Students in the United States are underperforming academically. Overall, U.S. students placed 17th in Reading Literacy of 34 countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) test—a triennial 2-hr internationally agreed upon test to measure academic achievement of 15-year-old students. In mathematics, the scores were even lower. Here, students ranked 27th on the PISA survey of 34 OECD countries (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2013a). Students are not performing at grade level. PISA is not the only survey on which students underperformed. In 2015, only 36% of the fourth graders examined by the National Achievement Education Progress (NAEP) test scored in the proficient and advanced band in English language arts (ELA; The Nation’s Report Card, 2015b). In Math, 40% of the fourth graders examined by the NAEP were proficient and advanced (The Nation’s Report Card, 2015a). Only 79% of our students graduate from high school (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2013b).

In urban schools, achievement is lower than in suburban and rural areas. Here, students face obstacles far greater than their suburban and rural counterparts (Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996). Snipes, Doolittle, and Herlihy (2002) reported that urban school districts face the following challenges: low academic achievement, inexperienced teaching staff, lack of expectations, and high student mobility. They also reported that students of minority and disadvantaged backgrounds performed academically below their Anglo and socioeconomically advantaged peers. The statistics of student performance rate overall is concerning and so is the achievement gap between minorities and White students, students of disadvantaged backgrounds, and students of socioeconomically advantaged backgrounds.

Regula Schmid¹

Abstract
This qualitative multiple case study examined the beliefs and behaviors of three teachers who worked at former Reading First Schools and whose student population consistently scored 10% above state average on the California Standards Test (CST) in English language arts. Test scores of all teachers who taught under the Reading First initiative at 29 schools in a county in Southern California were considered. Consent to participate was secured for three teachers who met the study’s selection criteria. To identify the behaviors and beliefs of these teachers, the researcher conducted classroom observations and interviews with the teachers and their principals. The information gathered was coded and triangulated, and then reported by themes. The findings revealed that participating teachers believed that all students could and would learn, and that student learning was a direct reflection of their teaching. They also believed that for learning to take place, teachers engaged in their own professional learning and provided appropriate instruction. Professional learning included collaborating with colleagues and analyzing student data. Appropriate instruction included behaviors that engaged students in learning activities and provided a positive class climate. The findings of this study will contribute to teachers’ and school principals’ understanding of behaviors and beliefs of effective teachers. The study findings might also inform professional development for teachers and identify areas in which more research would be beneficial to the field of education in general and the teaching profession in particular.

Keywords
education, social sciences, achievement, education theory and practice, educational measurement & assessment, general education, teacher efficacy, effective teaching strategies, teacher beliefs, teacher education, teaching

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African American and Hispanic students have over time consistently scored lower on reading and math tests than their White and Asian peers (Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzzeo, 2000). This disparity holds true throughout all areas of the United States including urban, rural, and suburban areas, as well as across all socioeconomic backgrounds (Cowley & Meehan, 2002; Ferguson, 2002; Ogbu & Wood, 2002; Singham, 1998, 2003; Viadero & Johnston, 2000). This achievement gap is concerning.

Policy has been written, abandoned, and rewritten to address this concern. In 1983, the report A Nation at Risk was released by the U.S. Department of Education. It described this crisis. As a result, the federal government instituted punitive accountability measures for schools, including the No Child Left Behind Act, which has now been mostly repudiated. Instead, there is a policy shift toward less federal involvement and more state and local control. This allows for a new opportunity and responsibility to close the achievement gap.

In an attempt to close the achievement gap and increase student performance, the teaching force has been in the spotlight. Many studies have examined teacher effectiveness. Several studies focused on teacher preparation and certification (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Rice, 2003; Wayne & Youngs, 2003), others looked at teacher characteristics and beliefs (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Haberman, 1995; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Mowrer-Reynolds, 2008), while still others examined practices of effective teachers (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Moser & Tresch, 2003).

Because of the concerning statistics about student achievement, policy makers and researchers need to find solutions for the success for all students. Researchers have been working diligently to find out the cause for the low achievement and how to raise student achievement. They found that students from low socioeconomic status do worse than other students (Hernstein & Murray, 1994; Hertert & Teague, 2003).

