. Why did you decide to pursue this additional training or professional development? (Underline choices)
   27.1. It would lead to an increase salary.
   27.2. The information was needed for the job.
   27.3. The information was helpful for the job.
   27.4. It would increase my chances for leadership roles.
   27.5. Other

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

28. How did the district help you get additional knowledge about reading instruction? (Underline choices)
   28.1. Mentoring provided
   28.2. Workshops, training sessions provided
   28.3. Financial support to attend workshops, conferences
   28.4. Financial support to attend classes, i.e. tuition
   28.5. Support to achieve special certification (e.g. Reading Recovery)
   28.6. Education leave paid
   28.7. Education leave unpaid
   28.8. Other

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

29. How did the school help you get additional knowledge about reading instruction? (Underline choices)
   29.1. Mentoring provided
   29.2. Workshops, training sessions provided
   29.3. Financial support to attend workshops, conferences
   29.4. Financial support to attend classes, i.e. tuition
   29.5. Support to achieve special certification (e.g. Reading Recovery)
   29.6. Education leave paid
   29.7. Education leave unpaid
   29.8. Other

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
30. How did the province help you get additional knowledge about reading instruction?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

31. How did universities help you get additional knowledge about reading instruction?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

32. Did you get help anywhere else to obtain additional knowledge about reading instruction? Where? What help?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

33. What, if anything, discouraged or impeded you from accessing additional knowledge about reading instruction? (Underline choices)
33.1. Costs:
33.2. tuition
33.3. travel
33.4. residence
33.5. parking
33.6. No time
33.7. Effort needed
33.8. Transportation concerns
   33.8.1. Travel distance
   33.8.2. Availability of parking
33.9. Availability of suitable university evening classes
33.10. Availability of suitable university summer classes
33.11. Unable to get time off from teaching
33.12. Other
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
34. What things might help or support you in getting any additional training or knowledge about reading instruction?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

About the supply of learning assistance teachers
35. How difficult is it for a teacher currently employed in the district to get your kind of job?  
(Underline choices)
35.1. Difficult
35.2. Moderately easy
35.3. Very easy
  Why? ____________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

36. How easy is it for a teacher new to the profession to get your kind of job in this district?  
(Underline choices)
36.1. Difficult
36.2. Moderately easy
36.3. Very easy
  Why? ____________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

37. Do you have other comments or suggestions about learning assistance or resource teacher access to knowledge about reading instruction?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

End.

Thank-you.
## APPENDIX C: VARIABLES AND CODES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label Column</th>
<th>Values Column</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1 = &quot;male&quot; 2 = &quot;female&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province</td>
<td>1 = &quot;SK&quot; 2 = &quot;BC&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full/part time</td>
<td>0 = &quot;part time&quot; 1 = &quot;full time&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from university</td>
<td>0 = &quot;ave. 1 hr&quot; 1 = &quot;ave. 2 hrs&quot; 2 = &quot;ave. 3 hrs&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further education after degree</td>
<td>0 = &quot;none&quot; 1 = &quot;further education&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal education on reading</td>
<td>0 = &quot;none&quot; 4 = &quot;1 or more&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal PD: conferences</td>
<td>0 = &quot;none&quot;, 1 = &quot;one or more&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal PD: memberships</td>
<td>0 = &quot;none&quot;, 1 = &quot;one or more&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal PD: journals</td>
<td>0 = &quot;none&quot;, 1 = &quot;one or more&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal PD: Workshops</td>
<td>0 = &quot;none&quot;, 1 = &quot;one or more&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal PD certificates</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot;, 1 = &quot;yes&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal PD: other</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 3 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two years prior experience</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no years&quot;, 1 = &quot;1 year&quot;, 2 = &quot;2 or more years&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial education standards met</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial experience standards met</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/Experience prepared you</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal education needed</td>
<td>0 = &quot;none&quot; 1 = &quot;some&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal education needed</td>
<td>0 = &quot;none&quot; 1 = &quot;some&quot; 2 = &quot;not know&quot; 3 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience needed</td>
<td>0 = &quot;none&quot; 1 = &quot;some&quot; 2 = &quot;not know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived support for education/PD</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;not know&quot; 4 = &quot;other&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/PD after beginning LAT</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;formal&quot; 2 = &quot;informal&quot; 3 = &quot;both&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District help: mentoring</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District help: workshops</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District financial help: conferences</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District financial help: classes</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District financial help: certification</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District help: paid leave</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District help: unpaid leave</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District help: other</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 3 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School help: mentoring</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 6 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School help: workshops</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School financial help: conferences</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School financial help: paid leave</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School financial help: unpaid leave</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School help: other</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help from province</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;some/much&quot; 3 = &quot;not know&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help from universities</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help from elsewhere</td>
<td>0 = &quot;no&quot; 1 = &quot;yes&quot; 2 = &quot;don't know&quot; 4 = &quot;no resp.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How easy is it to get an LAT job</td>
<td>0 = &quot;difficult&quot; 1 = &quot;easy&quot; 3 = &quot;don't know&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent on reading</td>
<td>0 = &quot;49% or less&quot; 1 = &quot;50-79%&quot; 2 = &quot;80%+&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience teaching</td>
<td>1 = &quot;5 yrs or less&quot; 2 = &quot;6 - 15 years&quot; 3 = &quot;16+ years&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience LAT</td>
<td>1 = &quot;5 yrs or less&quot; 2 = &quot;6 - 15 years&quot; 3 = &quot;16+ years&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D: LAT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORT

