Looking Through Their Lens: The Decisions about Reading Instruction Made by Experienced 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} Grade Teachers

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Abstract

Classroom teachers determine how reading is taught and their decisions are influenced both by the policies instituted by local, state and national agencies and the beliefs teachers hold. Teacher decision making strongly influences the teaching of reading in classrooms. Marzano (2003) stated, “… all researchers agree that the impact of decisions made by individual teachers is far greater than the impact of decisions made at the school level (p. 71).

Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) state “quality classroom instruction in kindergarten and the primary grades is the single best weapon against reading failure” (p. 343). Research on teacher decision making developed in the early 1980’s, yet little current research focuses on decision making concerning reading instruction. Often studies examine primary level reading instruction and if grades beyond primary are investigated, comprehension is the center of the examination (Durkin, 1978).

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine the decisions 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade experienced teachers make in their reading instructional practices. A case study approach was used with an analysis of data from field based observations and semi-structured interviews of 7 public school classroom teachers in one school. Artifact analysis from teacher samples and an analysis of reading instructional policies within the school and schools system were used to expand the analysis of data.

Three major themes were identified: (1) grouping; (2) instructional focus; and (3) strategies. Major differences were found between second grade, where students did not take the state mandated testing (SMT), and third and fourth grades where students were required to take the state mandated testing (SMT). Second grade teachers focused their reading instruction on the aesthetic components of reading with the purpose of developing readers who found enjoyment in reading. Third and fourth grade teachers focused their reading instruction on preparing students for test taking. This dissonance in reading instruction created a gap, or chasm in the decisions made about reading instruction in these grades. The chasm appeared to be based on the dissonance of purpose for grade levels. The emphasis on passing the SMT greatly affected the purpose of teacher decisions on the third and fourth grade levels, and this purpose is influenced by local, state and federal policy of accountability by high-stakes testing.
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Dedication

“You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing which you think you cannot do.”

~Eleanor Roosevelt~

I could not have completed this journey without the help of the following people:

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   Thank you for your inspiration. By telling me your story, I have reached this goal.

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   Your comforted me with your patience and willingness to listen and understanding.
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   You called me when I could not talk, you held me when I could not breathe.

The completion of this degree fulfills my highest dreams. It was not without pain, suffering, sadness, tears, and life lessons. I am thankful for each of these. Life is impermanent. I live for the present – it is the gift. Let me always remember that the will of God will never take me where the grace of God will not protect me.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~In Memory and Love~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Phyllis Travisano
5/4/51 – 8/12/04
Thank you!
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

For more than two centuries, American public schools have employed a plethora of diverse methods to teach reading, methods which often contradict one another. Classroom teachers determine how reading is taught and their decisions are influenced both by the policies instituted by local, state and national agencies and the beliefs teachers hold. One assumption is that teacher decision making strongly influences the teaching of reading in classrooms.

Conceptual Framework

The processes of teaching reading have been influenced by any number of more classical learning theories over time. Most recently, three major frameworks - behaviorist, developmental and constructivist learning theories have been identified as having significant influence. Understandings about teacher decisions and beliefs about teaching reading have moved from the shift of behaviorism in the 1960’s to cognitive psychology beginning in the late 1970’s. As this shift occurred, researchers moved from examining the sequential behaviors of teachers toward studying thought processes used in their teaching. As researchers began to study teachers’ cognitive structures and events in classrooms, “…a magnitude of ways of characterizing how knowledge might be constructed in the minds of individuals and the nature of that knowledge in particular domains of expertise” (Borko & Putnam, 1996, p. 674) were identified. Clough (1999) reminds us that “complexities inherent in learning and teaching make [it] unlikely that one learning theory will fit all circumstances” (p. 328). However, Guerrero (2005) provides support for a framework of cognitive psychology when teacher knowledge and decision making intersect.

Knowledge as a construct

The construct of knowledge in cognitive psychology has several assumptions. First, prior knowledge and beliefs are viewed as filters through which teachers interpret their actions and they effect decision making in the classroom (Borko & Putnam, 1996; Cohen & Ball, 1990; Keys, 2007; Mayer, 1992). Second, knowledge is gained in specific contexts and is a product of action within a context surrounded by the culture of the context (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). The classroom, as well as the school itself is the immediate culture teachers rely upon in making decisions about their teaching. Last, acquisition of knowledge for teaching is an actively
changing process. Teacher knowledge and expertise grows through classroom teaching experiences and interactions within the context of their classrooms (Fennema & Franke, 1992).

The terms knowledge and beliefs are often used simultaneously in research with no concurring definitions. Some authors maintain it is impossible to separate beliefs and knowledge (Fennema & Franke, 1992), while others contend that separating teacher beliefs and knowledge can help delineate the understanding of teacher practices (Calderhead, 1996; Carter, 1990). Teacher decisions rely on “… teacher’s knowing about different things (e.g., curriculum, students, assessment, instruction, and teaching in general) as well as possessing different types of knowledge (representation of skills, strategies, images, habits, concepts and prepositions)” (Guerrero, 2005, p. 251). It is the practical as well as professional knowledge that informs the practice of teachers.

**Categorizing knowledge**

Shulman (1986a, 1986b, 1987) identified three predominant domains that categorize teacher knowledge. Understandings of teacher knowledge have been validated and developed relative to these domains during the last two decades. The three domains identified by Shulman are: general pedagogical knowledge, subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. These three domains do not have clear boundaries and are not mutually exclusive. However, they provide a framework for examining teacher knowledge in the realm of teaching reading.

*General pedagogical knowledge*

General pedagogical knowledge refers to the knowledge teachers use to organize their classrooms and the management principles teachers utilize in the act of teaching. Guerrero (2005) further explains that this area includes general knowledge about teaching, learning and the learners. It “… includes knowledge of various strategies and arrangements for effective classroom management, instructional strategies for conducting lessons and creating learning environments, and more fundamental knowledge… about learners, how they learn, and how that learning can be fostered by teaching” (Borko & Putnam, 1996, p.675). This domain sets the stage for teaching.

*Subject matter knowledge*

Teacher knowledge of major facts and concepts within a discipline, as well as the relationships between these concepts, is at the core of teacher decision making (Grossman, 1990;
Shulman, 1986a, 1986b). Teachers make decisions about which concepts are essential for children to learn to read as well as those concepts which are nonessential on daily basis. This knowledge provides for organization and connection of ideas to learning and is a significant aspect of reading teachers’ subject matter understandings (Borko & Putnam, 1996). Currently, there is a demand to have ‘highly qualified’ teachers in all realms of education. Highly qualified is a term current in the literature, penned as part of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), 2001 which states “… all teachers of core academic subjects in the classroom be highly qualified. This is determined by three essential criteria: (1) attaining a bachelor's degree or better in the subject taught; (2) obtaining full state teacher certification; and (3) demonstrating knowledge in the subjects taught” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Qualifications for teachers demand higher education coursework to support content knowledge.

*Pedagogical content knowledge*

This important domain encompasses teachers’ knowledge of how to blend their understandings of subject matter and general pedagogical knowledge in order to develop strategies for pinpointing specific skills and knowledge to be taught that are unique to a specific content area. Shulman (1986a, 1986b, 1987) explains this domain as inclusive of the strategies teachers use to make the subject matter easily understood. Therefore, teachers must have an understanding of reading instruction and a repertoire of ways for delivering reading instruction in understandable ways to students. According to Shulman (1986a), this comprehensive teacher understanding includes knowledge of what is simple or difficult for students, as well as the preconceptions students bring with them to the learning situation. This knowledge is essential to teachers in their decision making.

*Decision making*

Commonly, teachers are described as decision makers in classrooms (Klimczak and Balli, 1995). Teachers identify ways to model strategies for understanding and ways to arrange the content to teach. These decisions influence the methods and practices teachers choose to use and therefore impact learning outcomes. Teachers hold sets of beliefs, practices, theories and knowledge that reflect how they approach any learning situation (Keyes, 2007). This knowledge shapes the direction of the practices they choose. Decision making has a long history in the literature, found in all academic, professional and social aspects of life.
Practices

Clough and Kaufmann (1999) created a visual model (See Figure 1) that reveals a representation of how teachers might make choices concerning their strategies and the materials they choose in teaching science, based on perceptions of students’ cognitive abilities and their students’ prior knowledge. Can these components serve as a model for teaching reading? The emphasis in this model on the areas of teachers’ prior knowledge influencing the process of planning, putting plans into practice and evaluating plans for the content area they teach is noteworthy. This emphasis is a reflection of a constructivist theoretical approach based on the work of Piaget and expanded by Vtgotsky (Darling-Hammond, Austin, Orcott, Russo, 2001), and supports the domains Shulman identified. The intent of teachers’ decisions is a factor that influences instruction.

Two primary assumptions can be considered to represent the intent of teachers’ classroom decision making. The first assumption is that teachers are rational concerning their practice. According to Shavelson and Stern (1981), “teachers behave reasonably in making judgments and decisions in an uncertain, complex environment” (p. 456-457). These authors go on to explain that although teachers may act reasonably, this does not mean their decisions are always the most advantageous for student or teacher goals.
Another assumption is that teachers are guided by their decisions, judgments and thoughts. The research about teachers’ decisions, thoughts and judgments is complex because of the difficulty of examining not only what teachers think, but also how teachers’ thoughts get carried into actions (Shavelson & Stern, 1981). In the 1980’s, studies about teacher decision making often used novice, or preservice teachers or a combination of preservice and experienced teachers (Klimczak & Balli, 1995; Olson, 2005; Shavelson & Stern, 1981; Shefelbin & Hollinsworth, 1987; Westerman, 1991). Research methods used to capture the cognitive processes and decision making of teachers have not used correlational and experimental research; instead, they have involved collecting qualitative data to probe teachers’ thoughts and decision making. One helpful methodology to examine teacher decision making is to use a case study method (Shavelson & Stern, 1981).

As decision making made its way to the forefront of teacher preparation research, a pivotal publication in reading instruction by Borko, Shavelson & Stern (1981) emerged. According to these authors, research that began in the 1960’s focused on the correlations between teacher behavior and student achievement, leaving out the inclusion of teachers’ “goals, motives, knowledge, plans, decisions and the like” (p. 451). A shift toward including aspects of teachers’ beliefs and the influence on decision making provided more insight on teaching reading. These authors chose to review four research studies and centered on teachers’ planning decisions and grouping for reading instruction.

Within the last 10 years, no research was located in which experienced teachers’ decision making about reading instruction was examined. Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) state “quality classroom instruction in kindergarten and the primary grades is the single best weapon against reading failure” (p. 343). Examining how experienced teachers make their decisions about reading instructional is the focus of this study.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the decisions 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade experienced teachers make in their reading instructional practices. An experienced teacher was defined as a teacher who had taught 3 years or more and was currently tenured with the school system in which he/she works. Reading research regarding teachers in grades above primary grades often concentrates on the use of instructional practices for comprehension (Durkin, 1978; Johnston,
1985; Pearson, & Fielding, 1991; Pressley 2000). However, no current research was found that examined how elementary teachers delivered their complete reading programs to students in grades 2-4. In the quest to examine what works for teachers and their students in public schools, this study was an examination of current reading practices of experienced public school elementary teachers.

An examination of the reading practices of public school elementary teachers offers practical ways to consider how teachers are currently teaching reading to their students. By examining the reading instructional practices in one school utilizing case study methodology, a rich description of reading instruction in a school revealed how students were being taught to read. In addition this study examined the decisions teachers were making about reading instruction in an accountability driven educational climate.

Research Questions

1) What decisions are 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade teachers making for reading instruction?

2) On what basis do teachers make these decisions?
CHAPTER 2
Review of Literature

Statement of the Problem

The research problem is a lack of understanding about decisions made by today’s teachers concerning how to best teach children to read. Little current research focuses on what teachers are doing in existing school environments that are highly influenced by the reading achievement scores of students. Wharton-McDonald, Pressley and Hampston (1998) reported “there is a lack of systematic study of effective teachers, a lack of understanding of their practices and perspectives” (p. 102). This study examined what decisions teachers were making to support the acquisition of reading skills in a school where achieving adequate yearly progress has recently been attained.

This chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to, supportive of and that guided this study and is divided into four major sections: (1) historical foundation of reading methods and practices; (2) reading research; (3) current understandings of methods and practices in reading instruction; and (4) decision making models and premises.

Historical Foundation of Reading Methods and Practices

Before the founding of public schools, education in the United States was a private endeavor and an elitist opportunity for the wealthiest families. Our initial independent government, along with its founding documents was designed and written by the scholars of the time – Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson – all men who gained education through private tutors (Robinson, 2000). These men were proponents of ‘free schools’ in the early 1800’s. Public school evolved from concept of these ‘free schools’ with the support of Horace Mann who believed the concept of common schools provided education for all and that every child had the right to a free education (Hunt, 2000).

In 1908, Edmund Huey in his classic text, Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading stated: “It [reading] is the noblest of arts, the medium by which there still comes to us the loftiest inspirations, the highest ideals, the purest feelings, that have been allowed mankind”(p. 5). The history of education, and therefore the history of reading instruction are important backdrops for this study. The foundation of teachers’ decision making about reading instruction in classrooms is rooted in teacher understandings of education. It is these understandings of education, coupled with teachers’ beliefs that affect methods and practices in teaching reading.
Methodology and Practices of Reading Instruction

The variety of methodologies used in reading instruction has a historical basis (Cowen, 2003; Hunt, 2002; Allington, 2002; Robinson, 2000; Stahl, 1998). By the 1800’s, documentation of reading instruction reflects two approaches, the whole word approach and the phonics approach. The whole word method is repeated exposure to words with a committing of these words to memory, while the phonics approach comprises using individual sounds of letters merged together to make words. By the beginning of the 1920’s, both approaches became less popular (Giordano, 2000). In the past century, basal, neurological and whole language approaches were most commonly used by teachers, some with phonics methods embedded (Cowen, 2003).

Basal Approach

Some other short lived techniques used to teach reading emerged in the 1920’s. The look-say method and the silent reading method were popular but were quickly replaced in the 1930’s by what is commonly known as the ‘Dick & Jane’ series of readers credited to William S. Gray, whose influence in reading gave power over how teachers were trained in reading instruction. From the ‘Dick and Jane’ basal series of Scott-Foresman to his yearly summaries entitled Summary of Investigations Relating to Reading, Gray, the first president of the International Reading Association, investigated reading practices and was a significant authority in the introduction of remedial reading programs within classrooms. These basal readers loosely comprised the budding concept of basal programs and only incremental changes in these programs occurred between the 1930’s to the 1960’s (Chall, 1996). Basically, basal programs used a whole word approach with a meaning emphasis while decoding skills were not taught until students demonstrated solid knowledge of basic sight words (Stahl, 1998). This was a move away from the method of sight word recognition utilized in the 1800’s.

By the mid 1960’s, basal stories had more diverse settings beyond the middle class home of Dick and Jane. In addition, the control of vocabulary in these basals relaxed, making the language more natural and interesting as well as presenting words in phonetic patterns with a greater emphasis on the analytical phonics approach (Stahl, 1998). This shift toward decoding words came on the heels of Flesch’s (1955) Why Johnny Can’t Read and Chall’s (1967) Learning to Read: The Great Debate. This change was assisted by a general sentiment in the population about reading, as well as research refocusing on the process of decoding evidenced in
the works of Kaveanaugh & Mattingly (1972) and Levin & Williams (1970). As Gerald Giordano points out in his book, *Twentieth-Century Reading Education: Understanding Practices of Today in Terms of Patterns of the Past* (2000), the controversy about how reading should be taught did not really start in 1955 when Rudolph Flesch published *Why Johnny Can’t Read*. Rather, Giordano found that the roots of the debate began back in the 1800’s when alphabetic systems of reading were replaced with phonics, whole-word methods and language-based methods. His premise was that this remedial reading approach, espoused by William S. Gray and Albert Gates, began because as more and more diverse approaches became prominent, individualized instruction through remedial fashion became the norm. However, when remedial methods failed to hold back the surge of dissent about the lack of reading success in public schools, the controversy exploded forth into the 20th century and beyond to today.

**Neurological Approach**

In addition, during the era of the 1950’s and 1960’s, reading was being explored in experiments of psychologists. One research assumption was that if the physical factors could be understood, reading problems could be solved. Beginning as far back as the early 1900’s with studies of the eye movements of adults during reading, researchers ushered in the ideas of visual perception as a significant variable in reading (Goins, 1958; Frostig, 1961). Additionally, neurological theories for teaching reading supported the use of Orton-Gillingham instructional programs (Gillingham & Stillman, 1960) which based its approach in explicit instruction in phonology and phonological awareness, sound-symbol relationships, syllables, morphology, syntax and semantics in a multisensory fashion using visual, auditory and kinesthetic/tactile awareness. This multisensory approach combined skill development in reading instruction by using explicitly patterned formats for teachers to follow. Some approaches to reading instruction today are based on the work of Orton, Gillingham and Stillman as specialized programs used for special education students, like the Wilson Reading System (Wilson, 1996). These programs have not been sufficiently studied and there is little evidence that they have any definitive success (Richey & Goeke, 2006).

Adding to the fragmentation and ever-changing scenario of reading instruction, the 1960’s also saw research on word recognition methods. Even the Office of Education coordinated research studies through independent studies in primary grades (Bond & Dykstra,
1967, Dykstra, 1968). From these studies came the trend to establish neurological factors as the cause for the lack of reading success.

**Whole Language Approach**

An emphasis on phonics was at the foundation of basal programs until the concept of whole language broke through in the 1980’s. Turbill (2002) referred to classrooms as “phonics factories” because children were using the structure of the language in ways never before thought possible. During the whole language revolution, a holistic perception of teaching reading for the purpose of making meaning was supported by the researchers Jerry Harste (1989) and Brian Cambourne (1990; 1994). Beginning in 1969, Ken and Yetta Goodman developed the concepts about three areas of language - semantic, syntactic and graphophonic knowledge - through their work with miscue analysis and Ken Goodman’s work in psycholinguistics. Their research supported the development of teaching of reading in a more holistic manner consistent with whole language theories. Whole language did not preclude phonics instruction. Phonics was viewed as important to decoding in context of reading, not as a separate entity.

The premises behind whole language methods were that: (1) literature is used in whole pieces, not abridgments or in segments as often found in basal readers; (2) each student has choice in what they read rather than teacher selections for whole class; and (3) the teacher provides integrated language experiences rather than direct instruction on isolated skills for reading (Jeynes & Littell, 2000). Bergeron (1990) asserts that no one definition for whole language exists; however, there are 6 basic attributes which include the: (1) construction of meaning; (2) functional or relevant language; (3) literature; (4) use of the writing process; (5) cooperative work between students; and (6) student choice (p. 319). Ken Goodman (1992) gives a definition that whole language is a “reading and writing curriculum which uses real, authentic literature and real books. It puts learners in control of what they read and write about” (p. 196).

At the same time, the reading and writing connection brought about a natural sorting out of the graphophonic system. Donald Graves (1983; 1994), a prominent proponent of children’s writing, appreciated reading instruction that included the immersion in the language of books and the engagement of young children in writing. With whole language instruction, children were writing like the rich literature they were reading, and as Smith (1998) purports, “you learn from the company you keep” (p. 27). Whole language brought rich children’s literature for
students to the forefront of reading instruction. The idea that reading, writing, and spelling should be connected in instruction spawned the broader term, literacy.

According to Yetta Goodman (1989), the beliefs supporting whole language began in the late 17th century with the use of picture books, use of the familiar in children’s lives, (or tapping into prior knowledge) using their native language as well as hands-on activities centering on the learner. This focus on the learner does not negate the curriculum; rather, it enhances the concept that curriculum can only be understood when students are actively participating in their learning.

The age of literature-based reading, whole language and student-centered instruction began to fill the late 1980’s and 1990’s until the term ‘whole language’ became almost politically incorrect. Since whole language began as a grass roots movement where teachers and other school personnel as well as researchers came together to envision this new paradigm, others connected to reading instruction looked upon this paradigm shift as unfounded in the realm of research and political correctness (Stahl, 1999). Slavin (1989) reports that the pendulum swing of pro-whole language to pro-phonics occurred because whole language became widespread before effects of whole language were studied. According to Stahl (1999), politics contributed to the downfall. California was one of the states where whole language became popular, followed by a decline in the reading achievement scores. Those who rejected whole language pointed to the lack of progress in these student test scores measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as the major reason, especially after the state of California’s performance in reading was lackluster and the state superintendent proclaimed whole language as their program of choice for reading (Cowen, 2003). These reported lower scores were linked in the media with whole language, thus promoting a return to “basics”, which was translated as a return to phonics instruction (Stahl, 1999). Stahl and Miller (1989) reported no advantage to using a whole language approach for first graders and questioned the shift of instructional approaches from basals and skill instruction to whole language. A whole language approach continues to be used, but has a lessened impact in reading instruction because of the lack of empirical evidence to support its effectiveness (McKenna, Robinson, & Miller, 1990; Moorman, Blanton, & McLaughlin, 1994). It is important to note that currently standardized test scores are the only accepted measure of the effectiveness of reading instruction. Whole language advocates point out the shortcomings of these measures. The use of “tests fail to measure
creativity and partial understanding… which play a vital role in the development of language” (Jeynes & Littell, 2000, p. 31).

The rejection of whole language was reportedly because of a lack of valid, scientific-based research for whole language programs and the premise that oral language could not be applied to written language (Cambourne, 2002). Whole language must not work. Yet, Cambourne goes on to explain how the constructivist theoretical framework created debate and dissonance over the past 25 years, producing this clash of “claims and counterclaims” (p. 39).

Children learn in a social context, and those experiences and the context in which reading occurs is critical to the ability to learn to read. This idea of learning in social contexts is grounded in the work of major theorists like Dewey, Piaget, and Vtgotsky (Goodman, 1989). Each of these researchers influenced the whole language paradigm with ideas of learners as participants, constructors and social advocates in their own learning. The social construction for reading is dependent upon authentic purposes for reading and demands strategies used to teach reading be steeped in engagement with text.

**Synopsis**

The selection of how to teach reading, what materials to use and how to support children’s literacy efforts are often dictated by a school system philosophy (Shanahan & Neuman, 1997). In today’s climate of evidence-based reading instructional processes, programs are determined by current educational policy and best practice research as a demand of NCLB.

Cowen (2003) states that there is currently a “lack of agreement by the reading profession with regard to reading acquisition” (p. vii). The complex issue of how to teach children to read involves not only a philosophical stance, but also research on what is effective with the world’s most difficult language to learn. As reading programs have changed over the years, so have the roles of teachers. Although primarily expected to ‘teach’ or to move students toward growth in all subject areas, teachers are asked to react to and integrate society’s complexities that face public school students daily. So, today in public schools, what decisions are teachers making in order to determine how to teach reading? Has anything changed?

**Reading Research**

The diversity of theories on approaches to reading instruction is a factor in the decision making of elementary school teachers. To understand methods and approaches used today, a review of research for 10 studies is provided in chronological order. Table 1 provides an over
view of the studies reviewed. This review is by no means exhaustive, but rather offers an overview of influential reading research over the past 40 years.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/Author(s)/Title</th>
<th>Purpose of Study</th>
<th>Sample/Methodology</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1963 Austin, M. Morrison, C. <em>The First R: The Harvard Report on Reading in Elementary Schools</em></td>
<td>Examine the present status of reading instruction to determine whether current demands are being met</td>
<td>Two methods: (1) survey to all schools systems in cities and counties in US where population exceeded 10,000; (2) interviews with administrative personnel, teachers coupled with observations in a representative sample of schools systems</td>
<td>No conclusive evidence to identify what determines effective reading instruction – 45 recommendations made. Five areas in need of most urgent improvement – (1) challenging developmental program; (2) better provisions for individual differences; (3) more stimulating programs for gifted readers; (4) improved teacher preparation; and (5) more effective leadership at the administrative level.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967 Bond, G.L. Dykstra, R. The Cooperative Research Program in First-Grade Reading Instruction</td>
<td>Examine what (1) characteristics relate to pupil achievement in reading; (2) identify which approaches produce superior reading and spelling achievement; (3) find programs uniquely effective or ineffective for pupils with high or low readiness for reading.</td>
<td>A comparison research design of correlational analysis was established with the data from 27 individual studies overseen by the Cooperative Research Program. Most studies reviewed compared basal reading programs to some other approach to teach reading. Common procedures for data collection and analysis and common experimental procedures were established. Data about pupils, teachers, school and community, as well as reading programs were compiled and analyzed.</td>
<td>(1) Basal programs were superior to non-basal programs across all levels of intelligence as well as for auditory discrimination and pre-instructional letter knowledge. (2) There is no basis for using test information to place pupils in any basal or non-basal program. (3) no conclusive evidence that community or school affected reading achievement.</td>
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<td><strong>1967</strong> Chall, J. S.</td>
<td>Analysis of practices in classroom reading instruction to answer the research question – Do children learn better with a beginning method that stresses meaning or with one that stresses learning the code?</td>
<td>Experimental correlational research analysis of 67 research studies that compared different approaches to beginning reading; interviewed 25 proponents of various approaches; analyzed basal reading programs; and observed how reading is taught in over 300 classrooms in the US, Scotland and England.</td>
<td>Beginning instruction with emphasis on phonics produces better results in learning to read – up to the 3rd grade – but no particular method of phonics instruction was espoused</td>
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<td><strong>1975</strong> Barr, R.</td>
<td>Examine the composition of instructional reading groups and their resulting homogeneity in ability to determine pacing.</td>
<td>Teachers and their first-grade students in 12 classrooms from 4 schools. Interviewed in November with identification of page each child was reading in basal followed by interview in May to determine number of stories read and number of new words introduced to measure instructional pace. Interviews in following year to obtain methods of instruction, training in teaching reading and prior experience in 1st grade. Teacher behaviors and attitudes were also identified through interviews.</td>
<td>(1) Most teachers group for basal readers at the beginning of the school year; (2) groups are paced differently – teachers aware of pupil information for grouping, however did not know they could control the pacing schedule; (3) low-readiness students influenced how grouping was done; (4) teachers within schools have similar practices for grouping and pacing – suggesting colleague influence.</td>
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<td>Year/Author(s)/Title</td>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>Sample/Methodology</td>
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<tr>
<td>1978 Durkin, D.</td>
<td>Examines whether 3rd – 6th grade elementary classrooms provide reading comprehension instruction</td>
<td>Observation of classrooms during both reading and social studies instruction to find, describe and time comprehension instruction with additional observations in a 3 pronged sub – studies look at reading comprehension (1) 4th grade classrooms - 24 teachers in 8 schools; (2) comparison across all schools – grades 3-6, – 12 teachers from 3 schools; and (3) individual students – 3 students – 2 females in grades 3 &amp; 6; 1 male in grade 5 None of the classrooms for each sub-study overlapped.</td>
<td>Practically no reading comprehension was observed being taught. Comprehension assessment through asking questions was prevalent</td>
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<td>1983 Shannon, P.</td>
<td>Investigation of objective factors in an attempt to describe the organization and procedures of the reading program in one school system</td>
<td>529 teachers, 26 reading teachers, 26 administrators. Quantitative and qualitative methods used. A survey was used to investigate both subjective factors – teachers’ perceptions of the reading program and objective factors - description of reading programs; In addition, observations of meetings between faculty and administrators as well as an examination of the district’s printed description of the reading program.</td>
<td>An over reliance on commercial materials for reading instruction was found by teachers and administrators. Both groups believed the use of basal readers would ensure reading success in student achievement. Teachers were placed in a subordinate role when materials were selected and used.</td>
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<td>Year/Author/Title</td>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
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<td>1990(a) Adams, M. J. <em>Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print</em></td>
<td>Through a review of research, examine and identify common principals and instructional practices that support early reading achievement</td>
<td>Cross disciplinary approach using research from cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, educational psychology, education, linguistics, computer science and anthropology in searching for overlap between disciplines in regards to literacy</td>
<td>Include: (1) children need to be read to in order to develop phonological awareness and knowledge of how print works – prior to formal word study &amp; phonics; (2) reading instruction must include both breaking the code (orthography) and reading in meaningful contexts; (3) children’s levels of phonemic awareness when they enter school predicts future reading achievement; and (4) once children connect phonemic awareness to printed language, they are ready for in depth word study.</td>
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<td>Year/Author(s)/Title</td>
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<td><strong>1998</strong></td>
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<td>Snow, C. E.</td>
<td>Determine effective interventions for young children at risk for learning to read. 3 goals –</td>
<td>Examined a range of research in reading instruction from experimental to case study. Using a principal of converging evidence – where multiple studies report the same basic findings, recommendations were made as best practices for teaching preschool through 3rd grade students to read. Important note – recommendations are for all students, not just those who are at risk for reading failure.</td>
<td>In order to be successful in reading, children must: (1) use reading to obtain meaning from print; (2) have frequent exposure &amp; intensive opportunities to read; (3) be exposed to frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships; (4) learn about the nature of the alphabetic writing system; and (5) understand the structure of spoken words.</td>
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<td>Burns, M. S.</td>
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<td>Griffin, P.</td>
<td>Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (PRD)</td>
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<td><strong>2000</strong></td>
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<td>Baumann, J.F</td>
<td>To address the question, What is the overall face of reading instruction as we approach the 21st century?</td>
<td>Distribution of surveys to: (1) sample of 3, 199 public school elementary teachers, drawn randomly from national listing of 907, 774 PK-5 grade teachers; (2) administrators were chosen from 623 completed teacher surveys where the teacher invited the principal to participate; (3) 91 building administrators invited central office administrators and 48 district administrators responded to surveys.</td>
<td>Overview: Teachers use: (1) a balanced approach vs. exclusive reliance on basal readers; (2) whole group reading vs. 3 group plan; (3) emergent literacy vs. reading readiness; (4) synthetic phonics vs. analytic phonics; (5) alternative reading assessments; (6) school and classroom libraries; (7) changing programs/philosophy vs. static, prescribed programs; (8) balanced, eclectic perspective vs. strong skills-based emphasis.</td>
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<td>Hoffman, J.V.</td>
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<td>Duffy-Hester, A.M.</td>
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<td>2005 Hoffman, J.V.</td>
<td>Multifaceted and longitudinal research to study excellence in 4 year undergraduate teacher preparation programs for reading instruction.</td>
<td>3 distinct studies – correlated. (1) survey of teacher education programs across the US; (2) investigate features of excellent teacher preparation programs - 8 sites – 7 universities, one college chosen out of 28 applications to participate. Descriptive data gathered from campus visits, structured interviews, document analysis and small-group meetings with program faculty; (3) effects of preparation on teaching practices through the first years of teaching – quasi-experimental over 3 year span – Year 1 structured interviews using constant comparative method of analysis; Year 2 – ongoing interviews but expanded to include classroom environment and teaching – compared to teachers not part of the 8 site programs AND use of a TEX-IN3 observational statistical instrument for literacy instruction (quantitative); Year 3 – continued from year 2 but added components to TEX-IN3 instrument to incorporate additional information.</td>
<td>Students who participated in high-quality teacher prep programs have a positive influence regarding the (1) experiences of teachers entering the profession; (2) student engagement in the literacy environments created in their classrooms. Graduates of high-quality preparation programs demonstrate a better teaching performance when compared with graduates of other teacher education programs.</td>
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In 1963, Mary Austin and Coleman Morrison published *The First R: The Harvard Report on Reading in Elementary Schools*. This study looked at the reading practices of elementary classrooms across the United States using a survey, interviews and observations. They state, “… we must examine the present status of reading instruction to determine whether we are meeting the demands of *today*, not to see whether we are doing better than we did yesterday” (p. 1).