The fact that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds perform at lower levels than their counterparts from advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds begs the question of whether or not teachers have enough impact to reverse the effect background has on student achievement. Researchers found that teachers indeed make a difference in student achievement (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sander, 2007; Chait, 2009; Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rockoff, 2004). Haycock (1998) even notes that a teacher has a greater impact on student achievement than any other factor, including socioeconomic status and parent education.

Individual teachers can affect high achievement in students even in low-achieving schools (Felch, Song, & Smith, 2010; Marzano et al., 2001). A question that begs asking is what activities or beliefs do these teachers exhibit that may account for the consistently high achievement levels of their students.

This study identified replicable strategies, behaviors, and beliefs teachers in low-performing schools exhibit that may lead to consistently high student achievement.

Research Questions

To better understand how teachers influence student performance, this study analyzed teacher behaviors and beliefs about teaching and learning. The following question was addressed: What do teachers believe and do that yields consistently high student test scores? To answer this question, the following sub-questions were addressed:

- What do teachers believe about their students’ ability to succeed?
- What do teachers believe enables students to succeed?
- What behaviors do the teachers exhibit that elicit student success?
- What personal beliefs do teachers profess about teaching and learning?

Summary of Relevant Research

Many studies indicated that some schools are effective at raising student achievement. In particular, success was documented by studies of high performing schools that served socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Barth et al., 1999; Center for Performance Assessment, 2009; Johnson & Asera, 1999; Lein, Johnson, & Ragland, 1997; Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2002; Reeves, 2014; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Research from these authors indicated that successful schools had certain factors in common. One such factor is a clear focus on student achievement. Other common factors included making purposeful curriculum choices and designing collaborative professional development sessions to focus on student achievement.

On the teacher level, the focus of the research has been on attempting to determine what constituted teacher quality and what impact it might have on student achievement. To this end, credentialing, preparation programs, teacher practices, characteristics, and beliefs were studied.

Darling-Hammond (2000) is one of the researchers who studied the impact of credentialing on student achievement. She found that teacher preparation and certification had a significant impact on student achievement. Her results confirmed a strong link between teachers holding the appropriate subject area credential and higher levels of achievement for their students.

Humphrey, Wechsler, and Hough (2008) studied actual teacher preparation programs. Their study included seven alternative teacher preparation programs and interviews with personnel of the programs, as well as a review of documents. The researchers found that teachers developed their skills and confidence best when placed in schools with strong
leadership, a collegial culture, and sufficient resources. They also reported that having an instructional coach had a positive correlation to teachers developing strong skills and confidence.

Effective teacher practices have been studied by a myriad of researchers. The literature identified effective practices such as frequent assessment and analyzing data (Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Moser & Tresch, 2003; Ripley, 2010), routines (Ripley, 2010), opportunities for students to interact (Smith, Lee, & Newmann, 2001), collaboration with other teachers (Moser & Tresch, 2003; Spencer & Spencer, 1993), clear objectives (Haberman, 1995; Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Marzano et al., 2001; Moser & Tresch, 2003; Ripley, 2010; Wray & Medwell, 1999), and feedback to students (Kannapel & Clements, 2005; Marzano et al., 2001).

In addition to teacher practices, teacher characteristics have long been studied as well. N. Brown, Morehead, and Smith (2008) found that education students perceived personal characteristics as the most important factor of a good teacher. Through pre–post class questionnaires and pictures, the authors analyzed the responses of 123 elementary preservice students in an education program. Using open-ended questions, students were asked to share their reflections on qualities of good teachers. Interestingly, before the course, students identified student centeredness as the second most important characteristic, while after the course, they identified teacher knowledge as the second most important characteristic. Other self-reported attributes included professionalism, classroom management, and teaching skills.

Teachers’ beliefs is a variable not well researched (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Teachers’ beliefs are a mixture of thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, and values about their roles as educators, education, and about how students learn (Vartuli, 2005). Some literature indicated that these thought processes affected teacher’s actions in the classroom (Vartuli, 2005). A number of other studies confirmed that teachers’ beliefs informed their actions (Grant, 1984; Richardson, Anderson, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991; Wilson, Readence, & Konopak, 2002). To empirically study this effect, other researchers examined teachers’ beliefs and checked them against a prescribed set of practices that teachers were to implement. The results of these studies showed that teachers’ beliefs do inform their practices (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991; McMullen, 1999; Stipek & Byler, 1997).