Provincial Governments and Ministries

1. Require standards of education and experience for LATs, including some coursework specifically about reading instruction. LATs in both provinces said requiring standards would encourage the entire system including universities and other agents to offer them support (6/30), would improve the role’s image, and would positively impact the supply of expert teachers for the LAT role (42/34).

2. Expect LATs to be expert in reading instruction. It inspires them to learn (42/34).

3. Offer public support for teachers in the media. To do otherwise destroys loyalty (12/30).

4. Take a leadership role in setting opportunities for collaborative decision-making regarding LAT needs and supports for education and PD. This is easier from the top (43/25).

5. Continue to provide up to date data bases of information and further information sources such as SET BC on technology or the manuals (on-line) about special needs instruction. It saves much LAT time, directing them immediately to trusted knowledge sources (20/30, 19/34).

6. Provide some site licences for electronic information sources and journals. These saved LATs money even if a small personal contribution was also required, and steered them to reliable sites (14/34).

7. Continue to present some workshops, perhaps working with partners, on the most critical topics about reading instruction and continue to support major conferences
about reading. Such support reaches across the province to help LATs especially those in smaller districts where less money is available for PD (3/30, 32/34).

8. Continue to include information in the curricula about instruction for special needs students including performance standards and work samples. These supports helped LATs understand the composition and stages of reading development (17.30).

**Districts**

9. Set opportunities to listen to LATs. Following their descriptions of needs and useful supports increases PD efficiency, and for them, the perception of being heard is critical to their loyalty (20/34).

10. Expect and encourage LATs to be expert. It inspires LAT efforts to learn (20/34).

11. Use standards of education and experience at the district level, whether the provincial ones or those developed locally. This shows an expectation of expertise, improving the role’s professional status, encouraging all to support LAT learning, and in the end positively impacting the number of expert teachers for LAT positions (16/13.6).

12. Support less qualified LATs to meet the standards as soon after hiring as possible. This might reduce the higher turnover rates among new LATs (16/13.6).

13. Use accommodating administrative approaches through simple applications and generous permissions, and with substitutes provided. LAT have extensive knowledge needs; smooth their access to learning (9/34, 2/34).

14. Set district goals that focus on literacy and reading. Such attention to the importance of reading instruction draws support for learning more about it.

15. Lead and support learning approaches that are collaborative, involve participant driven sharing of knowledge such as communities of practice, and that develop
partnerships with other districts, universities, etc. It saves resources, puts LATs in touch with a wider range of colleagues and ideas, and builds the collaborative learning that LATs appear to prefer (23/34, 20/34, 26/34).