In order to articulate their findings, the study was guided by the following checklist of “evidence considered essential for the success of any program” (p. x).

A. Evidence of an instructional reading program for all children to include:
   1. Development of reading skills to help children identify printed words, gather meaning from words, sentences and paragraphs, and evaluate and draw inferences from what is read
   2. Development of reading and study skills in the content areas
   3. Development of silent and oral reading skills
   4. Development of verbal facility
   5. Development of reading interests

B. Evidence of instructional provisions for children of varying abilities and interests

C. Evidence of special services:
   1. For the academically talented reader
   2. For the slow learning child
   3. For all children (library)

D. Arrangements for evaluating pupil progress and communicating with parents

E. Evidence of guidance offered to beginning and experienced teachers through:
   1. Workshops, practicums, demonstrations, etc
2. Classroom observations and follow-up conferences
3. Action research projects

F. Evidence of administrative leadership

Austin and Morrison reported that one method of determining effectiveness was that of comparing actual practices observed with viewpoints about what teachers believed was needed in a successful reading program. Their report was controversial and reached no conclusion on how reading should be taught. However, they did generate a list of 45 recommendations for the development of reading programs, ranging from special services, components, teacher training and administrative support. In this pivotal study, Austin and Morrison asked, “What are the instructional methods and techniques being used in the elementary schools to help children read?” (p. ix).

Austin and Morrison eloquently stated, “What we need at the moment are teachers imbued with a philosophy of teaching reading appropriate for today and tomorrow and who are encouraged and guided in carrying out this philosophy by their superiors” (p. 218). The philosophy of the moment has been shown through the years to change over time as evidenced by the historical portions of this chapter. So, although teachers may have a philosophy on how to teach reading, it may or may not equate with the current intellectual and/or political climate.

*The Cooperative Research Program in First Grade Reading*

Bond and Dykstra (1967) published *The Cooperative Research Program in First Grade Reading*, or commonly known as the “First Grade Studies.” Their research analyzed 27 reading research projects that were coordinated by a project director. These projects were sanctioned by the Coordinating Center of the Cooperative Research Program in First Grade Studies from the University of Minnesota and federally funded by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education. The 27 reading research projects were coordinated through this office with the project directors agreeing to guidelines about how the data would be collected and reported back to the center, with periodic meetings with the researchers scheduled to maintain the consistency of the data collection. This massive piece of research correlated many data points across the 27 projects.

Three research questions guided the First Grade Studies: (1) To what extent are various pupil, teacher, class, school and community characteristics related to pupil achievement in first-
grade reading and spelling?; (2) Which of the many approaches to initial reading instruction produces superior reading and spelling achievement at the end of the first grade?; and (3) Is any program uniquely effective or ineffective for pupils with high or low readiness for reading? The results of this massive study affected research for beginning reading instruction for the next 30 years (Cowen, 2003).

In response to question 1, the conclusion was that teacher, student, class, school and community characteristics had little impact upon reading and spelling achievement. Bond and Dykstra concluded none of these were “highly related” (1997, p. 367) to reading and spelling achievement.

In order to answer question 2, The First Grade Studies compared 6 types of instructional materials/methods:

1. Initial Teaching Alphabet (i.t.a.)
2. Basal Plus Phonics
3. Language Experience
4. Linguistic
5. Phonic/Linguistic
6. Basal Alone

These 6 types of instructional programs were used as experimental treatments by the researchers and were:

…used in more than one project… Five separate analyses were then performed, each analysis using the basal reader as a control against which to compare progress in other instructional programs. All projects which used as experimental treatments both a basal reader approach and an i.t.a. [Initial Teaching Alphabet] approach for example were combined into a single analysis. (Bond & Dykstra, 1997, p. 368).

From this analysis, classrooms that used an integrated approach, combining systematic phonics with reading and writing for meaning far surpassed those using mainstream basal programs. There was no one specific method that was more successful than others. Bond and Dykstra stated, “No one approach is so distinctively better in all situations and respects than the others that it should be considered one of the best methods and the one to be used exclusively” (p. 416).
With respect to question 3 of the First Grade Studies research, pre and post readiness testing was used as a standard evaluation for determining success in reading. One finding was that there was no specific program exclusively effective or ineffective with regard to readiness for reading. A second finding was that the phonics/linguistic type of programs were the most predictive for future success in reading. Knowledge of letter names, or alphabetic principles and the ability to discriminate between the sounds of words, or phonemic awareness were the two most important predictors in success in reading (1997, p. 413).

Michael Graves and Robert Dykstra (1997) reviewed the original First-Grade Studies conducted by Bond and Dykstra in 1967. Graves and Dykstra conclude that, with the exclusion of language experience, all six of the approaches centered on the code of the English language and when it should be introduced to the novice reader. They state, “Today, of course, a great deal of controversy over instructional methods revolves around these same issues…” (p. 344). These authors noted that the question of what is the best way to teach children to read was not answered by the First-Grade Studies project and that “the question has no simple answer, and is itself too simple… in many ways very close to the questions that many of us in reading education hope to answer” (p. 344).

Over the next 30 years, many of the findings from the First Grade Studies have impacted reading instruction and future reading research. For example, interest in professional development in literacy for classroom teachers, staff development, the concept of emergent literacy, phonemic awareness and reading readiness, are just a few of the areas influencing reading researchers (Cowen, 2003). Although the study itself was not easy reading and did not clearly state the implications, it was considered impressive during times when analysis of huge amounts of data were “a researcher’s nightmare” (p. 21).

Learning to Read: The Great Debate

During that same year, Jeanne Chall strove to evaluate the available reading research through systematic analysis. Her work, Learning to Read: The Great Debate (1967) was a readable review of the reading research of the time, analyzing 67 research studies conducted between 1920 and 1965. Chall’s work spurred a move toward the use of individual word decoding through phonics. And as Chall (1999) reviewed ‘The First-Grade Studies’ of Bond and Dykstra alongside her own research, she stated,
Essentially the First-Grade Studies found that beginning reading programs that contained stronger, more systematic phonics components produced statistically significantly higher end-of-first-grade reading achievement than those that had weaker phonics programs - those in the basal readers of the early 1960’s that focused largely on reading for meaning (p.8).

In Chall’s work, the research question, do children learn better with a beginning method that stresses meaning or with one that stresses learning the code? The findings and recommendations of Chall’s match Bond and Dykstra. Chall (1999) commented that her original research, Learning to Read: The Great Debate, and The Cooperative Research Program in First Grade Reading (Bond & Dykstra, 1967) both found evidence to support strong phonics or decoding programs in order to produce higher reading achievement (p. 8).

Chall’s (1967) findings also supported the enormous advantage of developing fluency through extensive reading and she purported the need for practicing reading for comprehension through challenging texts. Future studies on reading fluency and how it relates to reading comprehension were influenced by Chall’s work (Cowen, 2003). These concepts were novel for beginning readers. Although Chall’s work clearly supports systemic phonics instruction, she also advocated a balance to instruction by stating, “No program can do all things for all children, and no program can be all things for all teachers” (1967, p. 310). She also adds that other important factors include “language, good teaching, and instructional materials on an appropriate level of difficulty” (1999, p. 8). According to Cowen (2003), Chall believed that successful teachers of reading should continue to teach without making changes and she was more interested in changing or modifying basal reading programs.

One of the purported differences between the works of Chall and Bond and Dykstra is that Chall’s work related to lower socioeconomic children. This construct remains important today in light of current research findings of the disparity for reading achievement between nonwhite and white children in the United States. Another difference was that Chall reported on improvements in word recognition and spelling as a result of phonics instruction. Overall, Learning to Read: The Great Debate was readily accepted by the reading research community. Criticisms surrounded Chall’s emphasis on the “arbitrary coding system” (Strickland, 1998). This study stands as a classic in reading instruction research. As a result of these studies,
teachers in the 1970’s were influenced to include a high dose of phonics in reading instruction within both practice and discussion.

*How Children Are Taught To Read: Grouping and Pacing*

Teachers make decisions about grouping and pacing and the consequences of these decisions, when measured by achievement, are at the crux of this research. Barr (1975) examined teacher interviews and first-grade student reading achievement scores from four schools with varying socioeconomic backgrounds for the purpose of examining teachers’ grouping and pacing in reading instruction. Two schools were located in suburban, middle to upper middle class neighborhoods with the other two in urban, predominantly lower to lower middle class non-white neighborhoods, where 62 percent of students came from Spanish-speaking homes.

The design of this study centered on interviews with teachers about their practices. These interviews were done over a two-year period and included information obtained about methods of instruction, training in teaching reading and prior experience in teaching first grade. In addition, the study categorized teachers on their attitudes toward their students, teaching reading, classroom behavior and the reported reading strengths and difficulties of children in their classes. The data was rated by two independent judges using the interview protocol, with agreement occurring in nine out of the eleven teachers (one teacher had moved over the course of the two year period).

The findings for this study add insight into teacher decision making. According to Barr (1975), four trends about grouping emerged: (1) teachers with less formal reading experience tend to use whole class instruction (2) colleague influences, possibility connected in conjunction with course work on teaching reading, affected grouping decisions; (3) class size influenced grouping – smaller class sizes used whole class grouping; and (4) the reading achievement of students affected grouping, where teachers used standard achievement scores to create reading groups. Barr found grouping decisions clearly affected pacing.

Some other findings between classrooms that affected pacing included: (1) grouping decisions; (2) once grouping occurred, then instructional decisions about pacing were different for each group and were not absolute; (3) pace and group readiness had a close relationship – the more variety in readiness, the greater the differences in pacing; (4) teacher characteristics influence pacing.
This research demonstrates the importance of teacher decision making in grouping and pacing students in reading instruction. Reading instruction in first grade is influenced by grouping and, according to Barr (1975), teachers should “objectively determine pace in terms of [the] consequences for learning” (p. 496). Often times, children are paced too slowly, especially in groups of low achieving students and this slow pace transfers to little progress in developing reading skills; whereas those in groups with a rapid pace, make enormous strides in reading achievement (Barr, 1975). Instructional decisions made by first grade teachers may influence reading achievement in higher grades.

What Classroom Observations Reveal about Reading Comprehension Instruction

In 1976, Durkin responded to the request by the National Institute of Education to investigate understanding text, or comprehension. A proposal was developed to study comprehension in middle and upper elementary, 3rd through 6th grades, using an observational format to find, describe and log the number of minutes teachers were found to instruct students in comprehension. An assumption was made that primary level classrooms would spend the majority of their instructional time during reading instruction on decoding and at the higher grade levels; there would be a focus on meaning making. Based on previous published research, Durkin (1977) reported little instruction in comprehension was found during reading instructional time. The decision to schedule observations in both reading and social studies was made because “even if teachers give little time to comprehension during reading, then they could be expected to work on it during social studies, since children’s problems with content subject textbooks are both major and well known” (Durkin, 1978, p. 494).

The results of this study were that “practically no reading comprehension instruction was seen” (Durkin, 1978, p. 520). What was observed was the asking of questions and assessing whether students were able to answer the questions, or “interrogations” (p. 520). Another finding was that, in addition to seeing little reading comprehension instruction, the observers saw little real reading instruction of any kind occurring; therefore, it could not be said that the teachers were engaged in teaching other reading skills. In addition, this study found that large amounts of time were spent on “giving, completing, and checking assignments… [with] sizable amounts of time … [for] activities categorized as transition and non-instruction” (p. 520). Finally, regarding the idea that social studies lessons might be a time when reading comprehension would be
taught, this study found no teachers who used this time for improving student comprehension through instruction.

Durkin (1978) revealed in her suggestions for future research that “If observational studies are done… identifying what influences teachers to do what they do becomes crucially important” (p. 526). She went on to point out that in every classroom, there were readers who already understood what they were reading and she asked, “If their teachers are not teaching [comprehension], how did such children acquire their ability?” (p. 527).

The Use of Commercial Reading Materials in American Elementary Schools

The use of basal programs has been referred to in all of the previously reviewed research. Patrick Shannon (1983) observed teacher use of basal reading programs in one school district. This research was based on 3 tenets: (a) that reading programs are organized “rationality,” or operate as bureaucracies; (2) teachers “reify”, or use basal reading programs as the concrete basis for reading instruction; and (c) that the combination of these first two “alienate” teachers from their reading instruction (p. 69). According to Shannon, “teachers are separated [from] and accept their separation from the control of the content, method, and pace of their instruction” (p. 69). Teachers give up their personal understandings of reading instruction and assume basal programs provide the best instructional methods for their students because schools “tighten the organizations of reading programs… [and require] the stringent application of commercial materials” (p. 69).

The methodology for this research included a survey instrument for both subjective and objective factors pertaining to teacher perceptions of the reading program in their schools system. This survey instrument was based on the work of three of the previously reviewed research studies. The four subjective hypotheses (p. 72) are:

1. Teachers are not involved in their reading instruction (Durkin, 1979).
2. Teachers believe the commercial materials can teach a student to read (Austin & Morrison, 1962).
3. Teachers believe that the materials embody scientific truth (Barton & Wilder, 1964)
4. Teachers think they are fulfilling administrative expectations when they use the materials (Chall, 1967).
The survey was piloted twice to glean the Likert scale questionnaire to twenty items for the final version. In addition, three open-ended questions allowed teacher elaboration about their perceptions of their teaching instruction. These questions were scored by three independent scorers. Five hundred twenty-six teachers, as well as twenty-six reading teachers participated in the questionnaire and a biographical form. In addition, twenty-six administrators, who were given a different questionnaire form from the teachers, participated for comparison on the four hypotheses.

Twenty-six follow up interviews with teachers were used to elaborate the responses gathered by the questionnaires. Also, three reading teachers, three administrators and the district reading coordinator were interviewed. The results from the interviews confirmed the findings from the questionnaire.

According to Shannon (1983), the investigation of the use of basal reading programs based on the tenets of rationalization, reification and alienation from an objective and subjective perspective demonstrated a direct relationship between the concrete uses of basals and teacher acceptance of the administrative decision to use basal programs. This supported the premise that teachers rely on basal programs because these were the materials schools system administration chose as the reading instructional program. This study also found that teachers do not share in the choice of materials, but this factor did not significantly contribute to the reliance of basal materials for reading instruction.

Based on the major research studies of the 1960’s (found in Table 1), basal readers began to be produced with increased emphasis on phonics. Separate phonics programs began to be mass produced and used widely in school systems during the early 1970’s in addition to increased emphasis on phonics in reading method textbooks (Chall, 1983). The use of basal reading programs for reading instruction has been examined (Shannon, 1983) with conflicting resulting reports. Results included teachers needing training in how to use basal programs and how to discriminate ways to use the basal programs as one portion of a varied approach to reading instruction. The premise was that basal programs only further reduce reading instruction to a set of systematic principles that if followed, all students would learn to read and reading achievement scores would increase.
Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print (BTR)

This book was sanctioned by the Department of Education and developed by the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois – Urbana/Champaign. Marilyn Jager Adams developed this text during the “reading wars” (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998) – the debate of phonics versus whole language (as opposed to the phonics versus whole word approach from earlier research). The premise of this study was to examine and identify the convergence of commonalities concerning reading instruction across disciplines including cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, educational psychology, education, linguistics, computer science, and anthropology. This integrated approach was an attempt to “review as clearly and usefully as I could what we collectively know about the knowledge and experience that are required for acquiring literacy” (Adams, Allington, Chaney, Goodman, Kapinus, McGee, Richgels, Schwartz, Shannon, Smitten & Williams, 1991, p. 387).

According to Cowen (2003), Adams did not have the goal of creating a list of best methods of reading instruction. The purpose was to provide all stakeholders in early literacy with principles and goals to support methods of instructing young children through a balance of breaking the code, (or orthography) and comprehension. According to Adams (1990a), her objective was to provide support for how phonics instruction can be taught proficiently with the purpose of comprehension, the real reason for learning to read. Adams (1990a) said, “Approaches in which systematic code instruction is included along with the reading of meaningful connected text result in superior reading achievement…” (p. 125).

A significant part of this book clarified the necessity of phonemic awareness, which was the conscious knowledge that spoken language could be manipulated. It was this conscious awareness that assisted beginning readers to connect the alphabetic principles to individual grapheme-phoneme correspondence. For example, a child makes an association between the second letter of the alphabet to how it appears visually, ‘b’ and the sound it can make, /b/. This ability often comes naturally to most children. Cowen (2003) stated from this study there was no greater emphasis in reading instruction than phonemic awareness,

Four key components of reading processes include: (1) orthographic; (2) phonologic; (3) meaning; and (4) context. These four components must work in a coordinated fashion to allow a good reader to emerge. It is not just decoding the words, but rather the meshing of these components that allow for the creation of a balanced approach. (See Figure 2)
These four components are explained as:

- Orthographic processor is responsible for perceiving the sequence of letters in text
- Phonological processor is responsible for mapping the letters onto their spoken equivalents
- Meaning processor contains our knowledge of word meanings
- Context processor is in charge of constructing an ongoing understanding of the text (1990b, p. 21)

Yet, Adams stated there was no one best method to teach reading: “The effectiveness of a method depends too much on the details of its realizations- its materials, its teachers, its students and the compatibility of each with the other” (1990a, p. 423).

Critics of Adams assert that this study did not review enough research evidence concerning developmental views of language and literacy learning (Cowen, 2003). According to Strickland and Cullinan (1990), practitioners may conclude from the final chapter that only direct and explicit phonics instruction can be effective. Others like Yetta Goodman (Adams, et. al., 1991) believe there is an undervaluing of emergent literacy by this text. Adams addresses this issue by responding that, although the term was not used explicitly, “its relevance is centrally
developed throughout the book” (p. 392). Other drawbacks reported are the lack of regard for cultural changes in populations in public schools and the issues related to these diverse English language learners, as well as an analysis of the achievement gap (Cowen, 2003). Despite these criticisms, the long-term impact of this seminal work continues to influence reading instructional decisions.

Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (PRD)

This book, developed by notable scholars in realms of education and psychology, is a synthesis of currently knowledge about reading instruction. The Office of Special Education Programs and the Office of Educational Research and Improvement - Early Childhood Institute from the Department of Education and the National Institute on Child Health and Human Development - Human Learning and Behavior Branch sponsored this three-year endeavor to determine effective interventions for at risk young children. The Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children was formed with 3 goals: (1) to create a diverse and comprehensive research base; (2) to convert the findings into readable recommendations for parents, for the educational community, for publishers, and for those who work with young children; and (3) to disseminate this advice to audiences through conferences, publications and outreach activities. The findings apply to all children, not just those identified with reading difficulties. An important note is that, in today’s world, there is a “vastly changed technological society” (Cowen, 2003) that has created demands for higher literacy expectations. These demands “are far greater than those placed on the vast majority of schooled literate individuals a quarter-century ago” (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998, p. 20).

The intention of this publication was to provide opportunities for the implementation of the best practices in reading instruction by a wide audience. The authors used a wide variety of reading research methods, some of which included case studies, correlational studies, ethnographies, epidemiological studies, experimental studies, interviews, narrative analyses, quasi-experimental studies, and surveys. According to Snow, et. al., “it is important to understand how the results from studies employing these methods have been used in synthesizing the conclusions…” (p. 35). The principle of converging evidence was one important means to find evidence of best practices. Converging evidence was described as instances in
which research reviewed collectively provided support for a conclusion across different methods employed in educational research.

A second way to identify best practices came from a synergism between descriptive and hypothesis-testing research methods. Looking at multiple ways research eliminated, or controlled any unconnected variables strengthened particular premises in reading instruction. It was important to the authors to blend both qualitative and quantitative methodology in their review because “teaching and learning are complex phenomena that can be enhanced or impeded by many factors” (p. 36). This blending across different methods increases confidence that the findings have both internal and external validity.

The methodology used by Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) was called into question by Pearson (1999). The convergence of evidence is used only in some sections of the text and “experimental approaches are privileged over descriptive research” (p. 237). For example, in Chapter 6, the examination of instructional practices uses a 1998 experimental study by Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider and Mehta as its basis for the entire chapter. According to Pearson, much of the descriptive and quasi-experimental research was not incorporated into this report and “only the vaguest of references” (p. 237) are used for these significant works. Although critical of the overall validity, Pearson believed this report “represents a more deliberate attempt to provide the field with an authoritative account of what we know about teaching young children to read” (p. 235) beyond any previous attempts, such as the works of Chall, Bond and Dykstra, Adams, and others.

The report found that adequate initial reading instruction should provide that children:

- use reading to obtain meaning from print
- have frequent and intensive opportunities to read
- be exposed to frequent, regular spelling-sound relationship
- learn about the nature of the alphabetic writing system
- understand the structure of spoken words (1998, p. 3)

Beyond the initial development of reading, it is recommended that progress depends upon:

- having a working understanding of how sounds are represented alphabetically
- sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency with different kinds of texts
sufficient background knowledge and vocabulary to render written texts meaningful and interesting
control over procedures for monitoring comprehension and repairing misunderstandings
continued interest and motivation to read for a variety of purposes
(1998, p. 3-4)

The report also identified three problems that often created reading difficulties for young children: (1) difficulty understanding and using the alphabetic principle – the systematic written spellings that represent oral language; (2) failure to transfer the understandings of spoken language to reading and acquire new strategies needed; and (3) loss of motivation which amplify the prior two problems.

The First “R” Yesterday and Today: U. S. Elementary Reading Instruction Practices Reported by Teachers and Administrators

This research was supported by the National Reading Research Center of the University of Georgia and the University of Maryland with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement: U.S. Department of Education. It was a replication of research by Austin and Morrison (1963) that influenced reading instruction over 35 years ago through its wide-scale examination of reading instructional practices in the United States.

In 2000, Baumann, Hoffman, Duffy-Hester and Ro published a follow-up study to the work of Austin and Morrison. Their research replicated the 1963 study in order to provide a “status check of reading instruction today” (p. 338). Baumann, et. al. found the philosophy and goals of current reading instruction to be a balanced approach, with a major theme of systematic instruction in decoding within a literature-rich environment in which basals and trade books were used in combination. Students were grouped heterogeneously, with whole class instruction the norm. Support for struggling readers existed, but regular classroom teachers were expected to provide the bulk of the instruction and assessment (p. 346). Baumann, et. al. reported upon their findings as they compared with those of Austin and Morrison by using the cliché, “the more things change, the more they remain the same” (p. 359). Similarities across the two studies included large amounts of time for reading instruction, explicit phonics instruction, and concerns for struggling readers. The differences comprised a “balanced, eclectic perspective in contrast to
a strong skills-based emphasis in the past” (p. 359). The three reading group plan found by Austin and Morrison was replaced with whole group instruction in the Baumann, et.al. study - “Changes in programs and philosophy are common today; unlike the static state of reading instruction in the 1960’s” (p. 359).

Although differences have been reported between the 1960’s and the 2000’s, it is clear the current reading instruction is not the replica of past days. Because of accountability, today’s teachers are motivated by a sense of urgency to reach all students in reading instruction to raise achievement scores (Cochran-Smith, 2003).

*Teachers’ Preparation to Teach Reading and Their Practices in the First Three Years of Teaching*

The International Reading Association (IRA) formed the National Commission on Excellence in Elementary Teacher Preparation for Reading Instruction. This commission was charged with implementing research that would identify qualities of effective teacher preparation programs in reading. Three interrelated studies were commissioned: (1) survey of current practices in U.S. teacher education programs; (2) investigation of features of excellent reading teacher preparation programs; and (3) effects of teacher preparation programs on teaching practices through the first years of teaching.

Major findings of the national survey included:

- average number of hours in reading courses were greater than 6 (2+ courses)
- despite trends toward 5-year and fifth-year programs, 84% have 4-year baccalaureate programs
- undergraduate reading specialization offered in over 40% of programs; average 16+ hours required in these programs
- course textbooks/course topics suggested comprehensive and balanced approach to reading (emphasis on teaching decoding, fluency and comprehension) in most programs
- extensive field experiences in teaching reading prior to student teaching common
- vast majority of teaching faculty had classroom experience as well as advanced degrees
- learning to teach diverse learners was a major focus in programs
over 85% rated their programs as “very good” or “outstanding” (p. 268)

These findings indicate improvement when compared to the two previous landmark studies, referred to as “The Torch Lighters” (Austin & Morrison, 1962; Morrison & Austin, 1977). Although this survey information gave insight into the structure and variation of teacher education programs, data on the effectiveness of teachers coming through programs was non-existent.

Investigation of excellent reading programs was determined by an application process for 28 institutions. A panel of prominent reading educators selected eight sites – seven universities and one college for participation. These sites were identified as having excellent programs rather than the most outstanding programs. Descriptive data were gathered through campus visits, structured interviews, document analysis and small-group meetings with faculty. Data analyses through the use of constant comparative methods were used to identify critical common factors of excellence. From this identification, short descriptors for each of these eight factors were developed. These factors included: (1) content; (2) apprenticeship; (3) vision; (4) resources and mission; (5) personalized teaching; (6) autonomy; (7) community; and (8) assessment. Each of these factors was identified as important in the development of preservice teachers, leading to the third study.

The third study followed a group of graduates from these programs as they began their teaching careers. Two questions set the boundaries for this study: (1) what effects do participation in and completion of an excellent reading teacher education program have on the experiences of teachers as they enter schools? and (2) how does teachers’ preparation relate to their teaching practices? The intent of these questions was to reveal qualities of effective preparation in reading instruction.

Collection of data continued over a period of 3 years and revealed a strong connection between teacher preparation and their teaching. During Year 1, qualitative data were gathered through a series of structured interviews with 101 teachers who began teaching in 2001. Out of the sample, thirty-three graduated from programs where reading was embedded in the program. Curriculums such as these have reading courses within the program rather than offering reading as a specialty. Forty graduates completed a reading specialization program and twenty-eight additional teachers who completed a general program without a reading specialization. The data were analyzed from the interviews using the constant comparative method to classify themes.
Graduates of programs where reading was either embedded or specialized demonstrated clear differences from general education graduates. Most interesting were the choices and decisions made concerning reading instruction and the commitment to meet the needs of their students. A connection between teacher preparation and actual teaching was revealed.

During Year 2 and 3, the qualitative perspective continued through ongoing interviews, but methods of data collection were extended to include information about the classroom environment and classroom teaching that was descriptive and quantitative. Participants were also expanded to include teachers with the same number of years experience and other teachers at the schools where the original graduates were teaching making it possible for the researchers to contextualize the data. Additionally, some data were collected on individual students in participating classrooms. An instrument known as TEX-IN3 was introduced into the study and was used to assess the social practice perspective of the classroom literacy environment. The classroom literacy environment has been shown to be a “critical factor in effective teaching” (Hoffman, et. al., 2005, p. 273). Data from this instrument was used to create descriptive statistics and analysis of variance procedures were utilized to compare the performance of the original core graduates to the other two teacher groups, teachers in the same year teaching, and site-based experienced teachers.

The findings provided substantiation for positive effects of the teacher preparation programs on teaching. Some of the factors identified were the creation of rich classroom text environments; high engagement with texts and high understanding and valuing of texts. Successful performance at an early point in their careers was a measure of success for teachers entering the profession.

The importance of this research rests on the evidence that new teachers who are trained in high quality programs of teacher preparation in reading provide potent teaching opportunities in their classrooms. The increased exposure to a variety of text types, trade books, and text environments provides outstanding opportunities for students in these classrooms. Teachers who understand how to integrate these features within their reading instructional programs create improved chances for success for their students.
**Current Practices in Reading Instruction**

**Balanced Approach**

The predominance of the concept of a balanced approach to reading instruction pervades the literature since the early 1990’s. Yet, even Austin and Morrison (1963) believed that eclecticism was a necessary component of reading instruction.