However, other research indicated that there was no correlation between teachers’ beliefs and actions. Jones and Gullo (1999), in their study of 13 first-grade teachers, found that there was no correlation between teachers’ beliefs and their practices.

Similarly, Hedrick, Harmon, and Linerode (2004) reported that teachers did not put into practice strategies that they believed would help students succeed. Poole-Christian (2009) observed teachers and conducted interviews with them to find that their practices were juxtaposed to their beliefs.

Other researchers sought to identify what beliefs teachers held. Among others, Ripley (2010) and Askew, Brown, Rhodes, Wiliam, and Johnson (1997) found that effective teachers believed that all children can learn. Further studies found that effective teachers believed that errors were part of learning (Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Thomas & Barksdale-Ladd, 1995) and that it was their duty to motivate students and to provide challenging differentiated instruction (Walden, 2008). Effective teachers also were found to believe that they must hold students accountable for the learning and that good teachers accomplished tasks, respected their students, and valued their diversity (Walden, 2008).

The literature summarized above indicated that teachers have an enormous impact on student achievement. In fact, according to Haycock (1998) the teacher has a greater impact on student achievement than socioeconomic background and parent education. Wright, Horn, and Sanders (1997) found that teachers have a greater impact on student achievement than class, heterogeneity, student achievement level, and class size. Given that teachers have such a great impact on student achievement, it is critical to identify what makes teachers successful in raising student achievement particularly in low socioeconomic schools and particularly since now there is more localized decision making that allows and calls for action to be taken.

Although the research indicates that teachers can make a difference in student achievement, even in low socioeconomic schools and with students of color, national and state achievement results indicate that many do not. As studies on teachers’ beliefs are limited, this study attempted to add to the research on the topic by identifying what some of those teachers who achieve high student achievement while the rest of their school was failing believe, and what they specifically do to assure that their students succeed.

Method

This qualitative study employed a multiple case study approach. Qualitative case studies are often used to understand phenomena in education (Merriam, 1998). A multiple case study is an inquiry strategy to explore individuals. Researchers using case studies collect data over a period of time and develop a framework to limit the time and activity for the study (Creswell, 2009). To use the methodology correctly, the cases must be bounded by an entity, program, or policy (Merriam, 1998). This case study was bounded by studying a fixed number of teachers, and by the activity, namely focusing on their instruction in ELA.

This study identified high performing teachers at low-performing Reading First schools in San Diego County. The Reading First program was a federal initiative to bring funds to underperforming schools with the purpose of improving instruction and thereby student learning in Grades K-3 (McKenna & Walpole, 2010). In Reading First Schools, teachers implemented an adopted ELA program, had yearly
access to a 1-week training in the adopted program, had access to a literacy coach, and collaborated regularly with other teachers about ELA instruction.

As Reading First was a K-3 initiative, an attempt was made to include in the study’s population all second and third grade and not Kindergarten and first grade as the California Standardized Test (CST) was first administered at the second grade. In addition, to be selected to participate in the study student achievement data in ELA as measured by the CST had to indicate that 10% more students performed proficient or above than was true for the State average each year for 3 consecutive years. The scores for ELA were chosen for this study because language arts was the focus of the Reading First initiative. It did not include other content areas (Reading First California Technical Assistance Center, 2008). Therefore, it was likely that all Reading First teachers enjoyed similar professional development in ELA. Professional development and curriculum are intervening variables. By confining the study to teachers who had similar professional development experiences and implemented the same curriculum, these intervening variables were more controlled (Creswell, 2009).

There were 33 Reading First schools in this county. Only 29 were considered as the other four were located in the researcher’s district. To avoid a conflict of interest for the researchers, those four schools were not considered. Furthermore, two districts, which were comprised of 11 schools that fit the criteria, chose not to participate and did not divulge how many teachers in their districts would have met the criteria. Among the remaining 18 schools, which had Reading First programs, eight teachers met the criteria. One teacher could not be included because he or she retired. Another could not be included because the researcher was denied permission by the district to include him or her in the study. One teacher’s principal and two teachers were unwilling to participate. Therefore, the remaining three willing teachers and their principals made up the participant list.