16. Support new LATs strongly with workshops on needed topics, mentors, placement with experienced colleagues, etc. Their unfamiliar administrative and accountability tasks are heavy (23/34) just when their information needs about reading instruction are also extensive (35/34).

17. Offer a range of informal to formal mentor programs including group information sharing opportunities, and support the role with structured planning, information on mentoring, and time for it. LATs needs vary, and, while mentoring is not costly, it takes time and requires some development to ensure it functions as intended (2/34).

18. Offer more workshops and learning events on reading instruction especially with respect to special needs students. Develop an on-going or overall PD plan together with LATs that is part of a larger pattern of knowledge development for district teachers. Include some use of local expertise, some events during all or part of the school day, and some events that fit into shorter time slots. Repeat critical topics such as assessment, and offer information about new theoretical research, and new instructional methods, programs, and materials (35/34). LATs needs and preferred supports vary by their experience and background (23/34), role (43/34), and time available (9/34), and local PD events are more accessible for them (20/34, 34/34).

19. Continue to provide active coordinators and/or consultants. They are the conduit for information both to and from LATs and key to the LAT feeling of support (20/34).
20. Keep administrators well informed about reading theory. LATs need administrators who understand what they are doing.

21. Be open to the use of new or at least a variety of reading instructional approaches and methods, supporting LATs to use inquiry and experimentation to develop their own knowledge. Follow identical programs constrains LAT learning and reduces the options available for the effective support of particular student needs.

22. Provide access for LATs to professional books, journals, site licences, and sharing arrangements such as lending trees. This is hard to orchestrate from an individual LAT level (37/34, 41/34).

**Schools and school administrators**

23. Encourage, expect, and support LATs to be expert. Encouragement and permissions, scheduling flexibility, etc. cost nothing and are returned in loyalty and motivation to learn more (6/34.3, 37/27).

24. Help administrators to be aware of their key role in terms of encouragement and permissions and show them their multitude of options for LAT support.

25. Keep informed about reading theory and practice (29/29.8).

26. Set organizational opportunities such as grade level meetings for LAT/classroom teacher information and needs exchange (25/29.8)

27. Set PD topics collaboratively with teachers, including strong input from LATs. LATs know their own needs and may have noted particular needs among the staff, and can help choose topics that do not waste valuable LAT time (23/4).

28. Set school goals that focus on literacy or reading. A focus on reading draws information and resources.
29. Use LATs as school PD information sources. They may have much knowledge about reading instruction for exceptional students gained from their own PD events (23/4).

30. Take an active interest in LATs’ learning, including helping with their personal growth plans. Listening inspires, and a perceptive administrator might assist in creating a particularly efficient learning path.

31. Use partnerships, collaboration, and sharing with other schools, and with universities, reading associations, community interest groups, and colleagues in the school. This stretches resources while broadening learning opportunities.

32. Encourage and leave time for LATs (and other staff) to form interest groups about reading and to use an attitude of inquiry in their reading instruction practice. Such groups can be powerful motivators and knowledge sources (29/13.6, 23/34).

33. Consider using parent advisory committees, publishing companies, and technology groups to gain financial support such as for purchase of reading tests or for new instructional materials for trials. Such projects can benefit the school in terms of materials, may give your school a leadership role in the district, and simply focusing attention on reading (7/34).

34. Support mentoring about reading instruction among the staff including LATs. Some classroom teachers especially at the primary level may have much knowledge to offer an inexperienced LAT (7/28.1).

Universities

35. Find creative ways to offer and make accessible in both undergraduate and graduate programs, more courses about reading instruction. LATs reported an extreme scarcity of such courses (20/34, 21/34).
36. Front load into pre-service education more courses, and more information inside courses, on reading instruction and reading instruction for special needs students. With inclusion, even classroom teachers needed a broad knowledge of reading methods; less critical information topics in other subject areas might be left out (20/34, 35/34).

37. Include in pre-service programs, in depth information about reading assessment, especially informal classroom assessment, and include opportunity for practice. More knowledge of assessment was an immediate need for new LATs (39/34).

38. Offer distance courses and programs about reading instruction. This is increasingly the education choice of all busy LATs, not only those working at a distance (11/34).