In all the furor over deciding which method of teaching children to read is the most valuable, certain facts have been lost sight of: that children can and do learn to read in a variety of ways; that what is beneficial instruction for one child may not do for another; and that there are many different kinds of experiences which will aid in the attainment of good reading habits, skills and interests….

Therefore, it is recommended: that no single method of instruction in beginning reading be advocated but that a variety of approaches be utilized and that these be adjusted to the competencies and needs of individual children… (p. 220-221).

This historical battle over pedagogical differences revolves around the question of what is the best way to teach reading. Over and over, reading research makes a case for each method or program and teachers are left to decide what works for the students in their classrooms. “The focus of attention has shifted from the researchers’ theories and data back to the teacher, alone in her classroom with a heterogeneous group of children, all awaiting their passports to literacy” (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998, p. vi). However there is danger in this shift. Allington (2002) gives insight into the current state of reading instruction when he states,

They [school administrators] may also believe that they don’t have to worry about teachers who aren’t very expert in the teaching of reading, because they think teachers can just follow the instructional guides that accompany each series [basal]. But there is a long history of research that indicates that the teacher and teacher expertise matter much more than which reading series a school district might choose (p. 6).

In classrooms all over the United States, reading instruction represents a large chunk of the public school daily routine. The most predominant method of reading instruction today is a balanced approach. A balanced approach has many facets and multiple meanings. Cowen (2003) suggests that a balanced approach to reading instruction is an integrated approach that incorporates the essentials of:
- emergent literacy
- assessment-based instruction
- alphabetic principles
- phonological and phonemic awareness
- phonics and word study
- appropriate leveled readers
- reading response
- writing process
- comprehension or meaning
- extensive authentic reading and writing
- use of semantic and syntactic contextual cues
- self-monitoring and self-regulation
- practice in reading with fluency, speed and accuracy
- use of onset and rime (p. 2)

Pressley (2000) suggests that a balanced approach supports comprehension skills that are “multicomponental” (p. 557), where there is the inclusion of the development of sight words and rich vocabulary, decoding skills, specific instruction in comprehension skills, and opportunities to read sociocultural content material as well as decoding-by-analogy, or the use of spelling patterns for decoding. Spiegel (1998) sees a balanced approach as one that is a “comprehensive view of literacy [that] is inclusive not exclusive” (p. 118). It is a “decision making approach through which a teacher makes thoughtful choices each day about the best way to help a child become a better reader and writer” (p. 116). Decision making is founded on the ability of teachers to make a reflective choice about what will meet the needs of each child.

Turbill (2002) refers to using a balanced approach as the “age of multiliteracies” (p. 11). Recognizing the individualistic learning styles of students becomes a component of reading instruction as teachers use multi approaches, including technologies, to best suit the instructional needs of their students. But, identifying these instructional needs is difficult and can often result in one particular method, or a basal series being used for those students struggling to learn how to read. Reading research studies, like Hoffman, et. al. (2005) provide a foundational for the importance of knowing children for their individual learning styles and providing multiplicity of text opportunities. Despite all of the reading research embracing a balanced approach, the
national educational policy has moved to the current era of accountability using *The Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read* (2000). School systems are required to use methodology that was only “scientifically based.” Scientifically based methodology has been defined to include only methods identified by quantitative research which are referred to as ‘proven teaching methods.’

**Proven Teaching Methods**

A component of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires the use of teaching methods founded in empirically based research that will impart effective practice in the classroom. Teaching methods must be grounded in scientifically based research, which provides reliable evidence that the instructional practice works (U.S. Department of Education, 2003c). Schools are required to stop experimenting with lessons and materials, get down to basics, and use effective methods of teaching. The main example provided in NCLB was in the area of reading. The National Reading Panel, a congressionally mandated committee of reading experts, reported on five skill areas that are essential for reading instruction (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). These five areas are expected to be the basis for reading instruction in American schools because these skills have been shown to be essential to early reading success (U. S. Department of Education, 2003). These five areas included: 1) phonemic awareness instruction; 2) explicit systematic phonics instruction; 3) repeated oral reading practice with feedback and guidance; 4) direct and indirect vocabulary instruction; and 5) comprehension strategies instruction. It is important to note the panel of NRP recognized that their report was not comprehensive. The NCLB act used the NRP report as the foundation for all reading instruction and required that federal funds must be utilized for evidence-based instructional practices only.

Currently, educational policy on the federal level has profound consequences on the daily lives of children who are acquiring reading skills in public schools. The demands of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 oblige local schools to find fiscal resources to pay for the far reaching aspects of this law (Mathis, 2003). Today, the idea of a balanced approach, where phonics and literature are combined to give students the best of what research says is important is in direct conflict with the demands of NCLB where the expectation is concrete skill development.
Decision Making

The literature on teacher decision making is diverse and often entails a connection to instructional planning and content (Klimczak, & Balli, 1995). In 2007, a review on the topic of decision making using the EBSCO research engine provided over 13,000 research documents with only 24 of those related to elementary education. Out of those 24, three related to reading in the elementary classroom. The most noteworthy piece of research related to this research project, although 20 years old, (Sheflbin & Hollingsworth, 1987) dealt with preservice teachers in a reading practicum while the other two pieces of research related to preservice teacher education programs. No specific research relating to experienced elementary teacher decision making concerning reading instruction was located. When the search was narrowed to teachers’ beliefs and practices, there were about 400 research documents, with only three related to elementary education, and none related to reading. Therefore, this review of research on decision making included the general constructs of cognition, aspects of knowledge, categorization of knowledge, connections to elementary teachers and research in decision making.

Decision making has a long history of study in the literature dating back to the 1950’s. Doherty (2003) chronicles the history of judgment and decision making, with some of the shared assumptions including:

- To understand decision making, understanding the task is more important than understanding the people
- Decisions are taken with respect to levels of aspiration, or reference points
- Decision makers use heuristic rules
- Thought is constructive; that is, in making decisions, people don’t just consult preexisting tables of belief and probabilities. (p. 648)

Decision making experts can be found in both positive and negative cohorts, where the focus on success represents the positive group and the negative focuses on error and the ways errors can be used to make changes (Jungermann, 1983). This knowledge from the judgment and decision making literature helps to create a conceptual network of understanding teachers who make decision about reading instruction based on their experiences in the world. The concept of social judgment theory uses a lens model that visually demonstrates that the environment is known through the cues received (Doherty, 2003). Translating this into an example, a single teacher decision would not construct the basis for understanding all of this teacher’s decisions. One
would have to observe this teacher over time in the environment where these decisions are made in order to understanding the decisions this teacher makes. By using the concept of this lens model (p. 651), one could observe one teacher in many situations within the teaching environment to garner an understanding of the decisions of this one teacher.

**Cognition & Instruction**

Cognitive approaches to instruction began to be accepted in the 1990’s with an important contribution from Resnick (1989) who brought three factors of learning together. These three are: (1) learning as a construction of knowledge rather than the idea that learning is absorption of knowledge; (2) prior knowledge is used to construct new knowledge; and (3) learning is affected by the context in which it occurs (p. 1-2). Based on these three constructs, research has examined learning and cognition related to specific subject matter as well as individual learning strategies and their outcomes (Mayer, 1992).

**Knowledge Construction**

According to the model Keys (2007) developed, teacher knowledge provides a filter through which curriculum decisions must pass. This filter may explain how teacher knowledge, or their beliefs and practices, impacts decisions made about what teachers choose to teach. Teachers build their knowledge base through from their experiences, practices, beliefs, and practical knowledge about their craft and as this knowledge is constructed, specific knowledge is shaped relative to differing curriculum (Munby, Russell & Martin, 2001; Brickhouse, 1990). To understand the complex nature of teaching, examining the decisions reading teachers make based on their knowledge construction may provide insight into their teaching instructional techniques. For example, a teacher may begin to change his/her philosophical stance as a result of the opportunity to share practices with other teachers in a professional community where “rich conversations and new insights into teaching and learning” (Putnam & Borko, 2000, p. 8) present chances for risk taking. By making decisions to take these risks, teachers may construct new knowledge and alter beliefs which may enact changes in instructional practices.

**Prior Knowledge**

The concept of prior knowledge presents as the foundation for new knowledge a way to recognize the individualistic nature of learning. Teachers bring to teaching their prior knowledge from years of schooling which includes their personal perceptions of teaching and of the students
they teach. According to Munby, Russell & Martin, (2001) “A teacher’s knowledge is also heavily dependent on the unique context of a particular classroom…” (p. 877). Teachers’ beliefs reflect and affect their teaching (Pajares, 1992). These beliefs, founded on value systems supported by personal experience that includes first by their own school experience, then formal teacher training and previous teaching experience (Keys, 2007).

The decisions teachers make about reading instruction can also be influenced by their students’ prior knowledge. Students arrive in schools with a diversity of prior knowledge from their prior life experiences. In the last two decades, research findings have demonstrated that children who have a weak start in reading are seldom are able to reach the achievement levels of their peers who have more prior experiences in reading (Neuman & Dickinson, 2001; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Torgesen, 1998). Children who are poor readers in first grade frequently remain behind by fourth grade (Juel, 1988). According to Alexander and Jetton (2000), nothing influences what students understand more than the knowledge they possess. Elementary school reading teachers may incorporate the concept of students’ prior knowledge into their reading instructional planning decisions.

Situational Knowledge

Knowledge consists of many facets and has many dimensions (Alexander & Jetton, 2000). Teachers use information about antecedent conditions such as student information and instructional tasks as well as the classroom and school environment to achieve their teaching goals. According to Shaveleson and Stern (1981), the conceptual domain of teacher thought, judgment and decisions is influenced by how teachers integrate information about students, the subject matter and the environment (See Figure 3). This visual organizer shows teacher characteristics, specifically beliefs connecting to teacher cognitive processes, including decisions, and these decisions support the selection of content chosen by teachers in planning instruction. The idea of how the classroom environment is affected by instructional decisions is shown by this visual representation. Situational knowledge is interwoven in the beliefs of teachers and in their decision making. Gee (2000) endorses the importance of situational knowledge by stating that knowing how to proceed in specific social interactions is knowledge (p.196).
Figure 3. Overview of the domain of research on teachers’ judgments, decisions and behavior (Shavelson and Stern, 1982, p. 461) [RECONFIGURED]
Classroom practices are context dependent. Carter (1990) suggests that expert teachers’ knowledge is episodic or based on its development in context and therefore, teachers organize their teaching around the classroom setting and the student population. To develop understandings of teachers’ decision making, it is “essential to know (a) their goals, (b) the nature of the task environment confronting them, (c) their information-processing capabilities and (d) the relationship between these elements” (Shavelson & Stern, 1981, p. 461).

The investigation of situated knowledge has played a major role in reading research for the past two decades (Gee, 2000; Putnam & Borko, 2000). The premise is that oral and written language becomes meaningful when students actively pull together the patterns that they have observed and experienced in their lives as well as the patterns that are “shared by the community of practice” (Gee, 2000, p. 200). Fundamentally, how students learn and the situation where the learning takes place are core components of what is learned (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Learning occurs in classrooms where students are involved in sociocultural experiences connecting both their personal and school lives. These experiences may often be inconsistent with one another and students must learn to navigate language that is “connected to different worlds… different whos…. [and] different whats” (p. 203). Further, Gee (2000) asserts, the “sociocultural meaningful dances” (p. 204) for understanding language requires support, or scaffolding from others with more broad worldly experience. He states, “to read is to be able to actively assemble situated meanings in one or more specific “literate” Discourses. There is no reading in general, at least none that leads to thought and action in the world” (p. 204). Elementary reading teachers may make decisions to provide scaffolding for their students to develop a more broad and worldly view of language in diverse situations.

**Categorization of Knowledge**

For this study, the decisions experienced reading teachers make are important and as discussed previously, Shulman (1986a, 1986b, 1987) theorized that teacher knowledge develops along 3 domains, general pedagogical knowledge, subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. These domains may help explain the knowledge teachers need in order to make decisions for reading instruction. According to Shavelson & Stern (1981), in order to understand teacher decision making, one must understand teacher behavior within classroom contexts.
General Pedagogical Knowledge

Classroom organization and management is at the heart of general pedagogical knowledge. It is the broad principles and strategies of classroom management, as well as the ways teachers structure and organize the school day through conducting lessons and creating learning environments (Shulman, 1987).

Grouping for reading instruction fits into this domain. Barr (1975) found teachers can articulate deliberate decisions about grouping which can be supported with empirical evidence. The planning involved as teachers group for reading instruction may be influenced by their beliefs, cognitive styles, conceptions of reading and the way in which these three concepts affect their general pedagogical knowledge (Borko, Shavelson, & Stern, 1981).

The management of reading instruction is often based on many sources of information that influence teacher decision making. Information about students, the nature of the instructional task, and the strategies and materials all add to the pool of knowledge teachers draw on for reading instruction (Borko, Shavelson & Stern, 1981). Recognition that the domain of general pedagogical knowledge is linked closely to teachers’ beliefs about reading instruction is a key concept in understanding teacher decision making (Guerrero, 2005).

Subject Matter Knowledge

In schools, recognized knowledge in courses, or in subject areas such as biology or world history, is referred to as subject matter knowledge and is often characterized by specialized training or qualifications (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Choi & Ahn, April 2003). Shulman (1986a) pointed out this “missing paradigm” (subject knowledge) in the research of teaching and triggered an exploration of subject-matter knowledge. It is generally believed that teachers’ subject matter knowledge is a core factor in improving student learning. However, according to Choi and Ahn (2003), there are disparate findings about the significance of subject matter knowledge on the quality of teaching. For example, no significant relationship was found between performance on a subject matter test and teaching behavior (Guyton and Farokhi, 1987). Yet, Hawk, Coble, and Swanson (1985) found subject matter knowledge as measured by hours of certification significantly affected student achievement. Of the most recent research, Wilson, Floden and Ferrini-Mundy (2002) reviewed teacher preparation research and found no reports that directly assessed subject matter knowledge and the relationship between teacher subject matter preparation and student learning (p. 191). Monk (1994) found that subject matter
preparation had a positive relationship with student achievement; however, there was evidence of a threshold effect: that is, at some point, more subject matter content classes did not increase the level of student achievement. According to Wilson, et. al. (2002) less than 6 subject matter undergraduate courses seemed to be the threshold. Most studies of subject matter knowledge are 10 years old or more and only one makes reference to reading knowledge in elementary school teachers. Wilson, et. al.’s research centers on preservice teacher preparation and reports that there is “a general weakness of the research regarding the subject matter preparation of prospective teachers…” (p.192). No studies were found that specifically address subject matter knowledge related to the decisions about reading instruction of experienced elementary teachers.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge

The third domain of Shulman’s (1986a, 1987) work is pedagogical content knowledge, or PCK. This third construct expands subject matter knowledge to include the “dimension of subject matter knowledge for teaching” (Shulman, 1986a, p.9). PCK refers to the ways in which teachers find methods for representing and articulating subject matter information to students through examples, explanations and demonstrations. Teachers create ways for students to understand the subject matter that often come from “wisdom of practice” (p. 9). The wisdom of practice is that which teachers know from their experience, beliefs and connected understandings in their personal compilations of prior knowledge. Often, teachers with a wealth of experience will create strategies for supporting learning for which they often cannot explain the origin. These strategies for supporting learning must take into consideration both the preconceptions and misconceptions of students that teachers may need to dispel. According to Shulman (1986a), there is no scarcity of research concerning student misconceptions and a growing body of knowledge exists on how to overcome these misconceptions. Since creating strategies to assist dispelling misconceptions are part of the decision making process for teachers, more research in the area of pedagogical awareness of subject matter may be needed.

Connections to Teaching Reading in the Elementary Schools

The theoretical frameworks of cognition and instruction support the notion that teachers bring variant knowledge to any teaching situation and that teacher learning entails integration of this knowledge base (Davis & Krajcik, 2005). Teacher learning is also situated in the day-to-day practice of application of existing knowledge (Putnam & Borko, 2000). It is clear that the very nature of teaching is complex and revolves around not only the teacher and students, but also by
the teacher’s knowledge of subject matter. Teachers use their experience of general pedagogical knowledge as well as knowledge of content to make these decisions. The connection of theory to practice can be difficult to recognize and the research on teacher learning “lacks good ways to make connections” (Davis & Krajcik, 2005, p. 10) and is moving toward examining this connection.

*Research in Education on Decision Making*

Decision making by teachers is complex and affected by their beliefs, their knowledge, situational environments and possibly their understanding of subject matter. How teachers make decisions about teaching reading may rely on the literacy instruction methods and practices they understand and experience. It is important to examine research to support reading instruction and it is important to view teachers as the decision makers about how to teach reading to the students in their classrooms.

Identifying research that targets teacher decision making is elusive. Teacher decision making has been imbedded within research about the beliefs and practices of teachers, often found in areas of teacher thinking (Clark & Peterson, 1986, Munby, 1984), cognitive processes and knowledge (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Shulman, 1986a, 1987), and teacher beliefs and practices (Goodman, 1988, Nespor, 1987). Table 2 provides an overview of 4 research studies that can be aligned with decision making about reading instruction.
### TABLE 2

STUDIES INCLUDED FOR REVIEW: TEACHER DECISION MAKING ABOUT READING INSTRUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/Author(s)/Title</th>
<th>Purpose of Study</th>
<th>Sample/Methodology</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981 Borko, H.</td>
<td>Examination of previous research to discover decisions for teacher planning</td>
<td>Four studies examined. A set of questions developed to identify what teachers use to make decisions about planning –</td>
<td>(1) teachers combine information about student characteristics into estimates of reading ability;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shavelson, R.J.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(2) groups are formed on the basis of ability estimates and school environment factors and teacher’s conceptions of reading;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stern, P.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3) reading groups form the basis for long term decisions about reading;</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Teachers’ Decisions in the Planning of Reading</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>(4) these decisions then affect student learning;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(5) differences in pacing seem to be associated with differences in student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year/Author(s)/Title</td>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>Sample/Methodology</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987 Shefelbine. J.L. Hollingsworth, S.</td>
<td>Examines the effects of undergraduate elementary educational majors in a reading practicum, seeking to (1) identify what kinds of instructional decisions in reading were troublesome for beginning teachers; (2) explain why these difficulties might occur</td>
<td>14 interns (preservice teacher)</td>
<td>Using these decision making categories:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Instructional Decisions of Preservice Teachers During a Reading Practicum</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Qualitative analyses of unannounced observations of reading lessons designed for small reading groups through narrative accounts detailed 7 areas of decision making.</td>
<td>DGN – appropriate diagnosed PLN – flexible planning BAL – lesson balance TXT – appropriate text placement RDG – type of reading practice WRI – word recognition instruction BAC – developing background knowledge</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Four levels of analysis: I. First – data sets examined for evidence of thoughtful decisions along with coding then and given a performance score (3-0); Second – adding each performance score; Third - interns responses to coaching suggestions in WRI – scored on whether change was attempted and whether successful; Fourth: analyses of knowledge and performance by: (1) incoming knowledge; (2) classroom management; and (3) mastery of classroom routines</td>
<td></td>
<td>Overall, for performance of the interns, the group did not exhibit many of thoughtful, decision making behaviors. Lower levels of content knowledge and attention to instructional routines and management affected decision making performance. Some areas, like DGN, PLN, WRI showed little mastery. Others showed promise for those who entered the study with higher levels of incoming content knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year/Author(s)/Title</td>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>Sample/Methodology</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993 Barksdale-Ladd, M.A. Thomas, K.F. <em>Eight Teachers’ Reported Pedagogical Dependency on Basal Readers</em></td>
<td>Examine teachers’ beliefs and perceptions regarding reading instruction. Guiding question: What are teachers’ beliefs, perceptions and feelings about reading instruction using: (1) basals; (2) grouping and pacing; (3) non-basal instruction; Additionally, a second question – What are teachers’ beliefs regarding needs of students, parents, school administrators, and themselves when using a basal reading program.</td>
<td>8 elementary teachers – rural setting Semistructured, open-ended interviews audiotaped and transcribed Phenomenological approach to analysis on interviews – examined idea units, or complete thoughts that stated concepts about reading. Categorizing ideas units into domains and domains were reexamined to create taxonomies. Using Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, 3 clinical psychologists generated 2 lists of terms to describe low level needs vs. high level needs related to education and instruction. These terms were used to match idea units to these needs</td>
<td>Conflicts between teachers’ beliefs and their reported methods of teaching reading Teachers relied on basals (70-100%) for reading instruction using the curriculum outline to teach reading and made 89% negative statements about basals. Most teachers used 3 groups for reading in their classrooms and felt grouping was needed to meet needs of high and middle groups, but lower groups seemed to be left behind. Non-basal instruction was more time consuming and not used as much as basals which accounted for only 10% of their comments. Positive comments almost always related to students’ positive responses to non-basal activities. Teachers reported basal reading programs satisfied lower level needs for all constituents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Year/Author(s)/Title | Purpose of Study | Sample/Methodology | Findings
--- | --- | --- | ---
2003 Maloch, B. Flin, A.S. Eldridge, D. Harmon, J. Loven, R. Fine, J.C. Bryant-Shanklin, M. Martinez, M. | Examine preservice teachers in order to explore differences in understandings, beliefs, and decision making | 101 preservice teachers in 3 types of reading teacher preparation programs – (1) reading specialist, RS; (2) general education, GE; (3) reading embedded, RE | Three themes emerged: (1) instructional decision making; (2) negotiations; (3) community. 

Understandings, Beliefs and Reported Decision Making of First-Year Teachers from Different Reading Teacher Preparation Programs

This research is part of the larger study of Hoffman, et. al. previously cited.

| | | | For decision making: |
| | | | (1) 78% of RS, 21% of GE and 76% of RE were concerned with how their instructional decisions affected student learning; |
| | | | (2) RS considered both classroom context and curriculum content when talking about decision making; |
| | | | (3) RS reported creating learning experiences reflecting mindful planning. |

| | | | Case study research – structured telephone interviews conducted at 3 points in their first year of teaching. |
| | | | Inductive data-driven analysis in 4 rounds of analyses using overall question: What’s right about preservice teacher education programs? |
These four studies provide an overview of the research on teacher decision making about reading instruction. Borko, Shavelson, & Stern (1981) chose to limit their research to teacher planning and grouping for reading. Their research demonstrated that teachers made decisions about reading groups based on estimates of students’ reading achievement. They also found that these groups remained static and the pacing of each group was different. Lower achieving reading groups were paced slower than higher achieving reading groups. This pacing contributed to the static achievement levels of students.

Shefelbine and Hollingsworth (1987) examined the instructional decisions undergraduate preservice teachers made with students in a reading practicum experience. The authors concluded that students who had higher levels of content knowledge prior to participating in the practicum suggested that they might make appropriate reading instructional for students. An additional finding was that, as a group, these practicum preservice teachers did not make thoughtful decisions about reading instruction.

Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas (1993) examined teachers’ beliefs regarding reading instruction. They reported on conflicts between teachers’ beliefs about methods for teaching reading and the use of basals as the curriculum used for reading instruction. Teachers in this study believed the use of basal readers satisfied some needs for the students they taught. In addition, teachers wished for more time to utilize non-basal activities for reading instruction because they reported positive reactions from their students when these activities were used. The conflict depicted in this study demonstrated how teachers were mandated to use basal curriculum materials, yet they wanted to use other non-basal materials because students were more engaged with non-basal materials. Although this study was not clearly about teacher decision making, it provided some insight into the feelings of teachers about the use of mandated reading instructional materials.

The final study by Maloch, Flin, Ethridge, et. al. (2003) was a component of a previously explained longitudinal study by Hoffman, Roller, Maloch, et. al. (2005). The study examined the differences in preservice teachers’ understandings and beliefs about their preparation to become reading teachers. Although the participants were asked about their preparatory programs, the data demonstrated how these preservice teachers viewed their decisions about reading instruction, based on phone interviews during their first year teaching. This study attempted to identify the participants’ decisions through the three themes that emerged: (1) instructional decisions; (2)
negotiations; and (3) community. Overall, those participants who had specific reading classes in their program were more concerned about their instructional decisions than those participants that graduated from a general education program.

These four studies represent examples of research about teacher decision making. Each study’s purpose was dissimilar and represented different populations of teachers. No research was identified as representing experienced teachers and their decisions about reading instruction.

*Overview of research on teaching and learning - Beliefs*

A major part of research on teaching and learning has been categorized as unidirectional, where teacher’s actions create observable reactions for student achievement in a psychological, behavioral manner (Fang, 1996). In addition, Shavelson (1973) refers to teachers being treated as a ‘black box’, where an emphasis on teacher effectiveness characteristics ignores teachers’ goals, motives, knowledge, plans and decisions. This lack of looking through the lens of teachers to see the whole picture of teacher’s actions is problematic. Duffy (1982) rebukes researchers as creating “one dimensional solutions” (p. 358) to classroom reading instruction, where variables are thought to be easily identifiable, and if teachers would just manipulate these factors in the proper order, students would be successful in reading.

Dewey (1910) affirmed that “Thinking in its best sense is that which considers the basis and the consequences of beliefs” (p. 5). A shift from a behaviorist standpoint of correlating teacher behaviors to student achievement had opened lines of research into looking at the manner of thinking inside teachers’ heads. This look inside opens opportunities to enhance the understanding of teaching processes, the how and why teaching works the way it does (Clark & Peterson, 1986). In an effort to define teacher thought processes, these authors categorized them into three types: (1) teacher planning; (2) teachers’ interactive thoughts and decisions; and (3) teachers’ theories and beliefs. These categories represent the temporal concepts of thinking about teaching in the gamut of engagement from prior to teaching lessons to the reflections following lessons that influence the continuing planning for the next lesson. According to Stern and Shavelson (1983), teachers’ thoughts, judgments and decisions guide their actions in their classrooms. Prior to the early 1980’s, most of the research on teacher thought processes centered on the planning phase, as reported by Clark and Peterson (1986). Teacher planning and reflection include thought processes and have been investigated and termed a measure of decision making.
Borko, Shavelson & Stern (1981) reviewed 4 studies related to reading instruction and decision making, but chose to examine these studies in light of teachers’ planning decisions only.

Fenstermacher (1979) forecasted that teacher effectiveness research would be focused on study of beliefs, yet there is a conspicuous lack of reference to knowledge in the research surrounding beliefs (Fang, 1996). Knowledge is an important piece of the puzzle of decision making. Shulman’s (1986a) three domains of knowledge previously discussed are connected to not only teacher thinking but their beliefs and practices as well. As teachers process general pedagogical knowledge of procedures and management, they utilize pedagogical content knowledge to enhance the subject matter content knowledge they possess. Because the subject matter content knowledge contains both substantive and syntactic structures, teachers must create ways for students to understand the content within the structure of language and truths of the knowledge. Substantive structures refer to the ways content knowledge is organized, or how the knowledge is arranged for understanding (Fang, 1996). An example of substantive structures would be when teachers build scaffolding activities in order to enhance understanding of a concept. An example of this might be an opportunity to build words using rimes that have been practiced in class before searching for words with those particular endings in other texts.

Teachers use the syntactic structure of language with students as part of oral language interactions in classrooms. Most everyone has encountered a situation where something that has been said has been misinterpreted by another. The refining of syntactic structure of language is a process of learning how to make what you say clear to others. Teachers use this process to teach, often minute by minute in their classrooms. An example of this might be asking students to find passages in their reading text that support their understanding of an oral response given in class.

Teacher knowledge can be categorized, yet much confusion remains when trying to define knowledge and beliefs and it is “difficult to pinpoint where knowledge ended and belief began…” (Pajares, 1992).

Often what constitutes a belief is difficult to identify. According to Eisenhart, Shrum, Harding & Cuthbert (1988), the inconsistency in defining belief and belief systems may be based on the differences in research agendas, where the definition fits the research. Beliefs are difficult to define, hard to investigate empirically and often seem mysteriously found in philosophical arguments. Others describe teacher beliefs as a filter through which instructional decisions are made (Orton, 1996; Shavelson & Stern, 1981).
In the quest to understand teacher beliefs, numerous factors within the social environment of schools as well as personal environments influence teachers. According to Parajes (1992), cognitive knowledge has its own affective and evaluative pieces and cannot exist without judgment rooted in the belief structures developed from childhood. Nespor (1987) contends knowledge system information is semantically stored, but episodic memory holds our beliefs. Individual beliefs can defy logic and be inflexible and incongruent with our knowledge. Beliefs, born of previous critical events, affect the ways in which decisions are made in classrooms where thousands of interpersonal actions occur. Teachers often make decisions on impulse and based on intuition grounded in their beliefs rather than reflection (Lortie, 1975; Pajares, 1992). However, some researchers have found that classroom teachers base their decision making on theoretical beliefs (Borko, Shavelson & Stern, 1981). In regards to reading instruction, teachers exercise various theoretical beliefs about how children learn to read through the instructional decisions they make. Paris, Wasik, & Turner (1991) noted teacher expectations for student learning were based on their views of reading and student expectations for learning. According to Fang, (1996) teachers hold embedded assumptions about their students, the subjects they teach, and their teaching responsibilities, with these embedded assumptions influence practices and beliefs.

Yet, it is this overlap of teacher thinking, teacher beliefs and teacher decision making that creates difficulty in separating each into its own individual construct. The desire to understand how teaching occurs must include decision making and in order to “understand teaching, we must understand how thoughts get carried into actions” (Shavelson & Stern, 1981, p. 457). However, this is a slippery slope because, as researchers argue that beliefs are important to learning:

little attention has been accorded to the structure and functions of teachers’ beliefs about their roles, their students, the subject matter areas they teach, and the schools they work in (Nespor, 1987, p. 317).