A predesigned set of questions generated from research and current literature about effective teachers was used to gather data from the participating teachers and their school principals. The researcher also observed each of the participating teachers for one and a half days. Observation notes focused on the presence or absence of teachers’ behaviors and beliefs identified in the literature as indicators of successful teaching. Each teacher and their principals were interviewed twice to ensure validity of the results. The data were then coded and triangulated.

**Delimitations**

The study consisted of only three teachers in San Diego County and is not generalizable to a greater audience. Furthermore, the study focused on observation notes of one researcher and, thereby, findings are limited to her perceptions and interpretations. In addition, the information gathered in interviews with the teachers and principals are their perceptions and any interpretations are those of one researcher.

**Summary of the Results**

The academic achievement of Kindergarten through 12th grade students is a paramount concern to policy makers, educators, parents, and the public at large. Entire schools are failing (Duncan, 2009). Policy makers and educators are reforming entire schools. Even at schools that are failing, there are pockets of excellence—teachers whose students perform well. This study investigated the beliefs and behaviors of three such teachers whose students performed above the State Averages on the CST for three consecutive years. Study data indicated that the participating teachers held the following beliefs:

1. All students can and will learn, which is a reflection of the teacher.
2. Professional learning correlates into students’ success.
3. Appropriate instruction enables students to succeed.

**Discussion of Results**

This study found that participating teachers believed that all students could and would learn, and that this learning was a reflection on the teachers. They believed and engaged in professional learning, and they believed that appropriate instruction led to students’ success. Therefore, appropriate instruction was paramount. Teachers in this study did not give up and went after student success with a relentless tenacity. They learned about teaching and learning and taught and retaught until all students understood. They clearly believed that their actions could elicit success. This belief relates to the theory of self-efficacy, which is the notion that if people believe their behavior will affect a certain desired outcome, they will exhibit that behavior (Bandura, 1977).

In addition to the belief that all students could and would learn, all three teachers believed and engaged in professional learning. This learning looked similar for all three teachers. All three teachers engaged in data analysis and professional development such as working collaboratively and attending curriculum workshops. They also engaged and participated in professional development by obtaining a master’s degree and accumulating at least 8 years of experience. Interestingly, while the three teachers in this study had a master’s degree and at least 8 years of experience, existing research is mixed about the relationships between advanced degrees and student achievement and experience and student achievement. The majority of the existing research reported that years of experience had a positive impact on student achievement and that this impact is greatest between the third and fifth year of service and after that it tapers off each year (Clotfelter, Ladd,
& Vigdor, 2006; Klitgaard & Hall, 1974; Murnane & Phillips, 1981; Rockoff, 2004; Rosenholtz, Bassler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 1986; Rothman, 2009). This research might explain why the study teachers’ students’ scores were high for the last three consecutive years. It would be interesting to know during which service year their students started to show higher than State average scores and whether or not the students’ scores increased most during the third and fifth year.

While professional learning data looked similar among the study teachers, data under the themes of appropriate instruction did not look similar. It was driven by the belief that all students could and would learn and that appropriate instruction would be the instrument used to get students to learn. Interestingly, this looked different in each of the three classrooms. One teacher believed that key to appropriate instruction was student engagement. This belief was expressed in almost anything she did in the classroom from providing students with practice to holding students accountable. The other two teachers believed that it was crucial that students were comfortable and happy. Their interactions with students and their application of appropriate instruction were motivated by this belief.