39. Form partnerships with districts and schools to help develop suitable programs and to bring needed courses to teachers. Better enrolment numbers might be received in return (5/34, 35/34).

40. Talk with LATs to find their knowledge needs so that suitable courses and programs and relevant topics can be offered. Like other adult learners, LATs prefer knowledge that is derived from and has immediate application to their tasks and that is grounded in current classroom reality (47/31, 20/34).

41. Use a collaborative attitude when interacting with teachers, schools, and districts. Universities hold needed information such as about new research, and schools and LATs have practical expertise in instruction especially with exceptional students that might be of value to universities (14/34).

42. Use advisors and administrative policies that are both accommodating and informed about the courses required in provincial standards so that reading instruction
information can be set in or among these. Few, if any, undergraduate programs in either province include all the courses to meet the standards.

43. Enhance practicum experiences for pre-service and other teachers, also including some practicum experience in special education. It not only prepares all teachers for inclusive classrooms, but it may develop interest in special education, a field where teachers are in short supply and where new teachers with expertise may more easily get jobs (44/18).

44. Enhance student contact with or participation in informal sources of reading instruction information: conferences, professional organizations, community interest groups, teacher journals in addition to research journals, materials and programs for reading instruction in special education. Some needed LAT information can only be found through informal sources. Also, some pre-service contact prepares teachers for finding knowledge and mentors once in the field.

45. Encourage university staff such as practicum supervisors to be accommodating in their support of working teachers with on-going mentoring. It may help bridge the gap between university knowledge holders and practitioners in the field.

46. Teach prospective teachers to use inquiry and reflection to improve their reading instruction practice, and to work with colleagues to develop their knowledge. LATs do this, but knowing how ahead of time would help (24/34, 28/34).

47. Present information about a range of reading instruction methods and do not focus exclusively on the most recent ‘bandwagon’. LATs need to be able to use many methods and to approaches to suit the needs of all their students (32/31).
48. Continue regular publication of a speaker’s list and include a presentation
highlighting current reading research not only that completed at the local university
but about reading instruction generally. Teachers have few accessible means through
which they can hear about current research (18/34).

49. Advertise course and program offerings about reading instruction. Other universities
have glossy brochures in staffrooms and on individual teachers’ desks many times a
year; local universities should be among them (9/34, 10/34).

Professional Associations and Community Interest Groups

50. Collaborate with LATs and their districts to find the most effective ways to offer
support for learning more about reading instruction. These groups have much to offer
and the benefit of sharing information efficiently goes to students.

51. Continue to collect and present information about reading instruction for exceptional
children through electronic means. This is much valued and used by busy LATs.

Teachers’ Federations and Unions

52. Continue to set opportunities for shared professionalism among LATs. LATA in BC
was a valued example of an association that presented a wide range of supports
especially collegiality.

53. Offer more workshops, conference sessions, and other informal learning events about
reading. LATs report formal learning opportunities about reading instruction
especially with respect to exceptional learners are hard to find.

54. Continue to conduct research on LAT information needs regarding reading
instruction. Use this to encourage better supports throughout the education system
and beyond for developing LAT knowledge about reading instruction.
55. Investigate the advantages and disadvantages of the use of LAT standards of expertise with a goal of making information available for informed decisions. Standards may not negatively impact teacher access to LAT positions; no study LAT expressed any concern about the requirement of standards for their position and many teachers in both provinces said required standards offered them critical and massive support. Not having met the standards appeared not to impede teachers from taking LAT jobs.

**Teachers, Themselves**

56. Be more proactive in stating needs to other agents of possible supports such as districts, and in using communication opportunities to influence PD decisions at all levels. One administrator said she *needed* LATs to ask, so she could identify needs and address them (SKD1.23). Being heard enhanced a feeling of support (5/25).

57. Be available for and encourage collaborative decision-making and information sharing. Someone has to take a leadership role for these to happen and in some cases it may be LATs.

58. Continue to mentor colleagues and lead workshops when there is opportunity. Both parties increase their knowledge through such partnerships.