Therefore, what constitutes teacher decision making includes not only teacher beliefs about pedagogy, but their beliefs about how teaching has occurred in their lives, how teaching is observed by them and others, how teaching is experienced, what teachers think, and how they connect what they think to their teaching. It is not only a teacher’s beliefs that affect decision making; it is their connection to the world in light of teaching. Table 3 is an overview of four
theoretical approaches that may influence teachers’ beliefs and therefore their decision making about reading instruction. This table may provide a lens for examining teacher decisions, providing a structure for categorizing teacher decisions. The four theoretical approaches are: (1) sociological; (2) psychological; (3) curricular; and (4) physiological. Each of authors in Table 3 provided research that supports the theoretical approach. These four theoretical approaches may supply measures of clarity for the identification of teacher decision making.

**TABLE 3**

**Four Theoretical Approaches to Decision Making**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociological Approach</th>
<th>Psychological Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hargreaves, 1978</td>
<td>Pajares, 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peterson &amp; Clark, 1978</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Uses classroom as context
- Concerned with identifying connections between society and classroom
- Describes navigating the classroom society in which teachers make decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses information processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Think aloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Simulation studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Intentions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Concerned with how teachers learn to make decisions
- Describes how teachers offer opportunities and use perceptions of students in order to make instructional decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curricular Approach</th>
<th>Physiological Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doyle &amp; Ponder, 1977</td>
<td>Damasio, 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olson, 1980</td>
<td>Jensen, 2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Uses curriculum as integral part of decision making
- Concerned with how curriculum is implemented
- Describes the connection between what is in the curriculum and what teachers choose to teach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physiological Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses cognitive acts through the study of brain structures and processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns identifying covert acts that are made by teachers’ decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describes changes in physiological attributes that can be measured to investigate covert cognitive actions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Concerned with how teachers learn to make decisions
- Describes how teachers offer opportunities and use perceptions of students in order to make instructional decisions
Table 3 provides a general look at how teachers’ beliefs may be observed to affect their decision making about instruction in their classroom. It may be helpful to utilize one theoretical approach as a lens to identify how teachers are making decisions for instruction. For example, if curriculum is the basis for instructional decisions (See research question #2), then this lens might provide clarity to the decisions a teacher makes in the classroom. Or if student opportunities to make sense of what they read is evident in a teacher’s classroom, then that teacher may be using a psychological lens through which instructional decisions are made. These four theoretical approaches may help categorize what decisions teachers are making about their reading instruction and why they make the decisions they make.

Conclusion

Teachers remain the first and personal school contact with students as they attempt to read, make sense of print and in the age of accountability, take tests. The decisions teachers make about reading instruction are critical. Public schools cannot be successful without the expert teachers who place their integrity on their choices. Allington (2002) states, “If reading instruction is to improve, teachers must feel responsible for student outcomes” (p. 36). Therefore, the voices of teachers and the decisions they make daily in their classrooms have merit. This study examines decisions teachers make about reading instruction methods and practices.
CHAPTER 3
Methodology

Purpose

This purpose of this study was to examine the decisions 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade experienced public school teachers made in the selection of reading instructional practices.

Research Questions

The research questions were:
1) What decisions do 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade teachers making for reading instruction?
2) On what basis do teachers make these decisions?

This study utilized qualitative methodology by investigating reading instruction within classrooms allowing a glimpse into the daily practices in public schools. Creswell (1998) asserted that qualitative research is:

…an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting (p. 15)

Four qualitative data collection techniques were chosen to examine the methods and procedures teachers were using in their reading instruction. These four research techniques included: (a) conducting field-based observation of teachers and recording teacher actions in the delivery of reading instruction; (b) conducting in-depth interviews with teachers about their ideas, opinions and experiences associated with their reading instruction; (c) examining artifacts provided by teachers that reflect reading instruction in their classrooms; and (d) analyzing the policies of reading instruction within the school and school system.

Procedures

Developing a case study

Case study was one of the five traditions of inquiry reported by Creswell (1998) to be used when researchers wish to examine a place and time, where the setting and those involved within the setting provided clear boundaries for the ‘case.’ A case is a “specific, complex, functioning thing” (Stake, 1995, p .2). Case study allowed the researcher to find the contextual materials that formulated the case as well as gather information from multiple sources.
According to Creswell, a case study is an investigation of a bounded system, and may include multiple cases, called a collective case study. It is a holistic examination of a phenomenon in a natural setting, where the phenomenon can be a program, an event, a problem or an individual, and the setting creates the context for the phenomenon.

In this collective case study, it was essential to create a case boundary in order to identify the confines of the study. This study was limited to an examination of reading instruction in grades 2, 3 and 4 in one school considered to be representative of a local school system. This school recently accomplished adequately yearly progress, or AYP, as defined by the national standards set by the No Child Left Behind Act. These characteristics set the boundaries for this case study.

This collective case study also involved choosing more than one individual case to examine. Choosing different grade levels allowed for a differing sample of cases. The choice of grade levels was noteworthy. Decisions concerning primary reading instruction strategies were thoroughly researched (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998); thus for this study, reading instruction was explored beyond the initial level. Another reason for selecting these grades was that, in this state, standard testing was given at 3rd and 5th grade levels in elementary schools, with additional testing given at 4th grade beginning in 2007. This population represented grades prior to (2nd) and after (4th) the initial grade that state testing was given and also examined the 3rd grade because it was the first year state testing was required at this level. Prior to school year 2006-07, 4th grade students who did not pass the 3rd grade test had to retake the 3rd grade test; however, the state now supplied school systems with testing designed for all 4th grade students. The examination of decisions about reading instructional practices for more than one teacher at various grade levels was essential for a case analysis of how this school functions to prepare students in reading. Choosing a collective case study methodology offered the opportunity for balance and variety (Stake, 1995) in the examination of the methods various grade level teachers were using for reading instruction and their decision making in selecting these methods.

**Researcher Profile**

Like teachers, researchers bring their professional prior knowledge along with their personal preferences, or biases into their research. These biases originate in personal characteristics, or idiosyncrasies, as well as their lives. These characteristics may include physical traits such as gender, race, sexual orientation, social class, religious beliefs, and age
which situate the researcher in the world. These traits affect the choices and thinking of researchers concerning the methodology and framework, or paradigm of their research (Bailey, 2007). It was important to be aware of the influence of the researcher in this study.

I am a 56 year old Caucasian female with over 20 years of public school teaching experience in the public schools. I grew up in a middle class family of 6 children and I am the only female as well as the only person in my family to graduate from college. My undergraduate degree was in health and physical education and I taught for several years in this content area. I began working with special needs students in physical education and continued to work with students with challenges throughout my public teaching career. These aspects of my teaching career influence my values and the way in which I view the developmental nature of learning.

My interest in literacy, with an emphasis on reading, began many years ago when I worked with students who were in a restrictive, specialized school for emotionally disturbed students. I became curious about their lower reading achievement relative to their behavior. This curiosity led me to graduate school where I studied reading more in depth and earned a Master’s degree in Special Education – Learning Disabilities. Most of my twenty-three years of teaching were in elementary classrooms and the majority of these years I spent teaching reading to students who performed at lower achievement levels than expected. The last 10 years of my elementary public school teaching experience, I taught in an inclusive setting for students, where my classroom was a second teaching station for all students. Teaching reading was based on a workshop approach where word study, literature circles and writing were combined to teach reading for 3rd, 4th and 5th grade students.

Observations of the participants were silhouetted with my constructivist stance and experience. As I observed teachers’ actions and experiences, I perceived through the lens of my own reading teaching experience. Interviews with the participants provided an opportunity to for the teachers to explore in depth their reading instruction. However, these teachers had much more to talk about than just their reading instruction. I considered this opportunity to speak and be recognized for their words as part of my responsibility as a researcher. This assisted me in exploring the socially constructed realities of these teachers.

I believed that by looking at the multiple realities of these teachers, I could report on variety in their reading instruction. From the actions and experiences I observed and the interviews I listened to, I attempted to construct knowledge through the research process.
Creating more than one case study and searching for the connections between the reading instruction at each grade level allowed me to fit together the lenses though which we all looked. Yet it is important to recognize that my own personal experiences and beliefs could cloud my interpretations. Lincoln and Guba (2005) advised researchers to search for the connection between action and praxis within the socially constructed realities of those studied.

My experience with teaching reading in public schools is double-edged. While this experience with public schools and reading afforded me a level of comfort with observing and interviewing teachers much like myself, this level of experience also suggested a bias for what I know and was influenced by my philosophical stances. What I observed from these teachers was affected by the lens through which my prior experience and the distinctiveness of me exist. My goal was to report the interpretations of the experiences through my observations and interviews, using the multitude of perspectives involved. Collectively, these teachers and I made an attempt to identify the important aspects of their reading instruction.

**Contextual Setting for Study**

*Oceanside Elementary School*

One school, Oceanside Elementary (pseudonym) was selected for this collective case study. Choosing one school allowed the research to center on the reading instruction practices of teachers and their related decision making within the context of given school population and culture as opposed to larger samples such as one school system, multiple school systems or whole state public school systems.

A second reason for this school’s selection was that the building principal was interested in the study and agreed to permit the researcher access to the school community. Stake (1995) believed that site selection for a collective case study should maximize what can be learned since time and access are restraints for researchers. Choosing to go where research was welcomed was an important asset. It was also important to be cognizant of the collective school climate and community environment so that learning about the case was not limited by the sample, but may be looked at as a model for similar schools within the school system.

*Location*

The study took place in a small metropolitan city in a mid Atlantic area in the United States. Information about this city was located on the city’s web site. The city had an estimated
population of 94,000 and supported its own public school system, while the larger surrounding suburban area had 2 additional separate public school systems. This combined urban and suburban area supported a population of almost 300,000. In the last 10 years, the city area had lost 1.7% of its population. The two larger suburban areas experienced 8.2% and 3.8% increases in their populations. The average per capita income of the city was $2,000 to $4000 less than the two surrounding suburban areas.

The local area also supported 6 private parochial schools with a total population of approximately 1,500 students as well as 5 private secular schools with a total population of approximately 750 students. This area also had 2 private secular schools serving special needs populations with an approximate population of 170 students. From these figures, approximately 2,200 students attended private schools.

School System

The city school district served approximately 13,000 students, where 51% are identified as minority students. Half of the population of this school system was found in the 21 elementary schools where approximately 6% of the total population of students received special education services. A student-teacher ratio was reported as 18:1. The school system as a whole had yet to accomplish adequate yearly progress, or AYP, because some schools had not met the minimum state standards. The school system was closing several elementary schools to provide alternative school placements for students who were beyond the average age for their grade. These overage students had not passed the state mandated tests, SMT and therefore, were not promoted on schedule. The schools system created alternative school placements for these students to an effort to meet their needs.

School

Oceanside Elementary was one of the 21 elementary schools in the city public school system and served a PK-5 population of approximately 550 students. There were a little over 50 faculty members, making the student-teacher ratio approximately 10-1. There were currently six 2nd grade, six 3rd grade and five 4th grade classrooms. Oceanside was a Title I school receiving federal funds to support learning. The population of students at Oceanside Elementary had an approximate ethnic makeup of: 4% Latino; 70% Caucasian; 23% African American; and 4% Asian. In recent years, the Latino population has grown threefold.
Oceanside Elementary belonged to the Basic School Network, which supported the premise that students learn best when they see connections between the real world and school. The school reported on its website that “students also benefit by being shown connections between content area subjects,” thus the school reportedly connects “all learning to the eight major themes: (1) The Life Cycle; (2) Connections to Nature; (3) Working in Groups; (4) Producing & Consuming; (5) Communicating with Symbols; (6) Time & Space; (7) Response to the Aesthetic; and (8) Living with Purpose.” The Basic School Website stated four premises that support learning: (1) the school is a community; (2) the curriculum makes sense and literacy is core; (3) there is a climate for learning where class size is small and flexible grouping is the norm; and (4) there is a commitment to character and living with a purpose (Messiah College, n.d.). Oceanside Elementary had struggled to meet expectations from the federal government in accordance with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. In the school year 2006-2007, Oceanside made adequate yearly progress accreditation for the first year with adjusted English pass rate scores of 77 in grades 3 & 5 and an overall score of 91 in mathematics. The adjusted score occurred when remedial 4th grade student scores were counted twice into the final scores for 3rd and 4th grade. Fourth grade students who did not pass English in 3rd grade retook the 3rd grade test at the end of their 4th grade year. Oceanside had not made AYP the previous year, 2005-06 because of English and Math test scores. In school year 2007-08, Oceanside achieved AYP for the second year and was no longer on a plan of improvement.

Further breakdown showed Oceanside had raised the overall percentage of student achievement by six percentage points from 64% to 70 % from 2004-05 year to 2005-06 and then to 87% in 2007-08. In subgroup information, a significant change in the performance of African American students was evident. Students in this subgroup increased from 52% in 2004-05, to 71% in 2004-05, and maintained at 73% in 2005-06. The number of African American students taking the state test was also significant. From previous data over 20 African American students did not take the test in school year 2003-04; however, in 2004 - 5 only 12 African American students did not take the test and in 2005-06. One hundred (100%) percent of African American students took the state standards tests in 2005-06, with 99% the following year taking the state standard test in Reading (See Table 4).
Looking at the data by percentage of students passing at each grade level, it appeared the 4th and 5th grade outperformed the 3rd grade in the state testing over the last 3 years. The overall pass rate for 3rd grade moved from 61% for 2004-05 and 2005-06, with an increase to 78% passing in 2006-07. Fourth grade began testing in 2005, moving from 73% to 96% for all students. Overall, 5th grade scored 66% in 2004-05 moved to 80% and 84% for the next two years.

Subgroups within all grades illustrated female students slightly outperforming male students in 3rd and 4th grade in all three years. In 5th grade, there was less difference related to gender. In 2005-06, African American 3rd grade students outperformed 3rd grade white students, 82% to 53% and those scores were just narrowly reversed in 2006-07. In 5th grade, white students outperformed African American students, 85% to 69% in 2005-06 and 90% to 73% in 2006-07 (See Table 5).
Table 5: English (Reading) by Grade Level for Oceanside Elementary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>2004-05</th>
<th>2005-06</th>
<th>2006-07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>2006-07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>2006-07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These scores demonstrated a continuous improvement on the SMT among all students at Oceanside Elementary School. Based on this school information, it appeared there were changes occurring in this school that have led to an increase in the student performance on state standard tests. It is feasible that contextual factors were influencing Oceanside’s move toward achievement of adequate yearly progress. These factors were not easily identified based on the available testing data.

**Research Design**

For this collective case study, two teachers from each of the grade levels 2, 3 and 4 were asked to volunteer to participate. The principal of Oceanside presented the research proposal to the leadership team, which was a site-based team made up of teachers and staff at Oceanside. The principal or “gatekeeper” (Creswell, 1998) for this school contacted several teachers of 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade level and prepared a list of teachers who were willing to participate. Each teacher was personally contacted by the researcher and signed an informed consent form volunteering to participate. As participants, each teacher agreed to: (1) have 3 observations conducted in their classroom during reading instruction over a 10 week period; (2) participate in
an interview centered on teacher decision making following each observation and scheduled at
the teacher’s convenience; and (3) provided a selection of artifacts that represented the reading
lessons observed as well as any other artifacts that the teacher selected to represent classroom
reading instruction. Additionally, the researcher reviewed the school reading philosophy and
school system documents relating to reading instruction and philosophy. Patton (2002) stated
“By using a variety of sources and resources, the evaluator observer can build on the strengths of
each type of data collection while minimizing the weaknesses of any single approach” (p. 306).

Observations

Three observations were conducted at each teacher’s convenience. Teachers were asked
to identify times convenient for observation during their scheduled classroom reading time.
These observations were scheduled once a week during three different weeks within a 10-week
block of time. Field notes were recorded for each observation and the researcher kept a journal of
additional information pertinent to the observation.

Field notes were recorded during each observation to capture the natural setting of daily
routines in each classroom as a direct source of data. I sat within the classroom as an observer
only and recorded relevant data concerning how each teacher delivered their reading instruction,
as well as any personal insights about what was occurring in and around the classroom.
“Insights, ideas and inspirations - and yes, judgments, too- will occur while making observations
and recoding field notes” (Patton, 2002, p. 304). The insights of the researcher became part of
the fieldwork and were important pieces of data.

I did not attempt to record every interaction, but rather selected the interactions that
related to reading instruction only. I used paper and pencil in order to minimize distractions
within the classroom that a laptop might have presented. I recorded what students and teachers
said in relation to reading. “Direct quotations, or as near as possible recall of direct quotations,
should be captured during fieldwork” (Patton, 2002, p. 303).

I attempted to make the teacher and students comfortable by sitting in a space that was
not central to the instruction, to move only when the reading instruction moved out of sight and
hearing range, and to make no contact with students or teacher during the observations. Several
times in various classrooms, students talked to me. I was respectful to their questions but limited
my interaction. In addition, a few students asked their teacher about my presence. As previously
discussed with each participant, we agreed that if students asked, they would be reassured I was
not there to watch what they were doing, but to watch their teacher only. Before the first observation, I surveyed the classroom and asked the teacher to suggest where to sit. After the first observation, I spoke with the teacher about any other ways I could lessen the impact of my presence as a different person in the classroom. All participants assured me their students were not uncomfortable with my presence in their classroom. The presence of another person in the room was a traditional concern because of the effects of the observer on the observed (Patton, 2002); therefore, asking the teacher about providing less distraction was important. It was also important that I be “seen enough” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 453) to be a familiar sight in the school. Thus I spent additional time in the school building by visiting the library, other classrooms and the lunch room throughout the 10 week data collection phase. Being ‘seen around’ the building allowed this school community to become accustomed to my presence. I know this occurred because students began to speak to me outside of their classrooms, with some asking if I was coming to watch their teacher. Being ‘seen around’ provided a way to displace the problem of reactivity my observational research. My goal was to become a fixture in each classroom.

Each classroom’s particular setting was of interest because it was in “context… that activities can be best understood in the actual settings in which they occur” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 431). I took photographs of each classroom to enhance my ability to describe the context of the fieldwork and to visually capture the classroom environment. Data collected in the form of both words and pictures allowed me the opportunity to create a rich database on the context since “no data is trivial or unworthy of notice” (p. 432).

As a primary intent of data analysis, I began my analysis in the field. Lecompte and Schensul (1999) affirmed that this should be the first level of analysis. During the observations, I wrote impressions of the classroom lessons by using brackets [ ] to distinguish what was observed from what was felt, or my own personal reflections. The personal experience and insights allowed me to represent a heuristic look at reading instruction in each classroom. In order to bracket these heuristic experiences, the researcher “must have personal experience with and intense interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 107) in what is observed. Since heuristics concerns meanings, essence and quality of experience, the bracketing added my own personal understandings to the observations which complemented the meaning of the written words describing what was observed. My personal understandings of the observations of reading
instruction added insights. “It is this personal experience and intensity that yields an understanding of the essence…” states Patton (2002, p. 107).

In addition to the written words describing the observations and the bracketed reflections of the observer, I formulated questions for the purpose of further clarifying my observations. These questions were written in the margins of the raw field notes and used in the subsequent follow-up interviews.

After conducting each observation and recording raw field notes, I immediately typed the field notes on the same day and added any additional information remembered from the observation that may not have been written down. Adding this extra information or “cooking the notes” provided a link to the personal experience of the observation and a chance to reflect and fill in any details to assure what was recorded in the raw notes made sense.

*Interviews*

Following each of the observations, I scheduled an interview which was conducted within 48 hours of the observation. The purpose of this interview was two-fold. First, questions about what was observed were asked to help broaden the understanding of the circumstances, the procedures and methods used in reading instruction during the observation. Second, I had a prepared list of questions (See Appendix A) support the development of understandings of the teacher’s perceptions and of reading instruction in the classroom, centering on teacher decision making.

Each interview was arranged at the convenience of the teacher and took place where the teacher was most comfortable, their classroom. In the research there existed conflicting opinions about audio taping interviews. Stake (1995) offered that audio tapes, while valuable for exact wording and helpful for researchers to reflect and probe the interviewee, provided more data than a researcher can work with comfortably. He proposed that a “researcher should develop skill in keeping shorthand notes and count on member checks to get the meaning straight” (p. 56). In opposition, Patton (2002) believed the use of tape recorders supported the collection of interview data “without undue intrusion when observing programs where professionals are the participants” (p. 308). The preciseness made possible by using audio taping was helpful when making sense of the data and this benefit was priceless to me. I explained to each interviewee my purpose behind the audio taping, which allowed me to be completely focused on the interviewee, rather than taking a written record of the interview while conducting the interview. I explained
that by taping the interview, none of our conversation will be missed and that, at any time, the teachers could ask that the recorder be turned off. Although audio taping can make interviewees uncomfortable, it was my job to make the interviewee comfortable during the interview. Some methods I used to add to the comfort level for the participants included: (a) demonstrating continuing interest in what is being said; (b) demonstrating that what is being said is worth knowing; (c) showing respect for the participant’s investment of time to help understand their world. Genuine acceptance of these teachers’ beliefs and practices demonstrated “personal and professional commitment to learning and engaging people with respect” (Patton, 2002, p. 417).

I used a microcassette recorder to record each interview. I had an additional microcassette recorder running as back-up; however I did not experience problems with the main recorder. All interviews were transcribed and used to examine the reading methods and practices reported by teachers in the context of the actual reading methods and practices observed. Patton (2002) believes nothing can substitute for capturing the raw data of what is actually said by the participants. When audio taping, the environment must be quiet enough to ensure transcription may be accomplished so I suggested the interviews take place in the classroom when students were not present, if this setting was acceptable. Most interviews were completed during teacher free time which is approximately 45 minutes. Some teachers chose to be interviewed after school, rather than during the school day. Only once was additional time needed for follow up.

Prior to each interview, I reviewed my field notes from the observation. I had formulated questions in the margins of the raw field notes to better understand the decisions teachers were making about their reading instruction. Notes were taken as needed during the interviews to help me clarify questions that unfolded while talking and this allowed the participant to continue a line of thought to completion. I was able to backtrack to follow up or clarify what was said using my notes. According to Patton (2002), note taking during interviews helps to pace the interview and provide feedback to the interviewee about what is important, or “noteworthy” (p. 383).

**Questioning Format**

A semi-structured approach to interviews was utilized. At the first interview, teachers were asked to discuss their teaching experience using these two questions: 1) How many years have you been teaching? 2) What endorsements do you hold? These two questions provided general information about the teachers and their teaching experience. The research design required that the participants have a minimum of three full years teaching experience. In this
way, all teachers were ‘seasoned’ and had experience in public school settings. The use of these two initial questions allowed the participant to settle in and become comfortable with me as well as the interview format.

Following this general information, an additional list of questions was adapted from Appendix A in Mosenthal, Lipson, Torncello, Russ, & Mekkelsen (2004) for use as a standard base of questioning for all teachers interviewed. These are as follows:

1. Tell me about the ways that you teach reading?
2. What materials do you use in your reading program?
3. Tell me about your schedule, when literacy instruction happens, and how long it lasts each day?
4. Tell me about your grouping strategies during reading instruction?
5. Is there a common curriculum across your school?
6. Do you have the perception that the teachers and administrators share a common vision of reading?
7. Do you feel any kinds of pressure to teach reading in a particular way? Followed by - Tell me about your reasons for thinking this.
8. Do you talk with children about their reading? What do you talk about?
9. Do you teach word-recognition strategies or skills? Phonics? Comprehension? Vocabulary? How do you teach these?
10. How do you individualize reading instruction to meet specific student needs?
11. How do you individualize for students experiencing difficulty in learning to read?
12. Tell me the story of how your personal approach to reading instruction has evolved.
13. In the past years, what changes, if any, have you made in the way you teach reading?
14. In what directions might you anticipate your reading program going over the next few years?
15. Why do you think your school was successful on the SOL tests in 2006?
16. What needs to happen in your school for more children to do well in reading?
17. What impact would you say that your building administrator has on reading instruction?
18. What different types of assessment information do you collect in the classroom?

19. What kinds of influences would you say that the various state/federal initiatives have had on your teaching practices?

A copy of these questions was used for each participant and each question was checked off and dated when it was asked. This allowed me to assure that each question was used for each participant. These questions served as a standard line of inquiry across the three interviews. As expected, many of these questions were addressed through actual observation (like #3) as well as by questions generated by the observations (like #12). This standard set of questions allowed me a back-up examination of each participant in order to encourage participants to talk about their decision making about reading without asking directly. This allowed me to examine the data for decision making without the influence of each participant’s explanation of their decision making.

Once all the transcripts were completed, each participant had an opportunity to review the interview. In addition, at this time, participants were given the opportunity to tell about their understandings of their own decision making.

Artifacts

Each participant was asked to provide me with any artifacts that exemplified their reading instruction. These artifacts included materials that supported reading instruction in their classrooms such as worksheets and teacher-made resources. The teachers volunteered these artifacts as a way to illustrate their reading instruction. I reviewed these artifacts and classified and catalogued these documents according to the teacher’s grade level, type of artifact, and use related to classroom instruction. (See Appendix B)

Review of Policy Documents

Documents relating to reading curriculum and reading initiatives were gathered from the school district office, the school system web site, the individual school web site and the individual school. These items were examined to identify the intent of reading programs from the school district and at the individual school levels. These documents provided an overview of the reading policy expectations from both a system and a school level, as well as provide a point of triangulation for comparison with the teacher observations and interviews. The most prominent of these documents was the reading philosophy statement from Oceanside Elementary School (See Appendix C).
Data Analysis

Case Study Approach

The case study approach is a “specific way of collecting, organizing and analyzing data: in that sense it represents an analysis process” (Patton, 2002, p. 447). The clarity of purpose is important in qualitative study and the emergent nature of observational and interview inquiry should be flexible. Patton (2002) further clarified that “earlier states of fieldwork tend to be generative and emergent, following where the data lead, later stages bring closure by moving toward confirmatory data collection – deepening insights into and confirming (or disconfirming) patterns that seem to have appeared” (p. 436). The purpose of this study was to examine the reading instructional decisions for methods and practices of teachers in grades 2, 3 and 4. The similarities and differences that emerged and what they might mean in relation to the best practices in reading instruction were reviewed in respect to the need for success on the SMT at Oceanside Elementary School.

According to Stake (1995), analyzing observations and interviews involves “taking something apart” (p. 71) in order to put this information into a coherent description. Data reconstruction in analysis and synthesis of the data were an important component of my data interpretation. Dissection of the observations and interviews allowed me to identify meaning of the teachers’ actions that connected to their purpose. Finding meaning in the segmented data and reconstructing segments to make sense in light of the research purpose is the challenge of analysis of data in a case study (Stake, 1995).

Triangulation

Stake defined triangulation as a “working to substantiate an interpretation or to clarify its different meanings” (p. 173). Although there was no single approach to triangulation, its purpose remains stalwart. Triangulation was based on the premise that no one source of information is sufficient. Therefore, multiple sources of data collection and analysis were imperative to this research study. The use of observations, the collection of artifacts from teachers, the interviews, and the review of school and school system documents allowed for triangulation of multiple data sources, which made possible fuller understandings of the patterns within and across the data. It was important for me to remember that findings from different data sources may yield conflicting information and other inconsistencies regarding reading practices. Patton (2002) affirms that inconsistencies can be “illuminative and important” (p. 556).
In the triangulation of data sources, this study used a comparison of observations with interviews, checking for consistency in what was said over time. A comparison of the perspectives from teachers within grade levels as well as a comparison between teachers from different grade levels offered a way to triangulate the data. Another way to triangulate the data was the use of member checks. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) define member checking as “participants in a qualitative study are asked to check the accuracy of the research” (p. G-5). Participants in this study were given transcripts of their interviews for review in order to confirm and clarify the transcript. In addition, each participant was given the opportunity to explain their understandings of their own decision making using the open ended statement, “Overall, I believe I make decisions about reading instruction in my classroom….” Each teacher was asked to fill in the sheet and expound on this statement. Using a variety of data sources for triangulation allowed me to increase the credibility of the analysis. Patton states, “Either consistency in overall patterns of data from different sources or reasonable explanations for differences in data from divergent sources can contribute significantly to the overall credibility of findings” (p. 560).

Interpretations and Analysis - Patterns

This qualitative data analysis process involved examining data to identify patterns, themes inconsistencies and unstated or unavailable information. It was important to recognize that “vagaries, uncertainties and ambiguities” (Patton, 2002, p. 437) were also part of the pattern. Systematic analysis of the patterns within the data led me toward interpretation. Stake (1995) separates analysis into two main tactics – categorical aggregation and direct interpretation of individual instances. In this study, I looked at the interviews from each individual classroom first, sequencing actions and categorizing what occurred into codes for ease of identification. A second review of the interviews allowed me to reduce the data and consolidate the categorized actions into themes. Next, the interview and artifact data from the individual classroom teacher was analyzed, again categorizing information using the coding format found in the interviews. This case-by-case analysis gave support for building layers of analysis based upon cross-case patterns found through the data. Thick description of what occurred is “the bedrock” (Patton, 2002, p. 438) or the foundation of this study.