The overarching themes of beliefs and behaviors not only answered the research question, but also more specifically addressed the study’s following sub-questions: (a) What do teachers believe about their students’ ability to succeed? (b) What do teachers believe enables students to succeed? (c) What personal beliefs do teachers profess about teaching and learning? and (d) What behaviors do the teachers exhibit that elicit student success? The following conclusions are drawn regarding the sub-questions:

1. All three teachers believed that every student could and would learn and that this learning was a direct reflection on the effectiveness of their teaching. This belief addressed the sub-research questions regarding teacher beliefs about their students’ ability to succeed, as well as the sub-question about teachers’ personal beliefs of teaching and learning. It made clear that the teachers believed every single child in their room had the ability to succeed. One principal said about the teacher, “She always gets such good results, even though she had a very challenging beginning of the year because her students are barely speaking English. She is able to move them. So, I think it is that belief that they can, they will, and I will find a way to do it.” Furthermore, the fact that the teachers saw student success as their report card indicated that they believed they were effective as teachers if students succeeded and ineffective if students did not succeed. Thus, to be effective, they had to ensure that students succeeded. The teacher belief that all students could and would learn and that teachers were responsible for learning taking place not only allowed teachers to see success as attainable for all students but also made them feel responsible to ensure that it occurred. This was evident, for example, during an observation when the teacher during independent practice went over to a student who was working with a one-on-one special education aide and helped the student with the work. This was an indication that the teacher took responsibility for the success of even the student who had help from another adult. It was also evident during the interview when a teacher said that she always reminds her students, “You can do it. You can learn if you give it your all. And, I have to do my best teaching, too.”

2. For success to take place for all students and for teachers to exhibit their best teaching, the teachers believed that they personally needed to engage in professional learning that would better enable them to provide appropriate instruction to each student. This is one potential belief that guided what they did and answered the sub-question about teacher beliefs that enabled students to succeed. The three teachers believed that for their students to be able to be successful, they had to continuously learn new teaching strategies through professional development. One teacher when asked what she thought contributed to her students’ success said, “When we became Reading First, I got to go to week-long trainings. That really helped make me a more confident teacher. I learned a lot about reading.” She further said, “It wasn’t until we became Reading First and I got to go to the week long trainings that I got good.” The teachers further believed they had to learn about their students’ strengths and weaknesses through data analysis to know where each student stood academically; and they had to plan and implement lessons accordingly. A teacher said during the interview, “being able to analyze data and act upon it really fast can help.” The teachers also believed that if they provided appropriate instruction, students would be able to succeed.

3. As teachers believed that students had the ability to succeed and that their behaviors enabled students to succeed, they believed that if they engaged in professional learning leading to improved teaching on their part, all students not only could but also would succeed. Thus, they exhibited a number of behaviors which answered the research sub-question regarding behaviors they exhibited that elicited student success. All three teachers engaged in a cycle of professional learning, applying that learning and teaching using that new learning and then reflecting on outcomes, and getting additional learning as needed. Teachers, therefore, engaged in collaboration with other teachers, analyzed students’ data, and taught to students’ needs that emerged from the data analysis. They also sought out coaching. One teacher, when asked what
contributed to her students’ success said, “I have always had mentors.” Teachers taught and retaught relentlessly until students learned because they believed that students would succeed. They taught to the entire group as well as to small groups of students. One teacher shared that students who do not score well on comprehension tests “get re-teaching . . . They are being pulled three times a week.” Another teacher said, “I re-teach when they don’t get it.” It was clear that teachers identified exactly what it was that students needed and taught to that need. Even individual work was differentiated to meet students’ needs and to allow them to practice skills and strategies that were individually identified needs. This relentlessness, perseverance, and tenacity with which teachers pursued student success were remarkable. This might indicate that when students are given appropriate instruction, customized to fit their needs, they do indeed learn and succeed.

These conclusions and reflections on the study also raised several questions:

- Which findings, if any, contributed to the high achievement on the CST and to what degree?
- Would teachers have achieved similar academic achievement results had they not held the beliefs found in this investigation?
- Could the behaviors and beliefs make an impact independent of each other, or do they both have to coexist to make a difference? This study was not an impact study. It merely identified beliefs and behaviors of three teachers, at former Reading First Schools, whose students were successful on the CST. One wonders about the measurable impact of the beliefs and behaviors found in this study.
- Do beliefs translate into action or does action guide the development of beliefs? No attempt was made to discern how teachers felt about this debate. Perhaps it is an important question which if answered might have a great impact on how school leaders attempt to make school changes.

These questions and conclusions have further implications for research and for practice. The next section examines the implications for further research.