The initial stage of analysis involved looking at individual classroom for the patterns of reading instruction within each. Once the data had been analyzed for each classroom, grade
levels were a secondary level of analysis, providing an additional point for identification of patterns. An overall tertiary level of analysis was conducted by analyzing all grades together and the categories and/or themes were supported through this level of analysis. It is important to bear in mind the researcher’s utmost responsibility is always one of “doing justice to each individual case. All else depends upon that” (Patton, 2002, p. 448). The visual representation adapted from Patton (2002, p. 448) offered me a way to assemble data in layers that allow for cross-case patterns to emerge from the data (See Figure 4).
Figure 4

Case Study: Layers of Analysis

Case Study School Reading Instructional Program

2\textsuperscript{nd} grade
Case Study
Reading instruction

3\textsuperscript{rd} grade
Case Study
Reading Instruction

4\textsuperscript{th} grade
Case Study
Reading Instruction

Case study of individual participants
Reading instruction
Case Record

Creating a case record for individual teachers as an intermediate step pulled the data into a concise bundle, which Lincoln and Guba (1983) refer to as “analysis products,” to help provide organized and ready access. “The case record pulls together and organizes the voluminous case data into a comprehensive, primary resource package” (Patton, 2002, p. 449). This case record condensed the case data in a format not unlike reports used by social services, personnel and psychologists. I used flags to identify the themes in each case, making it possible for the data to be manageable, yet assisting with subsequent analysis beyond the raw data. Each case record provided the needed connection to this study’s purpose so that the final case study was clear in its analysis. The case record is a “condensation of the raw case data organized, classified and edited into a manageable and accessible file” (Patton, 2002, p. 450). For example, with the data from 3rd grade teachers, a case record allowed the individual data from each teacher to be condensed into an outlined narrative form that included the data in a manner that allowed for ease of analysis.

One way I organized the data was to categorize the themes by colors. All the observations and transcripts were read and I wrote in black ink my first impression of decision making aspects of each. These topics were identified and then all were read again to consolidate this first iteration into an emerging theme. Repeating this process for a second time allowed me to look over my first impressions of decisions each teacher was making and I created a theme from the data. For example, a variety of strategies emerged and the word ‘strategy’ was marked ink in order to identify the data that fit this descriptor. In addition, a flag was attached to the document to mark the place where this example of decisions occurred, making color coding to identify the theme. Each participant had a color-coded folder to hold the observations and transcripts, where each grade level was the same color to facilitate ease of identification. I used these individual folders to identify the extent of each theme within grade levels and further, recognition of themes between grade levels.

Using this organizational structure, the color-coded themes assisted with identifying the multiplicity observed in reading instruction. With a quick glance at each folder, a theme by color could be seen in each individual folder, each grade level by the color of the folders and overall for all the participants. Looking at each flag, I was able to identify various practices and report their use throughout each individual classroom as well as all the classrooms. Outlining this
information assisted in finding cross-grade level patterns. For example, if a teacher engaged students in summarizing the information read and summarizing was identified as a portion of the theme named ‘strategies’, than summarizing would be reported as a single practice for an individual. However, if more than one classroom is using this method, then similarities and differences would be reported in the use of summarizing.

Creswell (1998) favors reading all the information first to gain a sense of what has been gathered before taking reflective notes, or writing memos to begin the organizational process. I chose to write memos directly on the transcripts and observations. Creswell also suggested that a general visual image may assist the researcher with organizational structure. I created a visual matrix of the first iteration ideas as well as a second, and then added a visual table to identify the consolidation of topics identified in the first iteration. Making visual connections to the thematic structure of the data was critical in developing my understandings of what teachers were choosing to do in their classrooms to teach reading. The ways in which methods and practices emerged from the data helped create the dimensions of the information. The use of a matrix supported me in identifying patterns and comparing patterns that emerge (See sample, Appendix D). The use of inductive reasoning was used in reaching conclusions.

In review, Creswell (1998) provided the process for this study. First, the data was organized into files and then all data were read with memos, or notes written on the data which formed my initial coding of the information about decision making. A visual matrix was made to reflect this initial coding, or first iteration. A second review of the data allowed me to consolidate the initial topics into 3 major themes. An outlined case record was constructed for each participant to further in depth analysis. The data within these themes were organized for use in describing the components of each theme. Categorical classification within each theme helped identify patterns in the data, and the analysis of patterns lead to direct explanations and the development of naturalistic generalizations. Finally, the data were represented in narrative, with quotes that exemplify the data. Tables, figures and other visual images were developed to support understandings of the data. A case study should “offer a holistic portrayal, presented with any context necessary for understanding the case” (Patton, 2002, p. 450).
Limitations

Every research study can be defined by its limitations. This study created balance through the use of observations, collecting artifacts, interviews and an examination of policy documents. In qualitative research, case studies are contextual and limited by the samples chosen. In this collective case study, it was important to recognize the design constraints of the small sample within one school, 6 classrooms and 7 teachers. It was important to revisit the purpose of this study because by examining in depth the reading instruction methods and practices within these classrooms, I identified what was happening in these classrooms to support student reading. Patton (2002) speaks of “high-quality lessons learned,” meaning information that can be used for future action, and lists nine criteria. Three of these are particularly relevant to this research: (1) practice wisdom and experience of practitioners – how the data gives evidence that these teachers have a lesson to teach others about the delivery of reading instruction; (2) experiences reported by program participants – how the data gives evidence about the lessons observed that meet the needs of students in reading instruction; and (3) cross-disciplinary connections and patterns – how the data can serve as a model for others who might be searching for a model for their own reading instructional practice. Lessons learned must be kept “grounded in their context” (p. 565). Therefore, generalizations were gained from this environment only and reported only in context of this school.

As stated previously, one possible limitation of the observations included atypical behavior by the observed because of the observation. For example, the effect of my presence within the classroom may have changed the dynamics within the classroom. The problem of teachers reacting differently because they are being observed is well documented, and one method suggested for combating this effect is to observe over time. The research design was to observe three times in each classroom in order to generate useful information about reading instruction. According to Patton (2002), the length of time is dependent upon the purpose of the study and the ability to answer the research question and “an entire segment of a programs may be of sufficiently short duration” (p. 275). Therefore, the research design of observing only 3 times in each of the 7 classrooms may have been a limitation.

Another limitation could be the affect of the situation on the observed in unpredictable ways. An example of this might include observation of teacher responses in the context of reading instruction that form a philosophical inconsistency with my own philosophy. For
example, I am grounded in a constructivist philosophy and when I observed in a classroom where the teacher demonstrated a more behaviorist philosophy, I had to document my possible bias in the analysis of the observation. Because I was in an “etic” position, or outsider view, detachment from the observations was critical (Patton, 2002; Creswell 1998; Stake, 1995). However because I am a human and a teacher, I could not separate my connections to my philosophical base and so I confront this opportunity for bias. Observations and interviews may supply a cross check for each other. In addition, I focused my attention in analyzing the data by attending to what was observed, not how I felt about what I observed.

Researcher bias was a possible limitation of this study. Trustworthiness was an important concept in this qualitative inquiry and there was a need to strive for objectivity in observations and interviews. Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggested balance and fairness may be established by having researchers imitate journalists who attempt to tell multiple sides of a story. It was my responsibility as a researcher to be as accurate and unbiased as humanly possible in presenting the data based on the analysis and interpretation of the patterns identified from the data. For example, one of the noticeable facets of the observations and interviews with Max was the increase in frequency of strategies revealed from the first observation and interview to the last. As a researcher, I wondered if my own bias about his emphasis on the SMT played into my observation and subsequent interviews. I noted in my memo journal that I had a hard time with his methods because all of the reading revolved around the SMT. This direct contradiction to my own philosophy may have been difficult for me to balance. I also wrote in my memo journal that the contradiction in methodology from the first observation in 2nd grade to then observing 3rd grade on the same day, back to back, was surprising. As the observations and interviews continued with Max, I was less uncomfortable and allowed my research self to appear. Was this initial bias evidenced in the frequency of strategies observed and discussed? It was a possibility. My purpose was not to pass judgment, but rather to provide knowledge about teachers’ decision making with regard to reading instruction in this setting. Patton (2002) reminded researchers that qualitative inquiry “can present accurate data on various perspectives, including the evaluator’s perspective, without the burden of determining that only one perspective must be true” (p. 578).

Finally, the use of member checking may or may not prove to provide useful feedback. Stake (1995) reported he frequently does not receive feedback from the transcripts given to those who are participants. However, he also stated, “all my reports have been improved by member
checking” (p. 116). Participation in providing feedback is voluntary, is unpredictable in nature, and may provide little support in triangulating data sources. All teachers participated in reviewing their transcripts, provided no feedback of substance and only 2 teachers took the opportunity to write specifically about their beliefs related to their decision making.

Summary

Qualitative research offers a complex, yet insightful framework for studying any issue in detail and depth. Examining the reading instruction in the natural setting of classrooms in a public school with minimal intrusiveness was important for providing depth of understanding about what was actually occurring within public school classrooms in this era of accountability, and specifically in the attempts of Oceanside Elementary School to meet the standard of adequate yearly progress. In this study, qualitative inquiry was used for the examination of the decisions about reading methods and practices of two public school teachers in grades 2, 3 and three public school teachers in grade 4 as they taught and prepared students for achieving testing mandates.
CHAPTER FOUR

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the decisions experienced teachers in 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade make about their reading instructional practices. In order to examine these decisions, a protocol of observations and follow-up interviews with supporting artifacts volunteered by teachers was devised from which an examination of decisions made about reading instruction within classrooms could be scrutinized.

The purposeful sampling selection of participants was prefaced by the principal who is the organizer for Oceanside Elementary, a school located in the eastern section of the United States. The principal suggested a list of nine teachers for me to ask to participate and from this list, six of the nine teachers agreed to take part in this study. Originally, I was seeking only six participants, two from each grade level. However when one fourth-grade teacher, Winnie, agreed to participate, it was obvious that her co-teacher, Carol, should be included in the conversations about reading instruction because they worked so closely together with a shared group of students. Therefore, a total of seven teachers participated in this study.

Each of these seven experienced teachers had more than 3 years of experience in the same grade and was tenured by their school system. They ranged in years of experience from 5 to 21 years. Each teacher was responsible for teaching all subjects in their classrooms, with the exception of Max, who explained that he teamed up with another teacher, where he taught all the social studies for the two classrooms and his partner teacher taught all the science. Table 6 below provides an overview of these teachers, the numbers of years taught, and their certification for teaching.
Table 6 - List of participants, grade level, years teaching and endorsement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Years teaching</th>
<th>Endorsement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>K-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frannie</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>K-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>PK-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>K-8 Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ida Mae</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>K-12 History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>K-8, Reading &amp; Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanda</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>K-5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations with each teacher were scheduled at the teacher’s convenience with a follow-up interview scheduled within one week following the observation. The observations lasted the length of their reading instructional period, which ranged from 45 minutes to an hour and one half. From the observations, I generated questions that pertained to what was observed. The interviews were scheduled for a minimum of 30 minutes, either during their planning period or after school and often lasted more than 40 – 45 minutes.

Each teacher was interviewed using the questions created based on the prior observation which were used to substantiate what was observed, enhance my understanding of the teacher’s purposes during the observation and to allow the teacher to clarify any part of the observation. This list of questions from each observation can be found in Appendix E, listed by participant and number of observation. Additional formulated questions from Mosenthal, Lipson, Torncello, S., Russ, B. & Mekkelsen, J. (2004) (See Appendix A) were used to expand my understanding of the school, the teachers in the school, and reading instruction in the school. In addition, each teacher was encouraged to provide any artifacts that demonstrated or assisted in the explanation of their reading instruction. All teachers provided copies of what they were working on and some included copies of worksheets they wanted me to see to further help explain what was needed for their reading instruction.

During the first interviews, I recognized the need to keep the conversations geared toward my observations of these teachers. For example, in the first interview with Max I recognized after the long pause where I questioned the purpose of the worksheets he was using, that he was uncomfortable. I discovered how my questioning needed to be lower key at the beginning and
related to the observations only based on watching Max’s body language. Seidman (1991) advised researchers to “follow your hunches” and “trust your instincts” when interviewing (p. 68). By using questions I generated from the observations as the beginning point for all interviews, I found these teachers to be comfortable with answering and explaining their rationales for what I had observed in their classrooms. This format for conversation helped establish a relaxed climate. The first interview was one of getting to know each other and developing trust. Therefore, during the first interview, I attempted to stay with questions that concerned only their classroom and the observation I had recently completed. Because I had taken diligent notes and had transcribed them, I frequently referred to direct wordings printed on the field notes I had prepared which helped each teacher to remember the circumstances of the reading instruction on the day I observed.

By the second and third interviews, I was more comfortable because I had observed each teacher’s classroom twice by the second interview and it appeared most teachers were comfortable with the tape recorder and my questions, as evidenced by the volume of responses and the increased frequency of the identified themes for decision making. This increase of identified themes could be a product of my prompting questions to lead these participants to speak about their grouping, their instructional focus and the strategies they used. I did not artificially create these themes prior to the observations and interviews, but used the first iteration of the observations and interviews as a place to begin to identify the language each teacher used to search for decision making.

Themes

From the first iteration of looking for examples of decision making, I identified a range of 9-17 separate categories of practice and discussion across the participants. This first iteration was based a review of the raw data for a general interpretation seeking any patterns. The most important aspect of this level of data review was the honing in on decision making examples within the observations and interviews. After a complete review of all interview transcripts, I elected to use analyst triangulation to reinforce the formation of themes that seemed to be emerging. I enlisted the assistance of two university professors, one who uses qualitative research and one who does not, to look over transcripts of interviews from a participant. The purpose was to substantiate the classifications of data into these areas. Both professors agreed that the examples from the transcripts of the interviews were identified were instances of
decision making, but questioned the coding scheme. The frequency of areas of grouping, instructional focus and strategies was obvious; however, what did grouping, instructional focus and strategies mean? Could I identify examples and define what I meant by these three terms?

To create these operational definitions, I used my observations of these 7 participants, our conversations in the interviews, and my 23 years of public school experience to identify what grouping, instructional focus and strategies meant in this study. For the purpose of this study, grouping is defined as any ways in which students were clustered for instructional delivery. Strategies were any aspect of learning that teachers were actively teaching students to practice in order to improve their skills. Test taking strategies were a subset of this domain. Although more difficult to put in an operational definition that fits all examples found in the data, instructional focus was defined as the areas of knowledge these teachers selected as important to teach the students in their classrooms. Knowledge areas typically included skills that each of these teachers found necessary for the students they taught. The purpose of what the teachers were trying to teach that was often identified as the instructional focus. Instructional focus can be likened to the objectives teachers had as the direction of their lessons.

Once these themes were defined, the process of repeating analysis of the data to identify examples that fit into these three themes became the second level of iteration. I reviewed all observations and interviews for a second time, writing my memos in a different color, green. Combined with identifying these themes in the observations, the themes began to solidify with clear subsets of directed/collaborative decisions or personal decisions emerging. To further clarify, a directed decision about grouping would be one where a teacher in this study was asked an opinion about student grouping and an administration recommendation, or an external factor (such as the SMT), also influenced the decision about grouping. Collaborative decisions about grouping were ones where the participant in this study made decisions about grouping their students in conjunction with other teachers such as the reading specialist or ELL teacher and were often identified with the word “we” in the transcripts. Either way, these directed/collaborative decisions were made by more than one person. Personal decisions were ones in which the teacher made this decision individually.

In the theme area of instructional focus, the same subsets were identified. A directed instructional focus decision would be one that was made in conjunction with the school system requirements, administration and/or SMT, while a collaborative instructional focus decision was
made in with other teachers who had a stake in the decision, such as special education specialists, or reading specialists. Often these collaborative decisions were made with the understanding that passing the SMT was a prominent component of these decisions. These subsets further clarified which decisions were made by those participants in this study.

Strategy decisions were most often personal, made by individual teachers only. Although the prospect of strategy decisions being made collaboratively is certainly feasible, in this study, no examples were found in the data. While directed strategy decisions where an administration or another external influence exhibited control over strategies is also viable, several participant teachers in this study reported that the administration did not direct them to teach anything in any particular fashion.

**Individual Case Studies**

The following individual case studies represent the first level of the collective case study, where the decision making for reading instruction of individual participants was analyzed. Individual grade level analysis of decision making for reading instruction follows the individual case studies, which include any between-grade level analysis of similarities and differences in grouping, instructional focus and strategies.

Included in each of these individual case studies, I have included a box that exemplified the stated philosophy of each teacher. This frames what each participant reported they believed about reading.

**Second Grade Case Study – Tracey**

Tracey had 14 years of teaching experience, all but one year at Oceanside Elementary. She had taught fifth and fourth grade, but has been teaching second grade for the last 9 years. She held a liberal arts degree in education and was certified K-8. Tracey enjoyed the five years she taught fourth grade but stated she liked second grade the best.

Tracey’s classroom was located as one of the first classrooms in her pod. Behind her desk was a moveable wall while a row of cabinets, bookshelves and 6 foot moveable wall created a hallway leading to other classrooms in her pod from the main hallway. The moveable wall was the “Word Wall,” where words used during Tracey’s class were posted under the accompanying beginning letter of the word. Tracey’s desk

My main goal is pleasure... I want kids to be reading for fun!
sat near the farthest entrance/exit into her room from the main hallway, and behind her desk were bookshelves of teacher support materials. The walls of her classroom were covered with student work such as riddles, pictures of the butterfly life cycle and turtles. More bookcases held student novels and additional textbooks, as well as games and manipulatives. A rocking chair and a rug on the floor were located at the other end of the room with this space designated as the reading area. Student desks sat in the middle of Tracey’s classroom and faced a permanent wall where the blackboards were located. The blackboard area listed the instructional objectives, school rules, schedules and a calendar board for student lessons. I sat at a small kidney shaped table located behind the student desks and close to Tracey’s desk. The climate of the classroom was warm and inviting. As students arrived, Tracey greeted them by saying “Please put your things away, my friends and get ready for the day.” Students came into the room with ease for homeroom and moved to their respective reading classroom when asked.

Students in Tracey’s classroom were reported to be on grade level or above. There were no special education students identified in her classroom for reading. She worked on a team of three other second grade teachers who collectively made decisions on how to group students by ability in reading. Tracey stated that these groups were flexible and changed often. She explained: “…at the beginning of the year, for the last few years, in our second grade, the four of us…sit down in the summer and look at the first grade reading assessments… and loosely group students so we can start the year…” She stated that within her classroom she had a group solidly on grade level and one that began the year slightly below, but now everyone was on second grade level, with three students slightly behind the majority.

The flow of reading in Tracey’s classroom included one reading group working at their desks on seat work that often included worksheets or practice in spelling and writing in their journals. While this group was working independently, Tracey had the other group of students reading with her in the reading corner. She sat in her rocking chair and either read to the students or the students took turns in round robin fashion to read out loud. On occasion, students paired up and read to each other. Tracey always led a question and answer time following the reading. Groups switched after about 20-30 minutes.

Themes

From observations, interviews and artifacts, I found instructional focus to be the most prominent theme. Strategies were identified but there were not as many examples of strategies
being taught. These themes were identified through a first iteration or first review of the data. Upon the second iteration, or second review of the data, I refined the examples identified as “questioning” and “cross content connections” and folded these subcategories into the theme of instructional focus. These themes mirror all other case studies with the exception of prominent decisions about grouping.

Instructional Focus

Tracey’s main goal in her reading instruction was to have students read for pleasure. She stated: “I’m really big into just reading to kids for reading, for the entertainment because we hound them so much about all the skills that I think it’s good for them [to] say… I really like listening to this story.” Although reading for pleasure is not an identified as an instructional focus, it is important as a way to set the climate for reading in Tracey’s classroom.

Within the theme of instructional focus, three areas of concentration were identified: (a) word study; (b) comprehension; and (c) grammar. These three areas were complimented by a variety of other instructional foci, however only these three will be discussed in detail.

Instructional Focus-Word Study

Tracey was forthcoming about her training in word study and believed in using the text “Words Their Way” as an important instructional tool to support her students. Most notably she used this framework to support spelling instruction. “…one of the things I really like about “Words Their Way”… [is] developmentally it seemed right… it seemed to make logical sense. This series [basal spelling] does not make much sense…” She stated that for her weaker spellers she would use more developmentally appropriate lists of words that fit their needs rather than the district selected spelling program that accompanied the basal reading series. However, her goal was to eventually get all students to the district selected spelling program. She supplied me with a list of the spelling features that had been used so far in her classroom that year. These features were but one facet of the study of words suggested by Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton and Johnston (2003). This theoretical framework includes vocabulary development and phonics. Neither of these additional components was overtly observed in Tracey’s classroom; however the influence of vocabulary and phonics manifested itself in Tracey’s use of reading materials.

Spelling dominated a portion of Tracey’s reading instruction at the beginning of the week. Students were introduced to their list of words, and time was spent pronouncing these words and teaching the spelling feature for the week. An artifact (T-1-1) demonstrated a typical
spelling list and homework assignments for these words. Students had a spelling notebook where a specific feature was reviewed and all of the words for the week were recorded. It was not clear how these notebooks were used other than for spelling. When asked, Tracey explained the connection between the spelling features and reading.

When that opportunity presents itself, or when we are reading… a new story and they get to a word that they might not know… someone… said “the a is silent”. They were drawing from previous [knowledge]… making their own connection, which was great. Anytime they come to a word that’s being read orally, and there’s an opportunity to go back and remember when we worked on these… it’s kind of situational, just when the opportunity presents itself to remind them when we have these words [like] abbreviations… or long i…

On several occasions, different students in Tracey’s classroom were observed to make these types of connections as they read from a variety of materials. However, when asked, Tracey acknowledged this was not always the case for her students and that some of the features stuck with them more easily, such as the concept of two vowels together. “I think the two vowels being together are drilled into their [heads]… but that’s one they know….” Tracey believed other features brought recognition for some students, but she stated, “I don’t think there are truthfully a whole lot of connections going on.”

Vocabulary was a facet of the basal reading series that connected to spelling. When students in Tracey’s reading groups read with her in the reading corner, she introduced the vocabulary for the stories and often used contextual aspects of the reading to assist students in determining the meaning of the vocabulary (identified in the basal reading series for each story). Sometimes, these words were added as bonus words to their spelling lists for the week. The physical features of these words were not identified, and Tracey stated these words were not really classified in ways that fit the framework of the text, “Words Their Way”. Vocabulary instruction was a definitional activity during reading instruction in this classroom.

*Instructional Focus-Comprehension*

Comprehension assessment was a major component of Tracey’s reading instructional foci. She repeatedly used questioning as the means to determine whether or not students understood what was read. Often, the questions were factual and prompted students to recite their answers; however inferential questioning was also observed. Tracey deliberately directed her
questions in a varied pattern to all students, and was particular in asking those students whom she believed had the most difficulty understanding the reading. Questions allowed for further discussions which were observed to assist in cementing the comprehension of factual information from each reading story or passage. Often the questions took on a variety of forms, such as giving students a choice of answers to select from in oral fashion. In addition, Tracey used questions to check for comprehension of prior chapters when she read aloud from a chapter book that had begun many days before. She stated: “I think it just helps them focus… it gets their mind thinking about the topic…”

*Instructional focus-Grammar*

Tracey’s grammar focus was on verbs, in particular, the comparison of past and present tense. This skill was extremely difficult for her students. Although she used a teacher made sample of reading specifically to assist students’ understanding, (Artifact T-3-2) the concept of tenses for the verb ‘to be’ appeared to confound her students. Tracey spoke extensively about the lack of correct grammatical usage in the student population of her school. When asked about what she meant when she told students to listen and pick the answer that sounded right, Tracey said, “…if they stop and listen to what they’re saying, they’ll realize something, literally doesn’t sound right.” [her emphasis] Once said, she recognized that, because of what students might hear at home or in their community setting, what they chose might sound right, but may be wrong. This “aha” moment demonstrated Tracey’s willingness to think about her own thinking as she made decisions about her instruction. In addition when prompted, Tracey evaluated her instruction on present and past tense, recognizing her decision of how to present this concept was flawed. She presented a paragraph of sentences and had the students identify the verbs in the sentences. Some of the verbs were in different tenses and students were to state whether the verb was in past or present tense. Students were obviously confused, asked many questions and were not successful with this format. “If I give them sentences to choose like the reading series gives worksheets… a sentence and two choices… 75% of them could do this correctly.” She stated that she contemplated how her students needed additional reading passages to compare and discuss in order to become more successful. This was not a new concept for her students, but one that remained needing additional instruction.

In summary, Tracey was directed in her instructional focus for reading. She made decisions about what she expected students to understand when they read independently or with
her. She used the basal reading series for instruction, but saw the study of words in terms of vocabulary and spelling as important for students. Her decisions about reading were based in a developmental framework, where reading unknown words were supported with instructional guidance such as to look at the whole word or to look around the word to help make sense of what the student was reading. Tracey was articulate in her choice of ways to assist students in reading instruction.

**Strategies**

As previously mentioned, strategies were not found to be a major component in Tracey’s decision making. However, there were some important facets of strategies that related to her reading instructional decisions.

Strategies to decode unknown words and for students to make sense of what they were reading stood out in the data. Tracey made the decision to cue students to: (a) look at the whole word and identify any known parts; (b) reread around the unknown word; (c) self-correct; (d) use pictures; (e) isolate words in a frame; and (f) substitute known for unknown names. None of these strategies were often found in the observations and interviews but they were observed in the data with more than one example.

When students were unsure about their word calling, Tracey used the phrase “look at the whole word.” When asked about this, she stated she knew which child in her classroom needed to slow down because, “if he gets stuck, or doesn’t know [the word], I may prompt him… don’t just look at the beginning. Look at what the word ends with.” Tracey wanted her students to examine the whole word and stated it was something she went over all the time.

Rereading around the unknown word and self-correcting were emphasized strategies Tracey reminded her students to use when reading. Finding meaning in context is a beginning skill for young readers and Tracey reminded students that was something “good readers” can do to help themselves. According to Tracey this strategy for self-correction related to her students becoming independent readers. She reinforced students for going back to correct something they misread. She was observed to stop the whole class and compliment a student for listening to his brain say, “Hey, wait a minute! That didn’t make sense” and go back to correct. Tracey felt that the development of this self-efficacy was important to these readers.

The use of visual cues to support reading comprehension came in different forms. Tracey encouraged students to use pictures to assist in the reading of unknown words. She also gave a
real life cue, her own sweater when a student did not know how to decipher that word in print. Students were observed to use their fingers and other objects to assist as placeholders in reading and to use a framing strategy to isolate a word they were having trouble decoding. These visual reminders were essential as strategies for Tracey’s students.

Finally, the use of culturally relevant names in the basal reading series was observed to provide difficulty with decoding. For instance, the name “Juan” presented students with a challenge and Tracey reminded students that substituting another name for one you don’t know was a good strategy. Although she gave the students the correct pronunciation, some students chose to substitute their own name into the reading passage.

In summary, Tracey provided strategies for decoding unknown words that were holistic in nature. She was never observed to ask students to “sound out” the phonemes they saw. The nature of these strategies was important to note as they represented a philosophical aspect to Tracey’s decision making about her reading instruction.

Second Grade Case Study – Frannie

Frannie had six years of teaching experience in second grade at Oceanside Elementary School. She had a degree in Art and worked in the public sector before returning to school to obtain her teaching certificate. Prior to this position, Frannie attempted to get a teaching position in the state where she got her degree and did some long term subbing. She also worked as a teaching assistant for several years prior to returning to her home state and accepting her current position.

Frannie’s classroom was located in her pod as far away from the main hallway as a classroom could be. She had windows in her room which overlooked the parking lot on the side of the building. One entrance/exit to her room had a door that she normally kept closed. The other entrance/exit was located right next to her desk. Her room had two kidney shaped tables, one in each back corner of her room. There were many bookcases with children’s books and teacher materials throughout the classroom. Student desks were located in the middle of her room, facing the moveable wall between the two entrance/exits in Frannie’s classroom.

Students in Frannie’s classroom were reported to be the higher academically functioning students in 2nd grade. She stated that although the majority of her students were reading above
grade level, she also had students who were “middle range kids.” Her decision about how to

group students in her classroom was to mix students heterogeneously. When asked, Frannie stated she tried to split the lower readers among

the higher readers because in “this way they’re sort of supported by

the more fluent readers, and … I think, the flow of reading is a little

bit better.” No special needs students were placed in Frannie’s classroom. Frannie structured her

reading instructional time into 4 small reading groups of about 5 students, and she had a

volunteer who facilitated a reading group at the same time as Frannie. Students were reading

trade books in these small groups. Frannie stated that she did not teach any decoding skills with

her students. She said she observed her students “picking up the chunks that are inside of the

word and … decode that way, which is to me, how most good readers decode.” Frannie also

provided whole group activities that were teacher directed. Frannie stated that reading groups

were flexible and had changed multiple times during the year.

Of all the participants in this study, Frannie was the least willing to talk about her

practice and decisions about reading instruction. After the first observation, no artifacts were
given to me, even with additional prompting. The transcripts of her interviews contained little

depth of discussion about her reading instructional practices. When asked whether she taught her

students who had different needs any strategies, she replied, “I don’t do different strategies.” The

only observable strategy discussed involved encouraging students to “chunk” words. When

asked how she worked with students on fluency, she stated that she didn’t. When asked about

decoding, she stated, “I don’t do a lot of that” and that she was not really prepared in phonics and

decoding. Frannie stated that if she worded on decoding, she would probably do multisyllabic

words by “breaking them apart, and doing, giving them a chance to put them back together.” She

did not demonstrate any other ways in which she assisted students in their reading instruction.

The transcripts of the interviews illustrated how many different ways I attempted to open up the
discussion of her reading practices. From the transcripts, the only real theme that presented itself

across the data was comprehension as Frannie’s instructional focus. Some data could be linked
together under this theme.