**Implications for Further Research**

The purpose of this study was to find out what teachers whose students performed well academically believed about education and what they did as a consequence. It would be of interest to know whether or not these beliefs and behaviors were the direct cause of students’ success and to what degree.

What was also unclear from this study was whether these behaviors and beliefs were unique to the three teachers studied, or would studies find similar results for other teachers in like circumstances (working at an overall low-performing school). Such a study might address the same question but with a larger sample of teachers in California who meet similar selection criteria.

This study did not include subgroup demographic information as part of the selection criteria. For teachers to have more similar student populations, and thus more informative results, another study could be designed to include a selection criterion stipulating how many English learners and students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds the participating teacher had in his or her class. Furthermore, the schools should be of similar student populations and academic ranking. Although the schools chosen for this study were all low performing schools, over the years they made different academic growth. A selection criterion could be included to ensure that the schools have similar student populations and academic performance indicators.

It would also be interesting to find out what impact each of the Reading First Assurances—such as yearly weeklong teacher trainings on adopted curriculum, implementation of core curriculum, extended reading block, data analysis, and access to a coach (California Department of Education, 2002)—had on student achievement. Not only would it be of interest and significance to know which of the Reading First Assurances had the most impact on the overall student population served in California but on specific subgroups in particular. One of the key issues faced by the teachers at the three participating schools was that not all subgroups met the federal and state academic performance requirements. If educators knew what practices had the most impact on each subgroup, then teachers and school administrators could strive to apply these practices.

The teachers in this study applied different practices that they believed constituted appropriate instruction. It would be of interest to know exactly what impact each strategy has on English language learners in particular. Such a study should not be limited to the end of the year examinations, but should take into account long-term academic data.

In addition to knowing which practices affect which subgroups, it would be of interest to know which beliefs affect each subgroup and whether or not they drive practice or if practice drives the beliefs.

Future research on this topic also needs to investigate how teachers believe they come about their beliefs about teaching and learning. If they have beliefs that translate into instructional behaviors, this has important implications for school leaders, researchers, and preservice faculty. More research studies should be conducted to pinpoint exactly how students’ success can be maximized. Hopefully, all of these studies should bear in mind the implications they might have on the daily practices in classrooms and schools to maximize...
student achievement. The present study had several implications for practices that are addressed here.

**Implications for Practice**

This study found that effective teachers (a) believe that their students can and will learn and that this learning was a direct reflection on their quality as a teacher. In other words, their level of self-efficacy was high. Believing that all students can learn and having a high level of self-efficacy can have a positive impact on student achievement (Bandura, 1993; Gibson & Dembo, 1984). This has implications for site administrators who are responsible for creating a school culture that leads to student success (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). If a school faculty and school leaders all held the belief that all students can learn, it could create a culture of high expectations where failing is not an option. Beliefs and behaviors that lead to high student achievement would have to be modeled, nurtured, and fostered by school administrators. Developing such a culture would also require the need for administrators to provide professional development, coaching structures, and collaboration time for teachers to journal, reflect, and discuss with their colleagues what they believe about teaching and learning and about their students’ ability to succeed. Such discussions might serve to alter beliefs and may provide a forum to nurture and support desired behaviors.

These discussions could be enriched by cross visitations. These observations would provide data to discuss and reflect on during professional development sessions. They would also provide teachers with the observable data that might indeed help them change their instructional behaviors (Schlechty, 1997). Changing beliefs and behaviors through modeling, discussions, reflections, and observations should not occur as one-time professional development activities at the beginning of the year. Rather, they should occur regularly throughout the year to establish and maintain a culture where every teacher believes in students’ ability to succeed and sees this success as his or her report card.

Another implication for school principals relates to the impact of recruiting and hiring teachers who might fit into this no excuses culture. It is crucial that school leaders expend the energy to hire faculty equipped with the desired beliefs, behaviors, and characteristics to support a culture of success in raising student achievement.

Teachers in this study indicated that professional learning opportunities translated into their doing a better job for students. They also mentioned that collaborating with their colleagues, data analysis, and professional development were crucial learning activities. These activities are not done in isolation and require common time. This also has implications for school leaders. The schools in this study provided common time by implementing a minimum day schedule. Three schools all had four lengthened instructional days and one shortened day. During the short day, teachers used the time after dismissal to collaborate with each other or engage in professional development activities. This is only one way to find time. But, time becomes an implication that will require school leaders and staff to come together around common beliefs, to lobby the school districts and communities for support for their ideas and find methods by which to achieve their goals.

Study teachers used instructional strategies that led them to achieve high student achievement. School leaders need to consider whether research supports the use of such instructional strategies and whether they should be encouraged throughout the school. If so, this has implications for school-wide professional development opportunities and in teacher coaching sessions. It also offers opportunities for school leaders to showcase the work of successful teachers by allowing them to share how they applied these strategies and discuss results with the faculty. This would allow other teachers to learn from their peers and to make decisions about trying new strategies without the mandate from school leaders. The results of this study not only have implications for site administrators; just as importantly, they have implications for teachers.

**Implications for Site Administrators**

The teachers in this study believed that all students could and would learn and that this learning was a direct reflection on their quality as a teacher. In other words, their level of self-efficacy was high. Believing that all students can learn and having a high level of self-efficacy can have a positive impact on student achievement (Bandura, 1993; Gibson & Dembo, 1984). This has implications for site administrators who are responsible for creating a school culture that leads to student success (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). If a school faculty and school leaders all held the belief that all students can learn, it could create a culture of high expectations where failing is not an option. Beliefs and behaviors that lead to high student achievement would have to be modeled, nurtured, and fostered by school administrators. Developing such a culture would also require the need for administrators to provide professional development, coaching structures, and collaboration time for teachers to journal, reflect, and discuss with their colleagues what they believe about teaching and learning and about their students’ ability to succeed. Such discussions might serve to alter beliefs and may provide a forum to nurture and support desired behaviors.

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**Implications for Teachers**

The belief that all students can and will learn seemed to be the bottom line for two of the three teachers studied. One implication of this finding may be that if other teachers were aware of the student gains made by the study teachers, they might attempt to emulate their peers’ instructional strategies in hopes of duplicating their success (Schlechty, 1997).

The teachers in this study believed in professional learning and engaged in it on a daily basis via student data collection and analysis, collaboration with colleagues, professional development workshops, and obtaining advanced degrees. This might imply that if other teachers want to make gains such as those demonstrated by the study teachers, they too may want to evaluate their commitment and participation in continuous learning. These opportunities might include taking classes toward an advanced degree, collecting and analyzing student data, collaborating with peers, and attending professional development workshops.

Participating teachers also believed in appropriate instruction, which included giving students opportunities for practice, providing corrective feedback, holding students...
accountable, assessing students frequently, praising and redirecting students, and differentiating instruction. One implication of this study is that if other teachers apply these strategies, their students may achieve at higher levels. Thus, the schools might want to focus resources on supporting learning about the instructional strategies demonstrated by teachers in this study.

Implications for Preservice Programs, Professors, and Policy Makers

Stuart and Thurlow (2000) found that in teacher training classes that focused on beliefs, discussions and reflections provided just such a forum and did indeed result in changes in beliefs. Results from this study might also influence the design of educational policy and reform efforts. Because of the current conditions of education, law makers and politicians are continuously calling for reform. Results from this study might serve as the foundation for educational reform if policy makers channeled their reform efforts by granting fiscal resources to preservice, service, and mentoring programs that support the beliefs and behaviors that exceptional teachers exhibit. Furthermore, findings might also affect required coursework during preservice. The beliefs and behaviors that lead to increased student learning should be taught, discussed, and reflected upon during preservice coursework. Even before that, during the selection for admissions process, candidates’ beliefs should be taken into consideration.

The implications outlined above offer hope. Hope that reform efforts will take into considerations the findings of this study; university admissions practices will take into consideration candidates’ beliefs; teacher candidates will be educated in the strategies found to be effective in this and previous research and warranted opportunity to reflect on and refine their beliefs; teachers who possess beliefs and strategies that lead to student achievement will be hired and will be given opportunities for appropriate professional development, collaboration, and reflection; and that in turn all students, regardless of their background, will achieve at higher levels.

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