Themes

From the observations, interviews and artifacts, the most prominent theme I found in

Frannie’s decisions included only the area of instructional focus. This theme was identified
through the first iteration and refined in the second iteration where examples of the creation of teacher materials and vocabulary from the novels were added as subcategories of instructional focus.

**Instructional Focus**

Frannie’s main instructional focus was the development of comprehension. She used questioning and vocabulary to extend her students’ understanding of what they read. She also used spelling patterns to develop a connection to reading through the use of the basal series used by her school system.

**Instructional Focus-Questioning**

The use of questions during reading was the primary decision Frannie made toward the development of comprehension. When prompted, Frannie stated: “I guess when I ask questions, it’s to make sure that they’re understanding what’s going on, that they’re keeping up with the story line.” Frannie stated that she spent time on factual questions from the few non-fiction reading selections found in the basals because she felt students encountered these types of questions as they moved to higher grades. Frannie stated she was always teaching comprehension through checking for understanding. With every observation, Frannie asked students questions about their reading. She did not have a script of questions to ask, but rather led students to develop a wider understanding of the reading by having them make connections to previously read materials or vocabulary. In addition, Frannie stated she gave students chances to “write questions based on what they’re reading.” Frannie’s questioning was well documented in both observations and interviews.

**Instructional Focus-Vocabulary**

Frannie used vocabulary from the basal series as a piece of her reading instruction. From observations, I logged the use of Frannie using vocabulary pages in choral format for her students. She discussed the vocabulary words by relating them in a personal fashion. For example, with the vocabulary word ‘furious’, Frannie said, “When you won’t stop talking, which word fits me?” A student guessed the word furious and Frannie went on to explain that furious means “not just mad, but really, really mad.”

When asked about vocabulary from the novels they were reading, Frannie replied that she did not do anything formally, “When a word comes up… I think they might find interesting or that they probably don’t know, we’ll occasionally stop and talk about it in small group.” In all
observations, she discussed vocabulary words during the small reading groups and it was noted that each group did not discuss the same words. She did mention that she selected spelling and vocabulary words from a novel once because it was an odd week and she wasn’t using the basal that week. She stated, “I kind of liked doing that.”

Frannie stated that, from her viewpoint, her students’ ability to comprehend words in context had improved. She stated, “I never really taught it formally… it’s probably a skill I should. There are a lot of things that as I’m going through the year, I think, oh, I should spend some time on that, and then I don’t.” She continued to talk about her beliefs about reading coming naturally to students.

You know, the highest kids in her I can pretty much guarantee you they are not high because they read at home. They are just high because they have natural ability and in a few more years, that’s not going to matter anything and so you’ll see some of these highest kids, they are not going to be the top students in high school…

*Instructional Focus-Spelling*

A portion of Frannie’s instructional focus was spelling. When she directed her lesson on spelling words, she related the spelling features of the list to other known words. During one observation, she had a poem for students to choral read and they discussed the r-controlled feature of those words. On another occasion, the spelling list contained words that had the ‘-tion’ feature that students discussed and related to other known words. This connection to prior knowledge was an important facet of Frannie’s instructional focus. When asked about this, Frannie did not speak of how she used the spelling features, but instead stated, “I talk about the sound and how the sound is spelled… so there is a little bit of time spent on that kind of thing.”

*Additional information*

Frannie was explicit about her desire to have her students become life-long readers and how she was developing an independent reading program for her students. Because of the amount of work an individual teacher would have to put into the development of this type of program, Frannie was not willing to make changes in her reading instruction at this time. She spoke about how she formally used projects for trade books, but had given up on this format for students because students were “sloppy.” So she indicated that she stopped doing it because she did not think it was “worthwhile.”
In summary, the information about the decisions Frannie made about her reading instruction were minimal. There were few pieces of data that correlated across the observations and transcripts. The artifacts Frannie self-selected were minimal and provided triangulation support for Frannie’s instructional decisions. Because there were few recurring examples of different instructional decisions in the data, it was difficult to utilize the information in the observations and transcripts to reveal any consistency in the instructional focus for Frannie’s reading instruction. The only consistent aspect of reading instruction observed was small reading groups that read aloud where Frannie asked factual questions to check for comprehension.

Third Grade Case Study - Max

Max was a third grade teacher whose classroom was located in a mobile unit unattached to the main school building. All of the third-grade classrooms were located in mobile units, some of which connected together. Max’s unit connected to one other unit and the students were able to move between these two classrooms through an inside door that connected his classroom to his fellow teacher’s classroom. Max’s language arts, including the reading instruction core group of students included high performing students and special education students. The special education students received their services for language arts, including reading, according to their individual educational plans, or IEP in a pull out setting where they traveled inside to the main building where the special education teacher classroom is located. Most of the special education students receive their reading services this pull out program and remain in Max’s classroom for all other subjects, including science, social studies and math. Max stated that he was in agreement with the special education teacher about students being pulled out of his classroom for reading services. Max also stated he believed that homogeneous grouping is a successful way to work with students at this school:

   My first few years I had 4 groups in one room, and I would have a few kids back here [back of room, with him] the rest would be working and I would switch the groups out or rotate, and it just [pause], I got it to work, but I think it works better if you can have a single group for a single time and then focus on that group.

Max had taught third grade at Oceanside Elementary for all of his eight years of teaching experience. His endorsement in K-12 Social Sciences appeared to influence his teaching as evidenced in interviews, observation and artifacts where Social Studies content is apparent.
During the first observation, there were themed books lined up on the front board that appeared to be biographies of United States heroes/heroines like Betsy Ross, Susan B. Anthony, Ben Franklin and Abraham Lincoln. Artifacts on Greek and Roman historical figures were used for reading and Max stated he loves to read historical books. He had a classroom library of books that he had collected over time. This library was located on book shelves turned away from the main area of the classroom. These shelves created a niche where the computers for the classroom were located. These computers were on the wall and the book shelves faced the computers making a temporary wall on the left when entering the classroom.

Max explained that a silent sustained reading time (SSR) at the end of the day allows students some pleasure reading time. He told me the students had read all of his books and he encouraged them to bring anything from home they would like to read, including a cereal box, as long as they read. When I observed SSR time, one student pulled a Calvin & Hobbes cartoon book out of his desk, and was engaged reading this book until his bus was called. Several other students were busy reading their Scholastic book pamphlets, deciding which books they wanted to order. This type of reading was promoted by Max.

The rest of the classroom had posters on the walls, pictures of historical figures and charts. Max explained that the charts on the wall held the SMT standards for third grade. As his classroom worked on each of the standards and students passed the practice SMT tests, Max gathered evidence that these students knew the material for passing the SMT in the spring. Max marked the charts with stickers signifying what he has chosen to work on, which students demonstrated they understood and what standards remained to be taught. He stated that there would be continuing work on some standards throughout the whole year, regardless of a sticker on the chart. So, the stickers did not mean the completion of the work on a standard. An example of this was the standard that related to writing sentences. Students would be writing sentences all year long. It was noticeable that there was no student work on any of the walls.

Themes

From the observations and interviews, the most prominent themes I found in Max’s decisions included instructional focus and strategies. These themes were identified through the first iteration and refined in the second iteration where examples of interconnection, purposeful
reading, SMT information, connection of content to real life and other content areas, as well as modeling were added as subcategories of instructional focus.

**Instructional Focus**

A core component of the theme instructional focus in Max’s decision making was the connection he made to the SMT. He was intent upon creating good readers and expected students to focus on the individual components of reading in order to be successful on the state mandated tests, or SMT. Every example of instructional focus for Max’s decisions centered on the SMT. All artifacts related to testing, practice released SMT tests were reviewed, taken or talked about at every interview. Max taught his students the importance of the SMT:

I tell them the first day of school, you’re going to be sick of hearing me say the word [SMT] by the end of the year. And, they are [pause] and, you’re right, I don’t want them [to] fear it, but I do want them to respect it [SMT] …. You have to get them in the back of their heads to understand how important it is… and to take their time and y’know, do their best. It doesn’t matter what year you’re in, you have content to teach. I mean you can get… technically, I can teach the content in 3 or 4 months. I have to get them to **care** [his emphasis] about the test, and **want** [his emphasis] to do well. And that’s the big deal.

Max also showed his students how to figure out how many questions were needed to be answered correctly to meet the cut off score for passing and the students were supportive of each other when scores on practice tests were announced. He stated, “I would put the scores on the board and we talk about it and go over it. From day one, I was going over what they need and what they have to get …”

Max stated that his students must take ownership in the testing, since it is the focus of his teaching. He said, [these students] “have to feel a part of it, and I think if they are a part of it, their scores will be much better.” In the third observation Max told his students that everyone passed the 2005 released SMT test they took recently. One student yelled, “Great!” and all the students were excited. Max told them the class average was a 94 with the lowest score being an 88. There was a buzz among the student as they talked excitedly among themselves. Max told the students there were 50 questions and asked how much each question was worth. Some guessing ensued then one student said each question is worth two points. As Max handed back the tests, he congratulated each of his students for their “awesome scores.”
Instructional Focus – Comprehension

Not only was the SMT important. Max identified a core reading component of the school’s curriculum in the upper grades to be comprehension. He also stated that reading was a lifelong skill:

I’m more focused on taking readers, making them want to enjoy and love reading for the rest of their lives. I mean the rest of their lives. [pause] I do things to show them that. At the end of day, we all have silent reading. Well, I sit back here and read too. I don’t grade papers or do work on the computer or anything. We all read together. I like them to see that.

Instructional Focus – Vocabulary

Max identified one of the components of teaching these students as the vocabulary associated with economics (in social studies) standards on the SMT. He reminded me that this content was difficult to connect to real life because his students “don’t have an understanding of the world as we do.” Max stated he chose to make a lot of his own materials in social studies, matching these materials in form to the SMT format. According to Max, his students must know the vocabulary for economics, which includes terms such as “producer”, “consumer”, “barter”, “opportunity cost”, “scarcity”, “independence” and “interdependence” as well as how to apply these terms.

They just have to know the definitions, the terms. And, if they can apply that [pause], it is application because they’ll give them a story…And, they have to be able to apply that knowledge they have of the vocabulary…to a question. So, I end up having to go over and over and over the words. Like those words that I’ve done [points to the copy of the notes I made from what was on the board], I start on the beginning of the year…

Yet it is the way in which Max decided to teach this specialized vocabulary in order to make connections for students that was important, this interconnectedness creates a foundation for learning.

One of the first things I do is Greece. When we do Greece, Greece can’t grow enough food for themselves so I talk about interdependence right then. When I get to Rome, I end up talking about scarcity and barter I add into Rome. It’s just as I go along [pause] I’ve found that after my first year, I realized there are more
economics questions on the SMT, Social Studies SMT than there is anything else. So, I found that out after my first, second year and so, I do now take economics instead of [pause] it’s the last thing the [school system] says we’re suppose to do, I break it up and do little pieces here and there until when I actually get to my economics lessons, they [students] have a good background on it, so that I can just move on from there.

Max chose to use games as a review format and showed me a Trivial Pursuit type game that he would use with his students as a relaxing way to prepare during the last few days prior to taking the SMT. The constant review through worksheets, practice formatted tests designed to mimic the SMT, and review of vocabulary would continue in this more relaxed format for students. Max felt confident his students were prepared to take the SMT.

They’ve finished reading. [the basal readers] I’m going to take it easy on them next week. I don’t want to push them. I mean, they’re passing these review tests and I’ve noticed in the past that if kids do well on these, I have no issue with reading.

Max’s instructional focus in reading centered on content he considered important and that content was grounded by his experiences with the SMT. This focus was guided by the success of his students, not only on the SMT but also in the creation of students who read for pleasure.

*Strategies*

Some of the strategies observed and discussed with Max included specific methods for finding and answering questions on worksheets, using a ‘look back’ strategy to locate answers and a get rid of answers that were illogical. Max also spoke about how to develop specific “thought processes” such as “when you see a question like this and there is an open space [fill in the blank], take these things [answers given] and put them up there.” Attending to all of the print on a page was an important strategy Max instilled in his students because he recognized that most of his students would bypass the reading and go directly to the questions. “Reading everything on the page is a big thing for the reading test [and the] writing test.” He pointed out that sometimes students needed to realize that captions for pictures might assist them in answering a question. These thinking strategies that Max referred to represented ways of understanding what the SMT questions might be asking a student to answer. Although these might seem like common sense strategies, Max recognized that the students at his school had less
experience with the world of knowledge and chose to work on giving his students opportunities
to be exposed to a variety of topics and to learn specific ways of thinking about finding answers
to questions for these topics. He stated: “I think their experiences, especially in this school, their
experiences are low. They don’t have a lot of experience in the world. And I try to give them a
broad spectrum of topics, when we do a lot of that comprehension work [worksheets].” Max
also taught his students to use highlighting as a means of finding information that was
meaningful and necessary for answering questions. He stated that he often used highlighting in
social studies more than anywhere else.

They get these guided sheets, we go through them, they will highlight things,
information I will show them, got through the information. Y’know, [in] this
whole paragraph, there’s only 3 things you’ve got to know and we will go through
and highlight, and then down below, we might write key things to that, whatever
was in the paragraph. They might be questions they have to answer. A lot of its
stuff I come up with, a lot of its information pages that I find about certain things.
The kids collect the notes, they keep the notes, I collect them after the test, they
get a grade on their notes. If they have them all, they get a 100 on it. It’s a good
way for me to keep them keeping their binders in order.

The idea of keeping notes in binder was another strategy in the development of organization that
Max taught his students. He stated that he recognized their immaturity and did note taking with
them. “I don’t sit up front and write notes and they copy them down…. I’m not in high
school….the notes are guided, I will hand them stuff, a worksheet and we, they have to number
them, they keep track of them.” He recognized the need for students to be autonomous with their
learning and he chose to start them on the journey. “I really have to teach them how to keep track
of materials, how to study. It’s the first time they ever had to do that.” This choice of teaching
students to begin to be in charge of their materials was critically important to Max.

An interesting postscript to this case study was that Max, although centered on the SMT
for his instructional focus and strategies, demonstrated a different way to set the tone for reading
in his classroom for the school year.

My first day in reading, I sit down with the kids and I talk to them about reading
as a [pause] something that people do the rest for the rest of their lives. And I get
them to see that taking a test on reading is just one of the things you have to do,
growing up, being adult, passing school, all that stuff. You have to do this. But, the reading part, on this end, on the other side, is something that you should have with you for the rest of your life. And I’m not, [pause] I even tell them, I’m not sitting here trying to tell you that you have to like reading, I even ask them. That’s one of the questions I ask them, do you like reading? Do you hate reading? When I have that conversation with them, I get them thinking about reading…

In summary, Max approached his decision making about reading instruction in a methodical fashion. He chose to confront the need to prepare students for the SMT head on by teaching his students about the format from the beginning of the school year. Students read in content areas and practiced answering questions in SMT format. Max taught strategies to find the correct answer and focused his instruction on comprehension.

Third Grade Case Study – Kathleen

Kathleen was a third-grade teacher who was part of a phenomenon in her school that I refer to as a “school within a school”. The principal clustered one teacher each from first, second and third grade and placed all of the English Language Learners, or ELL, students with these teachers. This cluster of classrooms had a ratio of approximately 60% ELL students and 40% general education students who were reported to be on reading grade level or above. No special education students were placed within this cluster.

Kathleen had ten years of teaching experience, with six of these years in third grade at this school. Prior to teaching third grade, Kathleen taught four years of preschool. Her classroom was located as an interior classroom of her school, with no windows. As I walked through her door, I noticed the word cards attached to items in her room, “computer”, “clock”, “desk”, and “aquarium”. This often characterized classrooms where ELL students could be found in this school. The posting of English words on commonly found items in classrooms allowed ELL students to constantly be exposed to the language they were learning. There was a reading center, which was a table with a tape recorder and books on tape as well as some classic books like Black Beauty by Anne Sewell, Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame, and Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain. In our first interview I asked Kathleen to tell me about the reading center and the classroom library bookshelf sitting next to it. Kathleen told me she hadn’t done as much with

Overall the goal is... I want them to read chapter books and love it!
the books on tape this year as she has in the past, but she always had the students listen to the
basal story of the week on tape. She said, “It’s important for ELL’s to hear things more than
once, or as they read. It helps them with their vocabulary and their reading.”

The classroom was bright from the fluorescent lighting and the walls filled with posters
about language and grammar concepts. There were also posters to encourage students with
statements like, “For Success, Attitude is as Important as Ability.” The wall opposite the door
held words this class, their “Word Wall.” On the Word Wall were many science, social studies
and math vocabulary words which Kathleen identified as key words from the SMT. The Word
Wall was used to review vocabulary previously covered in core content areas as well as an
overview of the third-grade content for the SMT. The classroom was roomy, where students
moved to the back of the room for collaborative work on novels, and direct instruction in reading
in the front with Kathleen. Students often sat on the floor in the front of the room. Fourteen
individual student desks sat in the middle of the classroom space.

My first observation with Kathleen began with students taking a reading simulation test. I
wondered about two students who were not taking this test and when I asked Kathleen about
these students during our first interview, she told me she made the decision for these two
students to not take the simulation test. Her rationale stemmed from her understandings of the
reading levels of these two ELL students:

…this is just pure frustration for them, so I’m not going to frustrate them and I
don’t want to make them feel [pause]; they’ve come a long way. They were
both low-level kindergarten readers at the beginning of the year. They knew
only letter sounds and have come so far. They are very strong first-grade level
readers now. They’ve done a great job and the [state test name]; they are not
going to pass, but are required by law this year to take them [the test].

Themes

From interviews and observations, I found grouping, strategies and instructional
focus to be the three most frequent domains of Kathleen’s decision making. Most of her
decisions centered on the materials she used to prepare her students for the state
mandated tests (SMT), as evidenced by her artifacts.
Grouping

Grouping decisions included: (a) the ways in which the ELL students received reading services; (b) how they were placed in her classroom for reading services, including her perceptions about the numbers of ELL students; and (c) the ways students were grouped in her classroom for reading. As previously mentioned, there were two subsets for decision making about grouping. The first subset was termed collaborative/directed. Collaborative decisions about grouping included decisions made with other professionals such as the ELL specialist and the reading specialist and often identified in transcripts by the use of the pronoun, “we”. Directed decision making about grouping involved instances in which where Kathleen’s opinion was requested by her principal concerning placement of students in her classroom. Decision making about grouping done individually by Kathleen was be referred to as “personal decisions” about grouping.

In Kathleen’s classroom there were ten ELL students who would be required to take only the reading and math portions of the state mandated test (SMT). The school elected to take the one time exemption from the science and social studies components of the SMT offered by their state for these ten ELL students. There were 4 students who were not ELL and they were considered average or above academically and would take all four core subject portions of the SMT. Kathleen explained the grouping for reading in this way:

In my reading group, I have most of the students. I have 12 students that I see. We have two students who are pulled that go to reading specialist and half the time with reading and the other half [of the time out of her classroom] they go to the ELL teacher. Then we have a group that goes to the reading specialist and some of them see the ELL teacher. Then I see everybody on Friday and of course during these two weeks [prior to the SMT] I’m seeing everyone. I was seeing everyone most of the year. In January we started doing [pause] some of my group sees the reading specialist and some see the ELL teacher. But, basically I have a core group of 8 kids who are always in here. We divide them up by [pause] I have middle to high and then the lower ones get one on one or small group [pause] it’s how we decided to do it this year.

In practice, this meant that Kathleen developed a flexible schedule for reading that included the opportunities for small group reading instruction and remediation using available personnel. This
decision was made collectively based on faculty understandings of the needs of the individual students. Kathleen stated that she had a core group of 8 students to whom she delivered reading instruction for most of the school year.

Kathleen believed in the “school within a school” grouping her principal has instituted in her school. Because of the continuing rise in the numbers of ELL students, she pondered the effectiveness of mixing ELL with general education students.

Last year I had about 6 ELL’s and the rest were regular and I had 19 students. We have such a great number…and we have had an increase in our numbers of ELL at this school…and so what they want to do this year is have ELL classes. Well, what they first said was we can do ELL, you know, mixed with regular but all the ELL would be in one class. Well, when they did that, for my class, I had a different number at the beginning of the year but, I had 16 kids at the beginning of the year. And I had 6 non ELL and the rest ELL. And I’ve had people who would come and go and so now it’s mostly ELL. What I told my principal next year is that I think I would rather have all ELL than just a few not ELL. It just sort of ended up that way. I think we meant for it to be more of a bigger mix, you know, but we have so many ELL’s come in that transferred to this school that they’re like, oh my goodness, did they keep putting in my class without realizing hey, we have mostly ELL and not regular ed. It’s worked out well because the regular ed. kids were used to the ELL they were just released from the program so I only had, well two of them were never ELL but two of them were released. It’s nice to have a mix though sometimes because you want them modeled the appropriate English of the higher ability. But, I think when you have so many ELL that you really just sort of need to focus on that. It’s sort of pro and con.

Kathleen recognized that some older ELL students placed in third grade might need to be in her classroom; however, because of size and social maturity, she felt that older students were not appropriately placed based upon their skill levels.

Most of them [parents] wanted their kids to be in younger grades because they had missed so much in Africa with all the transition. They’ve missed a lot of schooling. We’re realizing things, like I have student who is 11 [most third
graders were 8-9 years old] and so we realize this year he really needs to be bumped up to fifth next year. Just because socially, now that we know him much better than we did at the beginning of the year he really needs to socially be with bigger kids ‘cause he’s taller and stronger.

Kathleen organized her students for reading in her classroom in multiple ways. At the beginning of the school year, she stated that one way she grouped her students was to use the ability results from a standardized test to guide her decisions about small reading groups. Kathleen grouped students in reading pairs in order to facilitate success in content areas, like science. She also spoke about using one-on-one instruction with a student to assist this child in the selection of strategies to use for successful information finding.

Kathleen sometimes allowed students to choose their own groups when reading trade books. The use of trade books was reported as having a primary purpose of making reading fun. Though when I observed Kathleen, she consistently used worksheets to teach strategies in preparation for the SMT, she stated that she did not want her students to lose the simple desire to read for fun and joy

Kathleen’s decisions for grouping explained the ways in which reading instruction was delivered for the students of her classroom. Often, many of the ELL students were out of her classroom to receive individual assistance with learning the English language. This created a need for Kathleen to be very flexible in the ways she designed her instruction for reading.

**Instructional Focus**

A second domain for Kathleen’s decision making was the focus of her instruction. Delineated examples of instructional focus such as reading comprehension and decoding were identified and connected to her use of modeling, scaffolding and guided practice. Some subcategories that fit into the domain of instruction focus included: (a) vocabulary, and (b) reference materials. The instructional focus domain dominated all of Kathleen’s interviews and observations. It is interesting to note that all artifacts submitted by Kathleen, with the exception of one, related directly to practice for the SMT.

**Comprehension**

Kathleen spoke about the focus of reading comprehension, not only in her classroom but as an instructional focus for her school.
I think every teacher has a common [pause]; the focus is the [SMT]. And, pass [the SMT] and that focus is reading comprehension. That is held in common by everyone. But how you teach it and how you believe it should be taught or how you do it, it’s different in every room.

She demonstrated her instructional focus on reading comprehension through centering on story elements, setting, characters and problems found in the stories that were read. She spoke about how she stresses comprehension, not only in the worksheet artifacts but also in the projects students work on when they read trade books. The reading of trade books was observed to be a minor component of the instructional focus. Trade book use in the observations could have been related to the time of the school year since the SMT was to be given in the next few weeks. However, Kathleen spoke extensively about the importance of trade books for student comprehension.

**Decoding**

Decoding skills were another area identified as part of Kathleen’s instructional focus. When directly asked whether she worked directly on vowel sounds, Kathleen said that she does not. Instead, she stated that she uses teachable moments within other lessons to make connections to sounds students began learning in kindergarten. This recursive look at sound symbol connections was observed on multiple occasions as a way Kathleen connected to prior grade decoding skills in order to review what students should already know. She also stated that she used picture cards to remind students about letter sounds, but because her students are third graders, she told them it was just a review. Kathleen saw the use of picture cards as being inappropriate because her students knew this was what the kindergarteners were doing in their classes.

Sections of artifacts had facets of decoding that Kathleen included in her focus with students. A typical example was:

“The word “tough” in paragraph 3 has the same vowel sound as ________”

A. boat
B. wrote
C. bought
D. cut
According to Kathleen, this was typical of the type of questions found on the SMT. Kathleen was observed to use these types of questions as opportunities to reinforce phonics. She articulated how she believed students needed to have scaffolding to make connections as they read these types of questions:

[For a] basic third-grader, just looking at part of a word is hard. They can do the whole word, but having to take out part of a word, like say the middle sound or the beginning sound or the ending sound. That's hard for them sometimes even though it's obvious if you talk to them and they read it, for some reason looking at it totally throws them off.

Kathleen stated that from her experience, third-graders often make the mistake of looking at the letters instead of sounding out what the letters are. For example:

So, if you talk to them you'd say, ‘cat,’ can you find something that has the beginning sound as cat? And then you say ‘candle’ and ‘book’ and they'll say, oh, candle. But when they look at something written, if you have like three "C" words, I don't know, a "C" word and a "K" word, say, you have cat and you said a "K" word and you have a "M" and an “L” they'd be like there's no "C," there's no "C," oh my goodness because they forget that’s it's sound. Not just the letter. They want to be drawn by the letter.

Kathleen also stated that the vowel digraph, /ough/, is one of the most difficult for students to master because of the variant sounds it can make. Therefore this question gave her an opportunity to reteach the phonics base for this sound. She explained the need create understanding for her students in this way:

So, you know, with ‘tough,’ they have, of course, another word with an O-U-G-H… It was like “brought” you know or “though” and so you're not going to say it the same way. Well, based on O-U-G-H, [spelling] they want to match O-U-G-H because they are very visual. It's hard for them to process, I'm looking at this and I'm hearing this, but then you add another layer, E.L.L. the vowels are different in our language than other languages…. Just by if you look at a word they know the sounds of the vowels, but any third grader is going to have a problem just taking out sounds and say, you know, match it. That's a big thing on the [SMT]. They always have, you know, what is the
same beginning sound as this? Or the one that tricks people is when they do something like they say the same sound as this, but the letters aren't the same. The letters are different.

This one facet allowed a discussion of phonics with Kathleen. She recognized the need to assist her ELL students, but yet was unsure about how to support them with phonics because what her ELL students know was how vowels work in their native languages. This does not match the English language and it seemed to Kathleen that her students were unable to trust English because their prior knowledge about vowels from their native language was incongruent with English.

The following are some of the other areas of instructional focus identified from observations and artifacts:

- the genres of biographies and folk tales
- phonics
- order of events
- reference materials such as the use of tables of contents, glossaries, indexes, dictionaries, encyclopedias and ways to research
- grammar and punctuation in reading
- identification of fiction versus non-fiction

Of the subcategories mentioned earlier, Kathleen’s insight about vocabulary was noteworthy. She spoke extensively about the importance of how to teach vocabulary to the ELL students in her class by relating the words to their background knowledge:

[About working with ELL students] I think it's made me focus more on vocabulary and making sure they understand what I'm talking about and what their reading is about, and I think something that I don't think I focused as much on vocabulary or meaning and understanding…. Because I knew they were coming from a different culture and had a totally different viewpoint…. I just had never really thought about it…. And I've actually thought, okay, when they are reading this, do they have any background in this? Will this make sense to them at all? [Before] I didn't think about that as much. I assumed that if we're reading a story about a horse, everybody has seen a horse so let's move on and go with it. This year in Africa, maybe they didn't see a horse, I
don't know. There are many, many things that I found out that they had no background knowledge of. I think I'm covering background knowledge more, too, and really looking at it from the student. I think it's opened my eyes to the need for the background knowledge. I've heard that term forever, but I never really got it.

With the other subcategory reference materials Kathleen stated that she would bring in a variety of items for students to explore and make sense of dictionaries or glossaries by working independently or in small groups and then reviewing student findings. She stated she also thought the skill base of using reference materials was not normally too difficult for third graders; however, this year she felt since vocabulary is an issue for many of her students, this affected their ability to use reference materials. Kathleen pointed out working with the librarian regarding reference materials. She requested that the librarian assist with dictionaries, encyclopedias, atlases, etc., because: “It’s so much easier, she has them all there. If I take them out, I can check them out for a day and then I have to return them right away. That’s a real pain …” She reported that the librarian agreed to work with reference materials, but the students let her know over and over that these skills were not taught in the library. Kathleen knew her students would be confronted with examples of these skills on the SMT, so she felt she must offer opportunities for her students to practice these skills in the format in which they will be tested. Kathleen decided on worksheets in order to cover this skill. Kathleen focused skill development on what students would find on the SMT. Kathleen was observed to exhibit a focus on the SMT skill agenda through scrutinizing the artifacts she provided and what was observed in her classroom. Yet her ideas about teaching reading seemed to be in contradiction. When asked directly how she balanced the SMT skill agenda with wanting students to love to read, she replied:

I realize I am just as much [SMT] focused as anyone, but what I notice happens to people and actually happened to me a few years ago, you get so caught up in the [SMT], the test taking and the skills and this is it, but that's, you know, when I started teaching, I loved reading, I wanted my kids to love reading…. I had all of these, you know, great goals for my kids, but then as you get sucked into the [SMT] pressure, you start narrowing your focus and it becomes all about the test, test taking skills and then we've got to cover this,
come on, now we're behind, come on, let's go, and I was like oh, I hate that. I don't want that, you know, I don't want to become like that and when I started noticing that reading wasn't fun for my kids I thought I better put a break on this.

This incongruity of what Kathleen believed was good practice for reading instruction as her instructional focus and also prepares her students for the SMT that remains a clash:

So, I do all the test taking skills, get my grades and do all the, I do emphasize more on [SMT] things… and chapter books I let up a little bit and that's just fun. That's just pure enjoyment… So, that's how I balance it by making my chapter books just for fun and that's how I do it.

The domain of instructional focus for Kathleen centered on an array of worksheets and practice tests that were designed to reinforce skills for the SMT. There was a hurriedness noted in the way Kathleen used these worksheets in both the checking of work already completed as well as the completion of new worksheets.

**Strategies**

The final domain designated as strategies included many test-taking strategies. However, the teaching of strategies was not a major finding from Kathleen’s data. Many single strategies were observed, but Kathleen did not talk about what was observed, even when prompted. Therefore, few strategies were correlated across the data. Because the observations and interviews took place in the spring semester of the school year, there was an emphasis on preparation for the SMT to be given in May. Kathleen stated that she taught testing strategies every year and believes “… fifty percent of the SMT’s is test taking strategies. I might even go farther to say seventy-five percent…” One of the strategies observed was guiding students to reexamine the paragraphs read to find where the answer to questions might be found. Kathleen used both worksheets and basals to practice this strategy, reporting that she used open book tests with the basals because this strategy “works really well because they have really good in depth questions that the kids really have to search for and find the answers.”

Some other test taking strategies were: (a) look at all the answers and eliminate answers not needed; (b) re-reading passages to check if what is read makes sense. Kathleen refers to test strategies as ‘test tricks’ breakers and tells her students to not be deceived by the test tricks.
… when you look at vocabulary words, first, you know, and see what you can either say no, that’s ridiculous or say maybe. And then you look at what you don’t know and you say, well, if it’s nothing I’ve ever heard of, it’s probably not it…

There are always two best answers.

It was apparent that Kathleen decided to teach her students how to eliminate answers quickly. She worked on these strategies through worksheets and students were observed to need repeated opportunities for guided practice to find the correct answer, regardless of the number of practices observed. It was impossible to determine any set reason why many opportunities for guided practice were needed. Maybe her students’ inability to use these strategies effortlessly, or with automaticity was the basis for Kathleen’s awareness for repetition.

Summary

Themes in Kathleen’s observations and interviews reflected an overshadowing of her need to prepare her students to take the SMT. She mentioned testing in an almost synonymous fashion with items that were her instructional focus and thus the testing appeared to drive the strategies she chooses. She was clear about her purpose to teach the strategies she thought were needed to score well on the SMT. Kathleen also stated that there was much more to reading instruction than just the preparation for the SMT.

There were contradictions in of Kathleen’s decisions. For example she spoke about how she planned student-led novel groups in contrast to the observation of test preparation skills. The incongruity of what Kathleen said in interviews and what was observed in her classroom and the artifacts provided were noteworthy. Kathleen explained this contradiction of wanting students to love reading and the focus on test taking strategies as:

I don’t want to become like that [hating what is being taught] and when I started noticing that reading wasn’t fun for my kids, I thought I better put a break on this… [so] I got them into chapter books and reading and really extended their love of reading and you should be able to read a whole book.

Fourth Grade Case Study – Ida Mae

Ida Mae was a fourth-grade teacher who did her student teaching and began her teaching experience at Oceanside Elementary. She had taught all five years in fourth grade at Oceanside Elementary and stated she was also working on her certification in library media. When asked,
she said she wanted to stay in public school, but move to either middle school or high school to work with older students. Ida Mae was one of the Chess Club coordinators for her school system. She was the only elementary person on the administrative staff of the Chess Club and stated that the others on staff feel she offered an “elementary mentality” to the chess administration. Ida Mae believed that when students played chess it offered them opportunities to develop language and math skills. She thought chess helped them with language because “it slows them down and makes them think about what they’re reading, makes them think about what they’re doing…. Once they become chess players, they become problem solvers.”

Ida Mae had an interesting classroom. Her classroom had almost 4 solid walls, except for the open doorway area. This was significant because in this open space school having walls was a rarity. Most classrooms have movable walls made from bookcases or cabinets. Although Ida Mae’s classroom was almost enclosed, it was located close to bathrooms for this pod area and the noise when other students were waiting to use the bathrooms could be very disturbing. Upon walking through the open doorway area, the classroom desks were arranged to face away from doorway area which helped to focus students away from the activity in the pod hall. Posters lined the room, and student work was displayed. One of the posters stated, ‘I think, therefore I am’. On one wall of her classroom, near the blackboard, the state standards were displayed in student friendly language on the left side of the board. When asked about this, Ida Mae explained that she rewrote these standards in first person language so that her students could understand what they were going to work on each day. Some examples given were: “I will work on probability” and “I will learn the meanings… and the spellings of previously unknown words.” This portion of the board also says that the state in which Ida Mae lives “loves and expects good things from her children.” This may explain some of Ida Mae’s feelings about the state standards.

There were bookshelves holding reference materials like thesauruses and dictionaries for student use, additional textbooks and some magazines. There were no children’s novels evident in this classroom. Ida Mae had an easy manner with her students and I observed a comfortable classroom environment. She referred to her own learning disability and challenges during my observations and interviews, speaking easily with her students and me about her own dyslexia and attention deficit disorder.
The students in Ida Mae’s classroom included 8 regular education students reported to be of average ability and 7 special education students. She explained that in previous years there was a model of co-teaching and collaboration in her classroom. Prior to this year, her classroom was built on station work where students moved from station to station. Often there were three adults to facilitate the stations, including a special education teacher, herself and an instructional aide. However this year, the special education teacher had resigned, the special education teaching assistant was substituting for the special education teacher, and was often pulled to substitute in regular education classrooms. There was no instructional assistant for her classroom. Therefore, Ida Mae had realigned the way in which her classroom arranged for instruction.

Decisions made about how to facilitate reading instruction in Ida Mae’s classroom this year were further compounded by her dedication to support the special education students in her classroom. The reading specialist was assigned a small reading group for about 30 minutes each day during language arts. Ida Mae chose late in January to find ways for the special education students in her classroom to be evaluated by a language arts portfolio rather than take the state standards tests in May. Normally, at the beginning of the school year, this would have been previously established by the special education teacher via each special education students’ individualized educational program, or IEP. Since there was no one in this special education teaching position, Ida Mae took on this responsibility for her students. When I observed Ida Mae, she was in the midst of preparing 7 special education students’ portfolios. All students in Ida Mae’s classroom were working on worksheet items that were to be used for the special education students’ portfolios. In addition, these students completed worksheets with the substitute special education teacher outside of Ida Mae’s classroom. All of these factors seemed to have led to a change in Ida Mae’s reading instruction for this year.

Themes

From Ida Mae’s observations, interviews and artifacts, the three prominent themes of grouping, instructional focus and strategies emerged. Ida Mae did not discuss grouping very much. This may have been because by this time in the school year, the grouping remained constant.
Grouping

There were fewer opportunities to observe different configurations for reading instruction in this classroom, as the structure for reading instruction did not change. Ida Mae explained that at the beginning of the year the groups were more fluid, but by the middle of the school year, the grouping had become more consistent. As previously explained, Ida Mae adjusted her reading instruction to include a 30 minute portion of her language arts time where a small group of students met with the reading specialist, another group of special education students met with the substitute special education teacher, and a final group of students who remained in her classroom. When the substitute special education teacher was not available, Ida Mae kept the special education students with the other students who normally did not leave the classroom.

This pull-out program allowed for separation into small reading groups for the stated purpose of allowing for more individualized reading instruction. The reading specialist worked with those students who needed additional practice to prepare for the state standards tests. The special education students worked on items that could be used as documentation for their performance portfolios which would be later substituted for their participation on the state standards tests. The other students remained in Ida Mae’s classroom and worked on practice worksheets that addressed a multitude of skills related to reading, most often reading comprehension.

Instructional Focus

Many topics were covered in Ida Mae’s classroom during my observations and discussed in the interviews. They can be condensed into two categories: (1) vocabulary and (2) comprehension.

Instructional Focus-Vocabulary

Vocabulary was a strong component of Ida Mae’s reading instruction. Ida Mae used a worksheet to open her classroom each day. These “Jump Start” worksheets (IM-1-1 & IM 2-4) included a word-of-the-day, an analogy, and other grammar and writing components. Students worked on these sheets upon entering the classroom. The worksheets served as a review as well as a way for students to begin their reading work for the day. She explained that she chose these worksheets because of the variety of activities and the opportunity for her students to use problem solving skills. She also explained her decision to use these in relation to the SMT. “I
chose these Jumpstarts…because it follows some of the SMT…. And, so every day they had to do it over again… because it has little bits of SMT in everything.”

Another way Ida Mae worked on vocabulary was by providing students with a graphic organizer which looked like an archery target face. This organizer was used as an alternative graphic organizer for identifying different facets of a vocabulary word. Normally, Ida Mae used a four-square organizer, where students put the word, definition, synonym and a picture to represent the word in each of the squares. With the target organizer, Ida Mae explained, “I want them using their vocabulary words in as many different ways as possible because they are just not understanding how to use (emphasis) the word.”

Another example of decision making about vocabulary development was a homophone worksheet. Ida Mae used a spelling practice worksheet on homophones that complimented the basal reader. This worksheet included a strategy box to review the definition of homophones, a paragraph where homophones were used incorrectly and students had to correct the errors and vocabulary clues to fill-in-the-blanks with the correct homophones. The use of this artifact was an example of Ida Mae’s connection to vocabulary. Beyond the completion of the worksheet, she chose a word for a student to represent in a picture. When asked how she chose which word for which student, Ida Mae said it was random, but yet she explained one boy in her class had just gotten glasses, after some hurdles. She chose the word “sight” for him. Another student loved to draw intricate details and Ida Mae chose the word “knight” for him. The decision to match homophones to certain students demonstrated an understanding of her students’ prior knowledge. This insight of her students was a factor in Ida Mae’s decision making.

In addition to working with vocabulary words on organizers, Ida Mae decided students should use reference materials to support their understanding of words. Students were observed using dictionaries and thesauruses with ease. Looking up the meanings of words occurred not only in dictionaries, but also with the glossaries and indices in science texts and reading basal texts. Students used a thesaurus to find synonyms, parts of speech, pronunciation of words as well as finding sentences using the word. The skills of using reference materials were important to Ida Mae. When asked how often students use these materials, she replied, “Almost every day, in every subject.” The use of reference materials were used during every observation. The ability to use a variety of reference material was an important instructional focus decision Ida Mae made in her classroom daily.
Instructional Focus - Comprehension

The second topic identified from observations, interviews and artifacts was reading comprehension. Ida Mae stated that she was “focusing mainly on comprehension.” Some of the ways in which reading comprehension was observed were: (a) the use of main and supporting details; (2) summarizing; (3) inferential understanding; and (4) finding clues. The decision to work on these areas was found in repeated examples in Ida Mae’s classroom.

Multiple opportunities for practice with main and supporting details were observed in Ida Mae’s classroom. One of the artifacts from the first observation (IM-1-3) was a worksheet with a paragraph about dinosaurs that directed students to find the topic sentence and supporting details. Students were guided through this worksheet by Ida Mae as a model in preparation for additional worksheets used as independent practice. These topic and supporting details sentences were put into a graphic organizer, much like a web used in writing. Ida Mae explained that this skill was one worked on in their writing earlier in the year and would be part of the SMT not only in the reading sections, but also in the science and social studies sections. The worksheet used for independent practice (IM-1-4 & 5) followed the same format, with several paragraphs rather than just one paragraph, and a graphic organizer to fill in with topic sentences and detail sentences for the entire passage. When questioned about the guided practice and independent practice sheets, Ida Mae responded, “I’m the one making the decisions. The book [worksheet practice book] lays it out and of course it [the book] groups it [the worksheets].” She was referring to the fact that she chose the worksheets and the progression of how to use them in order to meet the needs of her students. This sequence of worksheets typified her instructional focus.

Summarizing was an instructional focus identified by Ida Mae. One particular worksheet asked for a summary of the reading passage. When asked about this, she spoke about how, at the beginning of the school year, her students did not have strong phonics and fluency skills, but once these skills became more solid, then summarizing became her focus.

I’m trying to get them to summarize more. I really am. That’s what we’re working on….They are at the level they are supposed to be…. And so they can write the summaries now. And some of the sentences they are writing are just, y’know, amusing. They’re really becoming more creative and I see them growing there…. We started with the main idea that describes what you just read, or just the main idea of what you just read, or what the story is about. And, then we would add in
details, give me a couple of details now; give me a couple more…. Yeah give
some details that help support that main idea, and actually, that’s technically the
4th grade standard, if I’m not mistaken, supporting details.

Inferential understanding appeared as an instructional focus on numerous occasions
during observations in Ida Mae’s classroom. Sometimes an actual question on a worksheet asked
students to infer; other times Ida Mae asked students what inference meant and/or directly taught
this skill through the use of questions, ideas found on worksheets, or from a basal story. For
example, one basal story was a historical fiction account about life in the Plains states. In one of
the pictures, goats were walking on the roofs of houses. The story itself did not explain the fact
that the roofs were made of sod and Ida Mae led students in a discussion about this picture.

When asked, Ida Mae explained that she would go back to this story the next day and show
additional pictures of houses with sod roofs so that the inferential understanding of why these
houses had sod roofs was clearly not for goats to walk upon as some students had assumed from
the pictures.

Ida Mae explained her instructional focus decision about inference as a means to extend
her students’ thinking. Ida Mae read aloud Hungry Kid Island, a poem written by Shel
Silverstein and specifically asked students to tell her the inference from this poem. The
discussion from this opportunity allowed her to model how to make inferences when reading.
She explained inference as “… taking what you know, putting it together with what you read and
… drawing a conclusion.” as well as reminding students that inference has to do with
synthesizing.

Finding clues was another area of focus for Ida Mae. This focus in reading to identify
clues was observed during her reading instructional time through multiple worksheets and
reading in basal textbooks. There were numerous opportunities for students to search for answers
to questions using clues, as well as using context of the reading in their basal to find meaning.

This instructional focus led to many different strategies that Ida Mae had students use to identify
answers to questions on worksheets. These strategies will be discussed later in the strategies
section. Recursive practice and instruction in finding clues was an important facet in Ida Mae’s
focus.

Before discussing finding clues, it was important to note some aspects of reading that
occurred during reading a story in the basal. During the first observation, Ida Mae had her class
do a “picture walk” through the story in the basal they would read. This occurred following small group work on worksheet skills in different settings, some with the reading resource teacher, some with the special education substitute and some in Ida Mae’s classroom. All the students shared in the story in the basal reader together in Ida Mae’s classroom, with Ida Mae as leading the whole group lesson. Once the picture walk and discussion about the pictures was finished, students were called on to read orally. Most students read fluently, others with less fluency, but all were willing to read and participated easily. When asked about the level of participation, Ida Mae stated, “…possibly they’re willing to try because I give them, [pause] they know that they will have that support, [pause] that scaffolding there with them.” Some students were uncertain about decoding words when they read and Ida Mae provided words for them as needed. When asked about this in the following interview, she replied that working on comprehension was her focus and she didn’t want her students to be “hung up on that one word” Additionally, she stated that she was not focusing on decoding skills, “as far as I am concerned, it’s the special education teacher’s job to mainly focus on that [decoding skills] for those groups, that’s their goals.” She also stated that she was cognizant of not having a special education teacher at this time, so she took that fact into consideration when giving certain children words as they read.

One student had great difficulty decoding, and Ida Mae moved to stand near him and whispered softly words he stumbled over. One word in particular, “scissortail” made no sense to this student because he immediately turned and asked Ida Mae what it meant. She focused his attention to the words surrounding “scissortail”, and stated, “Let’s see if we can use the rest of the sentence to figure out what scissortail is.” thus demonstrating how to use context clues to identify meaning of unknown words. This process of using clues to make meaning, find meaning and answer questions was an instructional focus of Ida Mae.

Ida Mae made decisions to focus on how to make meaning and find answers in their reading. This aspect was clear in every worksheet artifact. How each student found meaning and answers depended upon the strategies used.

Strategies

Strategies were an important part of Ida Mae’s reading instruction and students were engaged in using strategies with every worksheet. She modeled how to use a highlighter, how to underline answers in a passage by rereading for specific information, how to get rid of unnecessary information or answers, known as “slash and trash”. She emphasized drawing a
picture to assist with comprehension and how to put words into a blank to see which words made sense. These strategies were a few examples of which strategies Ida Mae decided to teach her students in order to find meaning in their reading.

One component that accompanied the decisions to use any of the strategies was the atmosphere, or climate of the room. Ida Mae’s compassion for her students and her methods of presenting to students was often accompanied by her nurturing language, spoken with care. A phrase used on several occasions exemplified this. She said, “You’re reading with your eyes while I’m reading with my voice.” This statement was indicative of Ida Mae’s stated philosophy of supporting the reading efforts of students and assisting students to attend to the printed word. The way in which this phrase was said radiated her compassion and desire for her students to be successful.

The use of highlighters was a strategy used consistently in Ida Mae’s classroom. Students would highlight information they were looking for to answer questions, identify main ideas and supporting sentences, and even to identify who is telling the story. It was interesting to see students using highlighting with ease. However, it was not always that way, as Ida Mae explained:

When I first started to train them, I would say, “Ok, now highlight this, please”, or “Go in and highlight this word”, or “Find this and then highlight it”. I guess I’m still training them because I would [pause] yesterday I went by and I had asked them to highlight one word and this child had the whole paragraph highlighted. I was like, “What are you doing? It’s not your first day here. It doesn’t make you important if you highlight the whole thing!” That’s why I keep reinforcing the highlighting of important facts.

Along with highlighting, Ida Mae had students underline answers found in their reading. This was modeled for the students through demonstration on an overhead, or leading student discussion in identification of where the answers could be found in the reading. This required students to reread passages, which was done in a matter of fact way by her students. Normally, students this age do not reread with enthusiasm; however in Ida Mae’s classroom, rereading was expected, promoted and practiced. On more than one occasion, Ida Mae reminded her students to find the information in their reading.
A different strategy that Ida Mae decided was important to her students was a method of eliminating information or answers not needed, which was referred to as “slash and trash.” Not only was this strategy modeled by Ida Mae in guided practice with worksheets, but when asked she asked her students how they found the best answer, students stated that they had used this strategy. On at least one occasion, a student asked if they could “slash and trash” and Ida Mae told this student that he was free to use whatever worked best. When asked about this, Ida Mae explained this technique as:

Slash and Trash! Get rid of the silly… or obviously wrong answers….I want them to get rid of as many silly answers….I know there are no dumb questions, but sometimes there are…silly answers and that way it narrows it down. So, if they are looking and they’re not quite sure what it [does is it] gives them [if they have 4 answers and they slash and trash 2] only two left to figure out and 50/50 is a lot better than ¼. So, that’s why I want to narrow down their possibilities.

Another strategy that coincided with “slash and trash” was to test answers by placing them back into the blanks of the question. This method of trial and error can be precarious because students may choose an answer that fits smoothly in the blank, but may not make sense. Ida Mae cautioned students to use this strategy carefully and to not rely on just this one method. For example, she stated:

…like today one of the little girls used that strategy… it had to do with that she like something, but she stuck the word ‘smelly’ back in there [the sentence] and it fit. So that was her guess, but then when we [the class] looked at the whole paragraph, she realized that ‘smelly’ didn’t fit…. If it doesn’t work, or I like to make sure to tell them, even if it does work, double check yourself because you need to make sure that they haven’t tried to trick you.

Finally the use of pictures was a strategy of multiple dimensions. Not only did Ida Mae encourage her students to draw pictures to assist their comprehension, she chose the strategy of eliminating pictures from text passages that had the potential for misinterpretation and confusion. Students were observed asking if they could draw pictures and Ida Mae encouraged her students to use this strategy if it would help them understand the vocabulary. She provided opportunities on vocabulary worksheets for students to make pictures to reinforce their understanding of their reading, opportunities to create pictures of vocabulary words for a bulletin board, and even use
pictures in a basal story by a picture walk. The reinforcement for understanding what you read through the use of pictures was an important choice of strategies for Ida Mae’s students. But it was the contrary strategy, or the elimination of pictures as a strategy that was also of interest. Ida Mae determined that the SMT showed only a few pictures and those often gave students misinformation about the questions being asked. So, she had students crossing the pictures out in an effort to remind students to concentrate on what the words were saying and to not rely on the pictures given. When asked about this strategy, Ida Mae stated:

I’ve actually had my students start crossing out those pictures because they look at a picture and the question might say, “What’s this story about?” And they’ll [students] say, “Oh, it’s about a girl because I saw a girl in the picture.” …So, if they feel like it’s [the picture] is going to distract them they just go ahead and trash it because I don’t want them distracted by that.

Summary
Comprehension was the focus of instruction in Ida Mae’s classroom. The reading instructional choices she chose demonstrated a variety of ways to practice effective strategies and offered students ways to comprehend what was read in her classroom. The decisions Ida Mae made about strategies were based on her desire to enable her students to make sense of what they read. Most of the strategies observed and discussed with Ida Mae were perceived to benefit the comprehension of her students.

Fourth-Grade Case Study – Carol
Carol had 21 years teaching experience, the most for all the participants in this study. She was a reading specialist who worked at Oceanside Elementary for the last 15 years. She stated she tried middle school for one year, but decided it wasn’t for her. Carol taught reading as a Title I teacher and worked with a variety of grade levels until the previous year. When asked about the current grouping configuration for the delivery of her services as a reading specialist, Carol explained the conversation with her new principal as follows:

This was something new she [the principal] had decided she wanted to try [pause] all of the students who didn’t pass the 3rd grade SMT, to put them all in one room and she said it would be easier for me. Basically I’d be with one teacher, maybe
not all day but most of my time will be spent with that teacher and so we talked some about how we would work that. How it will actually work out and everything and I think it’s been great.

So following the conversation with her principal and prior to the beginning of school two years ago, Carol began working with another teacher, Winnie, to prepare fourth-grade students who had failed the 3rd grade standards test to successfully take the 4th grade standards test. Although Winnie was the general education teacher whose classroom was scheduled to be observed, I decided the collaborative configuration of these two teachers should be examined because these they worked so closely together with reading instruction. Therefore, each member of this co-teaching pair was investigated in this study.

This grouping was directed by administration and collaborative in nature because both teachers agreed to this configuration. The only personal grouping ideas expressed by Carol during the observations and interviews had to do with which half of students she would have her assistant work with each day. When asked about this decision, Carol responded that she gave the assistant those students that could do the daily work without much assistance.

Carol took on the role of a detective in this synergy. She looked at each student’s skills through informal assessments, and in conjunction with the skills she determined the SMT expected of 4th grade students, Carol developed lessons to allow students to practice those skills necessary to be successful on the SMT. She determined a need for a very structured environment in reading instruction was necessary. She stated, “I just think on the whole they need ... [a] structured environment and to move one step at a time, I think that helps them to take one step at a time and kind of think out loud through the process…. So we do that… one thing at a time.”

Carol’s classroom was an interior room with no windows and was shared with another specialist. She had approximately half of the room which is divided by bookshelves and cabinets. Carol had a wealth of books and materials which were easily accessible to her. Some of these materials were worksheet books designed to practice the format for the state testing. A semicircle table faced the blackboard and students met there for reading instruction where they would copy information from the board, or answer questions found on the board.

Reading instructional time for these two teachers was divided into two periods of 45 minutes each where Carol and her co-teacher Winnie split Winnie’s group of students, each had half of the students for one of the periods before switching. When a group of about 7 students
arrived in Carol’s room, she split those students into two groups where a teaching assistant worked on a lesson with 3 or 4 students while Carol worked with the other 3 or 4. These small groups were very directed in their skill development.

Themes

From the observations and interviews, the most prominent themes found in Carol’s decisions were instructional focus and strategies. These themes were identified through the first iteration or review of Carol’s interviews and refined in the second iteration where the examples of meeting the individual reading needs of students and making connections were added to the theme of instructional focus.

Instructional Focus

Carol’s instructional decisions revolved around the identification of the skills students would need for the SMT. Her portion of reading instruction was geared to a variety of skills to be practiced in order for students to experience questions that mimic ones found on the SMT. The breadth of skills was met with not just reading passages on worksheets, but she also used the reading of a novel and a subsequent teacher made worksheets questions for students to answer.

Carol’s instructional focus centered on a mixture of discrete skills that were found on worksheets. However, these skills were consolidated into three categories: (a) comprehension; (b) vocabulary; and (c) grammar. Discussion with students about the skills and cues to find any errors was prominently used. Subcategories of comprehension included main idea, fluency, context clues, questioning strategies, and a phenomenon I labeled oral cloze. Vocabulary included the use of antonyms, synonyms and opinion words. Carol spent time on grammatical components such as punctuation, capitalization, pronouns, proper nouns, and the use of reference materials, like dictionaries for pronunciation. These categories encompassed most of the skills identified by Carol as areas students would find on the SMT.

So, in a way, it’s teaching a lot of skills, but I have to look at it [SMT] as I’m trying to help these children pass this so they can go to 5th grade. So, I’m trying to give them the skills to do that….

Comprehension

Carol’s decisions about comprehension skills dominated her lessons and she stated, “I guess the hardest thing I want to hit is comprehension.” Main idea was practiced and students who demonstrated difficulty with the identification of main idea were given multiple
opportunities to practice this skill, not only on independent worksheets but also on worksheets that Carol designed for chapters in the Junie B Jones novel. Carol identified oral discussion as a method she used because she stated that students needed to talk about what they had read to help cement their understanding.

…read a page or two and then let’s talk about what we read, what’s going on… make sure they understand what the character is doing… why [the students] think they’re doing that? And what do you think is going to happen because they did that? That’s where my focus is.

When Carol was asked directly about working with students on fluency, Carol stated, she didn’t “work on fluency that much.” However, she explained how putting expression in what students read was important. Carol reminding students on several occasions to use punctuation to help them pause, asking students to put emphasis on italicized words, modeling fluency when she read and encouraging students with praise about reading fluently.

Carol’s instructed students to use context clues and she realized how difficult this was for her students.

They really get hung up on [pause] if I ask them the meaning of a word and they can’t say the word, they really get hung up on that [pause] because they will just come up and ask, “What is this word?”… I told them… you don’t have to know HOW [emphasis] to say that word… go back and find it in the story and read the sentence in front of it, read the sentence after it, to get the gist of what it means.

You don’t have to be able to say it at all. This is very difficult for them.

Not knowing how to pronounce every word read was a hurdle for her students. Although the skill of using context clues was difficult for her students, Carol stated she believed that opportunities for sustained reading were important to develop this skill because opportunities provided gave students more confidence to make sense of what they read. Carol declared the majority of her students did not need work on decoding, that they were pretty much on grade level, yet this inability to decipher words created comprehension difficulties.

Carol provided a variety of questioning for students to practice in both oral and written form. She stated that the exposure to a variety of questions was important and that different types of questions required different strategies to use in order to find answers. When reviewing the artifacts, both factual and inferential questions were found. During observations, Carol asked
both types of questions and modeled how a student might ask themselves what the question was asking along with how they might answer the question. This self-efficacy was demonstrated in various strategies that will be discussed later in this case study.

Carol used a procedure while she was reading aloud that I labeled oral cloze. As she read to students, they followed along in their copy. Carol paused every so often and students filled in the next word. She stated she used this to assist attention when she was reading aloud and said: “… it’s harder for them to keep up when I’m reading but if every once in a while I stop and let them put in a word, they can keep up with me better that way…”

Comprehension was one of the most important aspects of Carol’s reading instructional focus. She stated that the students she worked with scored favorably on miscue analysis yet, “… it’s the comprehension… they can read, most of them are pretty good decoders. So, they can go on with it, but it’s knowing what they read.” [her emphasis]

Vocabulary
Vocabulary was a second area identified as emphasized in Carol’s instructional focus. When asked about the basal series, Carol stated that she would like to see more vocabulary development. “The vocabulary is very difficult…when you have eight words that you don’t know … that is really hard… the kids have a hard time with vocabulary.” Some of the ways Carol developed student vocabulary was through the use of antonyms and synonyms, along with the development of spelling. The development of the ability to use context clues, discussed previously, added to the instructional focus of vocabulary development.

Carol chose to work on the development of antonyms and synonyms because of the connection to comprehension of vocabulary words. She stated she did this type of working with words in novel based activities. However, Carol recognized that one of the reasons vocabulary was so important was because on the SMT, students needed to understand a variety of meanings for words. For example, “… one of the reasons… is because the answers on the SMT, they won’t just say it’s funny, it’s a funny story. They use humorous, so you have to teach the kids what all of those words mean. What is humorous? Oh, funny! But, if you had funny in there, they would get it!” [her emphasis]

The ability of students to identify fact and opinion words in their reading was connected to Carol’s development of vocabulary. She likened it to being easier for them to identify words like “longest”, “shortest” or “prettiest” as ways to distinguish opinion words. When pressed
further about this, Carol simply said she thought her students identified these words easily as opinion because they had worked on them so extensively all year and that she identified this area of focus as one she recognized and supported in her instructional.

Grammar

Grammar as an instructional focus was a prominent theme in Carol’s classroom. She provided worksheets that specifically practiced grammar and reviewed these concepts from these worksheets extensively with students. (See Artifacts C-1-1, C-2-1, & C-2-2) Work on capitalization, punctuation, parts of speech and dictionaries for pronunciation was observed.

When prompted, Carol explained that students worked on grammar worksheets at least 1-2 times per week in order to promote familiarity with the process of the questions. She decided these were important because students had such difficulty with these types of questions on the SMT. She believed the difficulty came in the multilayered directions. She stated:

They have to read the paragraph, not all of it is underlined, so they’ve got to read it and think about what it’s saying but then pay close attention to what’s underlined and think about what type of mistake that is…. But, it’s hard for them.

Carol explained that the worksheet book she chose was one that begins easier and develops more difficulty as you move through the book. Each page had a paragraph in which to find the errors. When observed, Carol had to lead students to the correct answer because they simply could not find what was wrong in the paragraph. The skills included not only reading, but returning to the paragraph with sections underlined and looking at each word underlined to determine where the error might be. It was also likely there were no errors. For Carol’s students the majority of the oral answers were that there were no mistakes. Even when an answer such as punctuation or capitalization was orally given, when asked to explain what exactly the error was, the majority of the students could not identify what was wrong. This was an area of need. When asked about student writing, Carol responded that they just didn’t have time in fourth grade for writing because they had to prepare students for the SMT. Students in Carol’s room did not use their own writing for finding grammatical errors.

The use of dictionaries was observed and related to grammatical focus because students were using them to identify parts of speech and to look at how words are pronounced. This was not a large focus for Carol, but it was important to mention that students attempted to use dictionaries in ways beyond finding meanings for words. Carol stated that another focus was
the use of reference materials such as a thesaurus, an atlas, and encyclopedias handling each for a week of instruction and then practice following instruction. She said this was a new area for her since she had taught second grade previously and did not spend as much time on reference materials at that grade level.

In summary, Carol’s instructional focus centered on skills she found on previous year SMT tests and created opportunities for students to practice like formatted questions that mirrored the SMT. For example, Carol spoke extensively about her use of novels during the first semester. She discussed various novels her students enjoyed and the themed units she developed. She explained that the use of novels allowed students to read for more for pleasure. She created worksheets that followed the format of the SMT to be used to assess her students understanding. However, once second semester began, Carol stopped using novels for reading and began to work on skill and strategy development in order to prepare her students for the SMT. She explained that she no longer had time to do project based work with novels, such as alternative book reports or character illustrations. She stated she felt pressured to teach discrete skills because:

…if they don’t practice these skills that they will be asked to do on that test, if they don’t have some practice with it, their chances are not good for passing that test. Even if you’ve been over and over the material, if they haven’t practiced it in that format…. So, I’m trying to give them the skills to do that.

Strategies

As stated previously, Carol’s motivation was to prepare her students to take the state standards test. In order to meet this goal, she identified skills that these students who did not pass the third grade test would need to practice. In addition, Carol stated the need for students to become adept with some strategies. “My focus is to give them a strategy so that when they see a question [on the test] they can think about that, they have a strategy to attack the question.”

Further she articulated that if students are not on grade level,

… then you have to teach them some strategies along with reading [pause] they have to gain some strategies to try to figure out what’s going on. How am I going to get through this test, if I can’t read some of these words, what can I do to try to figure out what this question is asking me?
One of the strategies Carol taught her students was the use of highlighting. This strategy was used with many different instructional foci. She had them highlighting to find the main idea, details in what they read even specific vocabulary words. Students read questions, and reread to find the answers and highlight those. The use of highlighting was taught as a strategy that would be used on the SMT and was observed to be used independently by students without prompting from Carol.

An additional strategy was the elimination of answers in questions that were nonsense in order to limit the multiple choice answers. This strategy was observed to be used by students on numerous occasions, always with prompting from Carol. She stated:

I encourage them to tell me when they take one out [students might say] okay, I’m going to take this one out because that didn’t happen in the story or that doesn’t make sense with what we read. And then when they narrow it down between two choices lots of times they can figure out [the answer], because well this one is better because…

Students were observed to be less confident in using this strategy on their own.

The strategy that appeared most frequently promoted by Carol was to reread. She urged students to go back and reread passages to solidify information, expand vocabulary understanding by using context clues and to identify sentences that assist in answering questions as well as returning to reread when there was a miscue. Carol modeled this strategy over and over, encouraging students to do the same as they read worksheets to find the answers necessary to complete the work planned. This rereading often occurred with Carol assisting the process with students who were uncertain.

It was interesting to note that as the observations and interviews progressed, less strategies and conversation about strategies occurred. There was less discussion about strategies and more conversation about the kinds of things Carol was attempting to do as the reading specialist in this co-teaching effort.

Summary

As a reading specialist working in a co-teaching partnership with her fellow fourth-grade teacher, Winnie, Carol remained steadfast in her responsibility to prepare these students to pass the SMT. She sacrificed those reading instructional opportunities that she knew made reading fun for drill for skill development. As Carol aptly said:
… if they can’t read the question and answer it, then the school has failed. So that thrust is totally different than it used to be [long pause] It’s sad…. It’s just all about accountability and numbers you know. And, I hate that part of it. If this child doesn’t pass then [pause] they fail. They can’t read.

*Fourth-Grade Case Study – Winnie*

Winnie had the least experience of all the participants in this study. Her certification was in elementary education K-5 and was originally hired as a second-grade teacher. She served as a teaching assistant her first year out of college and was given teaching responsibilities from the onset. Her first full year teaching began in second-grade but because the number of second-grade students did not support her position, she moved to fourth grade. She taught fourth grade for four years, and had a below grade level group each year. Although working with students below grade level, Winnie felt it was “rewarding because you see at the beginning of the year what they could do and by the end of the year how much they’ve gained.”

Students in Winnie’s classroom were placed by her principal because they had not passed their third-grade standards test. This was an agreed upon placement by Winnie and her co-teacher Carol, who worked together to prepare these students to pass the 4th grade standards test. Winnie stated Carol had helped her develop as a teacher with a better understanding of the reading needs for students who had not passed the SMT. Winnie also stated that she was sure her principal wanted to keep the grouping arrangement and not “change what we’re doing.” Eighty-five percent of students in Winnie’s classroom had passed the 4th grade SMT over the past two years and Winnie reported that her principal had “told us… [we] are the key to our [the school’s] success.” Because the students in Winnie’s class make up a part of the school’s recovery population, passing the SMT allowed their scores to be counted twice in the formula for the entire school. Winnie explained her understanding as follows:

I did not realize how important it was until… the first year scores came back and it counted twice and then it was really explained to me what had happened with the scores…. So, if they didn’t pass the third grade test in reading or math, it counts for a fourth grade if they pass and it also counts for a third grade.
The configuration of placing students who had not passed the SMT in reading in Winnie’s classroom, with support by Carol, the reading specialist had provided success for these recovery students.

Winnie’s classroom was located across the main hall from Carol’s classroom, providing an easy transition of groups between these two rooms. The hour and one half block for reading was split into 45 minute units, where Winnie and Carol shared all fourteen of Winnie’s students. Winnie’s group of students were split into two groups, with one staying for half the time with Winnie, while the other group went across the hall. Each teacher worked with seven students during 45 minutes and then they swapped the groups. These groups were collaboratively selected by Winnie and Carol and Winnie explained as homogeneous. “… the groups are divided; it’s pretty much like a higher group and lower group within this whole classroom group of a low group… [the lower group] does need more re-direction and focusing back to things that they missed than the other group does.”

Winnie’s classroom was closest in her pod to the main hallway and close to the office area. The room was decorated with student work on some of the walls and expectations for behavior were posted. Entrance to Winnie’s classroom was from the main hallway into the pod area where this wall along the hallway was made up of movable panels that stood about 6 feet tall. The wall behind Winnie’s desk was a movable floor to ceiling wall, and the two remaining walls were permanent. Current objectives were posted on the board and an additional board was used for homework assignments broken down by subject/content areas.

Themes

From the observations, interviews and artifacts, the most prominent themes were instructional focus and strategies. Each area of instructional focus centered on comprehension of material read. From the first iteration to the next, few other examples were identified and consolidated into these two major themes. These examples included supplemental material selection, pacing and decisions about how much material to cover. These themes mirror all other case studies with the exception of prominent decisions about grouping.

Grouping

Minimal grouping decisions were made by Winnie. The principal made a directed/collaborative decision and placed the fourteen students in Winnie’s classroom based on their failure to pass the third-grade SMT in reading/language arts. Both Winnie and her co-
teaching partner shared governance with this decision. The only other decision about grouping was made collaboratively with Winnie and her partner Carol. This grouping decision put students in homogeneous units that provided compact numbers of students in which each teacher had no more than seven students for a 45 minute class period. These groups were fixed and no change was observed. An interesting outlier of information was that the students in Winnie’s classroom were required to attend the school sponsored after school program, which provided tutorial assistance for students who had not passed the SMT. Winnie taught in this additional program and worked with her students from her classroom.

I could have had another group if I wanted to but I felt like, why not just continue what we did during the day... I know what they have had and I know what they need. So, I’m really glad that I decided to keep this group.

Instructional Focus

Winnie’s main instructional focus was to prepare students for the SMT through summarizing what they were reading. Within this summarization process, she provided guided instruction in a variety of other instructional facets of learning which included: (a) inference; (b) vocabulary; (c) compare/contrast and reference materials. These facets were the most prominently triangulated with observations, interviews and artifacts.

Instructional Focus-Summarization

Writing a summary for what students’ read was foremost in Winnie’s instructional focus. It was in every aspect of every observation, used as a tool for comprehension. Winnie taught the format for summarization that she felt was most effective for her students. Students were not observed to read without summarizing what they read and this continuous practice was the mainstay of Winnie’s instructional focus. When prompted, she explained:

I feel like the purpose of the summary is, for them… first, it is one of our [standards]… to summarize and… I knew that they could read, but the comprehension was a problem so I thought if they summarize… they would, by the end, have a better understanding of what they read.

Winnie stated that summarizing was guided through her instruction on how exactly to make a summary of what was read. She set clear parameters about how summarizing should be done and worked thoughtfully on how to instruct her students to summarize. Winnie explained that in the beginning, she would ask “what do you think would be a good summary for paragraph one?” and
she would have students do this orally with her. She modeled writing summaries enlisting help from all her students. From this scaffolding, Winnie gave her students small paragraphs to practice with her guidance. As the reading passages increased, Winnie assisted students to develop a summary for each paragraph, in order to break down the amount of material to summarize. In this way, students would read a paragraph, summarize that paragraph and then read the next paragraph. Winnie stated this would also ensure that students comprehend each small section of a story or passage read. She encouraged students to read two paragraphs to summarize and stated she didn’t think she would want her students to summarize whole reading passages because of the loss of comprehension. However, there were reading passages observed where dialogue often presented a one sentence paragraph. Students were unsure how many paragraphs to include in their summary as evidenced by their need to ask Winnie. In these instances, Winnie modeled and instructed students to use more than two paragraphs to summarize.

Summarization was the main instructional focus in Winnie’s classroom. She stated, “I just think that they are understanding the story better with the summaries.” This developing skill illustrated how comprehension was identified and encompassed a wealth of additional instructional foci. Inference, vocabulary, and compare/contrast were most often found within the instruction of summarization as additional instructional foci.

**Instructional Focus-Inference**

Winnie identified inference as being a weakness for fourth grade students based on the simulation test the fourth-grade students took that mimicked the SMT. She recognized the difficulty in teaching this skill and stated that even when having students go back to reread was not sufficient because with inference “you cannot find the answer directly there.” Every artifact from the first two observations had questions to answer that were inferential. Winnie assisted students with connections to their own prior knowledge as well as led students with “why” questions to develop their understanding of the inferential questions. Winnie often had students reread passages and attempted to have students related the information to themselves in order to help students get a more worldly view of the reading passage. She helped students make connections between the factual information they read and the inferential questions that were asked on the artifacts. When Winnie worked on main idea with the summaries, she blended this with inferential understanding by asking questions that broaden their thinking about what they
read. The development of inferential understandings of reading passages was minimally successful. Winnie guided each question, modeling how she determined a broader understanding of the reading passage and then guided students to attempt to answer the inferential questions. Her students were not observed to independently answer inferential questions.

**Instructional Focus—Vocabulary**

Winnie emphasized vocabulary through the use of the basal series. Not only was the vocabulary found in the stories they read important, but comprehension of vocabulary that could be found in questions, such as “drawing conclusions”, “genre” or “author’s purpose” were essential for students to know. She stated:

> Just having them familiar with what the vocabulary is that they’re going to be looking for [pause] I mean if they don’t know what drawing conclusions, [what] that word even means, then how are they going to answer a question about it?... using the vocabulary that they will see on the test and reviewing it week after week is one of the things... so that by now that’s part of their vocabulary because they have heard it so much in the classroom, they use the words themselves...

Vocabulary in non-fiction was another area of emphasis. Winnie stated that she does not have access to enough non-fiction material in order for students to practice. The science and social studies curriculum did provide a wealth of content; however, Winnie had to make any practice materials in SMT format for students and this was time consuming. Because students had the most difficulty with non-fiction, Winnie stated:

> So, whenever I find something that is non-fiction, like in these supplemental books, I try to incorporate that as much as possible... because I feel like they need to be reading non-fiction and summarizing non-fiction and finding the answers in non-fiction instead of fiction

**Instructional Focus—Compare/Contrast**

Winnie spent one entire observation working on the concept of comparing and contrasting using a Venn diagram. This was a review of comparing how alike and differences could be mapped and she added the concept of “authors using signal words to let the reader know when they were comparing and contrasting.” Winnie was deliberate in her instruction of these signal words, encompassing them as part of the vocabulary students needed to know in developing their comprehension. Her purpose did not waiver. One of the expectations from the
standards was to use graphic organizers and Winnie identified that this skill often is found in non-fiction reading passages on the SMT. She stated that she believed using a graphic organizer like a Venn diagram was easier for students than a written summary. Using an overhead example of the signal words, Winnie demonstrated how to identify these words in a reading passage and guided students in the creation of a Venn diagram. Because this was a review skill, students were able to work independently with success after the guided activity Winnie provided for her students.

When asked about the use of this visual cue for students, Winnie stated that although this was not something they did weekly like the written summaries, “it just kind of clicked with them…” When asked if her students might benefit from a visual for summaries, like a story map, Winnie was noncommittal. The use of a Venn diagram to compare and contrast was a preparatory aspect of Winnie’s lesson in order for students to answer questions on a worksheet concerning compare and contrast.

_Instructional Focus-Reference Materials_

Winnie identified references as a weakness not only in fourth grade, but for her whole school. She explained, “When we got our results from last year’s SMT tests, [this weakness] came across in 3rd, 4th and 5th grade.” She questioned why this was so difficult for students when teachers were working on these skills often. In addition, Winnie mentioned that since they have library once a week and wondered why references could not be emphasized by the librarian.

Why can’t that really be emphasized… in library? Because she has them [reference materials] at her fingertips. And I can’t go and get them, but in order for me to get an entire set of encyclopedias, it’s just more difficult, when she has it all there. So, we talk about his time and time again in our leadership team meetings and how we feel like library should hit on references and, of course she says, “we do references.” But it doesn’t come across in their scores that it is emphasized enough.

Winnie stated that references would continue to be an instructional focus for her students because it is a weakness.

…if you don’t look at what your weaknesses are, then how in the world do you know what to go from… unless you’re taught how to do that, unless someone
says to you, guys, this is what we need to do, I don’t know how many people would do that on their own.

Questions about reference materials were found in three artifacts provided during two separate observations.

Winnie’s instructional focus concentrated on comprehension through the creation of summaries. She identified her students needed inferential skills, vocabulary, ways to identify how to compare and contrast information they read and the use of reference materials. These areas of her instructional focus were triangulated by observations, interviews and artifacts.

**Strategies**

Rereading a passage was the most prominent strategy Winnie expected her students to use. Incorporated within this strategy were underlining and highlighting of information. The theme of strategies was less prominent in this case study than in previous case studies.

Winnie was methodical in her expectation for students to reread material prior to summarizing. She modeled reading a paragraph in a passage the first time and had students read aloud at least two additional times. She did not rely on students reading silently. She stated that she tried to get them to read on their own and believed that they would understand what they read better by reading it more than once. “… so that’s why is we read it together normally I’ll read it first and then… have them read it after me.” In addition, Winnie stated that she taught them to reread as a test taking strategy: “…if you do not teach them how to go back and find the answers… they’re not going to do it on their own...” When answering questions, Winnie suggested to students that rereading would assist them to find answers by directing students to: “Go back in the story and read which paragraph this can be found.” She also had students look at the questions first and then reread to find the information. Winnie recognized that this strategy works for factual information best because students were stymied with inferential questions (see previous instructional focus on inference).

The use of highlighting and underlining supported the strategy of rereading. As student reread, Winnie prompted them to identify where they found their information. She reminded them. “As you read along, if you remember something from the questions, you should go ahead and highlight that to help you later on with the questions.” When working on the instructional focus of compare/contrast, one student asked Winnie if he could underline in his work as he read
and she reinforces this for all students by reminding them of this strategy to assist finding information they will need for their Venn diagram. (observation 3)

As previously stated, Winnie did not concentrate on many strategies with her instructional focus of summarizing. The strategies she emphasized were consistently found in the observations and interviews.

Summary

Winnie focused her instruction on having her students summarize everything they read. Summarizing became the way students created comprehension and once the summaries were completed, then students would answer questions about what they read. Winnie’s purpose was clear; she stated her job was to prepare her students to pass the SMT. There were no observations of reading for pleasure, all students read to answer practice questions. Winnie did not offer any contrary opinions about what was necessary for reading instruction for her students.

Grade Level Case Comparison

Second Grade

When looking at the two second grade case studies, the primary purpose of each these teachers was to have students acquire a desire to read independently. Both teachers offered opportunities for students to be involved with texts outside of the basal reader, with Tracey moving students to chapter books and Frannie using trade books as supplemental reading for the whole class. Both of these teachers stated that their instructional focus was on comprehension.

The use of questioning to check for comprehension was a technique both teachers used with high frequency. These questions were often factual in nature and Tracey used strategies like looking back and using pictures to support understanding of what students were reading. Frannie did not demonstrate any decision making about assisting students through the use of strategies.

When students misread words or were uncertain, these teachers were far apart in the decisions they used to support reading attempts. Frannie most often simply gave students the word they miscalled or did not attempt. When prompted to explain, she stated that she provided words so as to not interrupt the flow of the reading. Since her students only missed multisyllabic words, Frannie declared she might assist a student to pick out parts of a longer word to assist them with decoding. In contrast, Tracey stated a host of strategies, such as looking at all parts of the word (beginning, middle, and end) to determine the sounds for these parts and framing the
word with their fingers. She elected to teach students these strategies to assist their decoding, and thus expand their comprehension.

Spelling was a major component of both teachers’ instructional focus, with Tracey deciding to hone in on the spelling features that matched her prior knowledge of word study. When the spelling feature was introduced at the beginning of the week, it seemed that was the only emphasis on this component of word analysis. Tracey did not use these words and did not point out the particular spelling feature in any other contexts. Frannie spent the first part of each week on the spelling feature for the week, using it in various contexts that she chose, for example, in a poem that she read aloud and had students choral read. After reading the poem, students then identified the spelling feature found in the poem. This was the only connection to word study observed in second grade.

In summary, these second-grade teachers modeled reading, gave opportunities for students to read in their basal series and engaged students in reading additional supplemental materials. These choices to provide materials beyond the basal demonstrated their desire to expand their students’ exposure to literature and promote independent reading.

**Third Grade**

The difference in the decisions the two third-grade teachers made in their classrooms about reading instruction were obvious. Both had an instructional focus centered on preparing their students for the upcoming state mandated test (SMT). However, for Max, this preparation took the format of independent worksheet practice for which students received grades and feedback following the completion of their work. He gave practice tests repeatedly and talked to his students about the intricacies of testing. He fed the content of the curriculum into the worksheets, where students read independently about information they needed to know and processed it by answering multiple choice questions which followed the reading. Based on his interviews, Max began this process of independent worksheet practice and simulation tests at the beginning of the school year and continued until the state standards test was given. His decisions about reading instruction centered on ways to prepare students for taking the SMT.

Kathleen’s decisions about reading instruction were different from Max. Like Max she had students practicing the format for testing from worksheets, but her delivery was different. She reviewed the information on the worksheets with the students as they marked their answers.
She used the worksheets as her teaching tool and chose to emphasize the discreet skill areas she felt were weaknesses for her students. Over and over she practiced these skills in multiple choice format to give students opportunities prior to taking the SMT.

The student groups in these two classrooms were very different and it may be that because of these differences, the decisions each teacher made had to be different. Max had on or above grade level students while Kathleen had mostly ELL students. The instructional focus for each of these classrooms was also markedly different because of each teacher’s philosophy. Kathleen believed in the need to provide students opportunity to read good literature during reading instructional time. Max demonstrated that reading novels was for silent sustained reading (SSR) time found at the end of the school day. There was no reading of literature was done during Max’s instructional time. The reading was from worksheets which were followed by questions to be answered. The decision on how to structure each of their classrooms placed students in highly different classroom reading environments.

In summary, although the decisions made by these two teachers about reading instruction in their classes focused more on test-taking strategies than reading instruction, the delivery of these decisions were markedly different. The comprehension of what was read was important to both teachers but the rationale was different. Max expected students to read and understand, and they would demonstrate this understanding by the scores on worksheets and practice tests. Kathleen expected students to respond orally and follow along on the worksheets to demonstrate their understanding. The delivery and purpose of reading instruction took on a much different form in each of these classrooms.

*Fourth Grade*

When comparing teachers on this grade level, both Winnie and Carol will be a unit and Ida Mae as a unit for comparison. All three of these teachers had the purpose of preparing their students to pass the SMT, the same as the third-grade teachers. However, the decisions these teachers make about their reading instruction were much different.

Winnie and Carol, working as a team, split their instruction. Winnie strictly used summarization and Carol worked on discrete skills as ways to prepare their students. Neither of them had more than 7 students at one time for reading instruction. Carol very often was able to split her group of 7 into two groups because she had an instructional aide. The use of small grouping was a collaborative decision made to enhance reading instruction.
Ida Mae had some assistance with her students, which was often sporadic and only for a short 30 minute period of her reading instructional time. She demonstrated a mixture of methods for approaching reading instruction and her decisions often were based on how to support the special education students in the preparation of their portfolios, which was an alternative route to demonstrating state standard knowledge.

Winnie worked on summarization as a means to comprehension. Carol worked on the discrete skill development in response to the SMT format and random discrete skill testing. According to these two teachers, this combination assisted their students but did not develop reading skills like fluency and appreciation of the printed word. Carol spoke of aspect of reading that she was no longer able to teach. In her interview transcripts Carol stated how she used novels in the beginning of the schools year, had thematic units and encouraged reading trade books for pleasure. However, Carol admitted she provided worksheets with questions in SMT format to assess her students’ comprehension of the novels they read. She reported she could no longer do projects about the novels because she didn’t have time. When second semester began, her reading instruction changed and she focused on discrete skills. This personal contradiction was evident in her interviews.

Winnie stated that she was doing exactly what her students needed. She provided basal instruction at the beginning of the year, and second semester, she taught summarization full time using worksheet passages for reading. The only instruction she provided was what would assist her students in learning how to summarize what they read. From the observations and interviews, this decision to teach summarization was focused and consistent.

Ida Mae worked with discrete skills in combination with basal reading. She was observed providing a variety of opportunities to gain skills in test taking strategies including highlighting needed information, the “slash and trash” technique, and rereading passages for better understanding. These types of strategies were decisions Ida Mae made to teach her students to prepare for testing. These decisions were not unlike the types of strategies used by students in Winnie’s and Carol’s classrooms. Again, it was the delivery of the reading instruction that was varied in these two settings.

In summary, the fourth-grade teachers made similar decisions regarding the rationale for their reading instruction, but their delivery was much different. Some of these differences related
to the directed grouping that each classroom experienced and the inability of the school system to correct the missing personnel issues at this grade level.

Summary

When looking at this school and reading instruction of the participants in this study, the Oceanside Elementary School Reading Philosophy (See Appendix C) posted on the bulletin board in the office framed the overall instructional focus. It stated, “We believe that learning to read is a process that requires children to create meaning from a variety of printed materials, to apply the meaning found in print to specific purposes and to write meaningfully.” The second-grade teachers supported the process of creating meaning from a variety of printed materials, and third and fourth-grade teachers applied their instructional focus toward comprehension with a different purpose. Their purpose pertained to preparation for passing the state mandated test.

In summarizing what was learned from these classrooms, there was a chasm between the decisions made about reading instruction in second-grade when compared to third and fourth-grade. The rationale for reading instruction remained solidly based in having students understand what they read. Comprehension was a common thread. However, the purpose was different. Second-grade teachers stated clearly they wanted their students to love reading. They provided opportunities for experiencing reading and checked for comprehension in ways that were not connected to state mandated testing. Most of the third and fourth-grade teachers professed their desire for their students to love reading, as each of the boxes with their quotes support. However, the opportunities for reading were observed to relate to answering questions in the format of the SMT. There existed a chasm between the grade before students were tested by the state mandated testing and the grades where testing began. This chasm subsisted also in the philosophies of reading in some of the teachers in third and fourth grade thus affecting the decisions about reading instruction.

School and School System

As a final piece of analysis, the school and school system philosophy was explored for the influences on the decisions the participants in this study made regarding reading instruction. Looking at these gave a distinctive bit of additional data.
Oceanside Elementary School

Notable at Oceanside Elementary were two important facets. Each participant discussed the support from the school administration concerning discipline. When prompted about the reading successes of students, each teacher spoke extensively about the fact they were able to teach without interruption by inappropriate behavior. Prior to the current principal, teachers reported that the constant interruption by students’ inappropriate behavior prevented consistent teaching to occur. This problem affected all subjects, including reading. With the arrival of the current principal, teachers reported the climate changed so they spent time during the day engaged with students in academic pursuit rather than behavioral problems. This aspect of Oceanside Elementary is worth mentioning because of the overwhelming response from all the participants.

As previously mentioned, a copy Oceanside Elementary School’s reading philosophy was posted on the bulletin board by teacher mailboxes. This statement of beliefs (See Appendix C) set the standard for reading instruction in this school. This statement provided a foundation for the expectations for reading instruction at Oceanside Elementary School.

In the first paragraph of Oceanside’s reading philosophy, the statement that reading is a process and that a variety of materials offered a glimpse into decisions teachers might make about reading. It stated, “Teachers must know and use a variety of strategies to help motivate children as they learn to read.” The fact that strategies were stated in this philosophy matched the data for the majority of participants in this study. Most teachers were observed to teach strategies and from interviews, most teachers spoke fluently about the strategies they decided to use and the purpose behind the strategies they chose. Only one teacher, Winnie stated she didn’t teach strategies.

In the next paragraph, ideas for reading instructional needs by grade level were stated with the underlying concept being comprehension. Participants in this study focused on this concept in their instruction and in the strategies they taught. Vocabulary and reference materials were stated in the philosophy as important for third grade and above. These two areas were supported by all teachers in this study. Importantly, three teachers mentioned the need for more assistance by the library with teaching reference materials. Since reference materials were housed in the library and difficult to check out, teachers in interviews explored how this area of need by their students could be enhanced.
Finally in the last paragraph, the concept of “lifelong learners” was prominent. The philosophy reiterated comprehension and an enjoyment for pleasure reading. These intents were emphasized by teachers, with comprehension identified at all grade levels and enjoyment a goal cited in the data for second-grade teachers. Although some teachers in grades three and four spoke about students growing their joy for reading, observations of reading instruction did not demonstrate any opportunities.

When teachers were asked if there was an overall consensus for reading instruction in their school, most believed that all teachers were focused on reading comprehension as a goal. This was identified in the data as unifying facet of the reading program at Oceanside Elementary.

School System

No reading philosophy was located for this school system, but a mission statement was found on the website for the school system. It stated:

[school system name]’s reading mission is to educate all students and to help them become lifelong learners and productive citizens.

Goal 1: All students will be reading on grade level by the end of third grade.

Goal 2: Reading will be the focus in all grade levels with special emphasis on diagnostic and intervention strategies.

When visiting the school administrative offices, pamphlets were acquired concerning reading. No specific materials were found made by the school system to reflect their specific philosophy. All materials were nationally prepared information on reading from:

1. The Partnership for Reading – a collaborative effort of the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U. S. Department of Education.

2. The U.S. Department of Education – Office of Communications and Outreach

3. National Institute for Literacy (NIFL)
All these organizations are agencies of the Federal government each with a statement of its purpose. Condensing the purposes, literacy skills were the emphasis for schools, parents and policy makers. Some publications were geared for parents for children at specific grade levels and some were for teachers to support their understanding of reading instruction. An emphasis in these materials was found in scientifically based research, which coincides with the current federal policies, such as the No Child Left Behind Act.

Other information found on the school system’s website included teacher curriculum mapping documents and other supportive materials assisting teachers in the pacing of their reading instruction. The basal reading series formed the basis of the pacing and from the data gathered, the teachers in this study used the basal readers for reading instruction. The basal readers were not the only materials teachers used, and some teachers made decisions on how and when to use the basal reading program. For example, some teachers like Frannie (second) used the basal a couple days of the week and read trade books the rest of the week. Max’s (third) students had finished the basal reading stories by the beginning of second semester, so he provided supplemental reading passages through worksheets. Ida Mae (fourth) used the basal for part of her instructional time almost every day. Carol and Winnie stopped using the basal program, choosing to use supplemental materials to prepare for the SMT. When asked about the reading basal program, all teachers stated they were comfortable with the series and believed they had many materials to use. Several teachers mentioned the lack of non-fiction stories in the basal and provided supplementary non-fiction stories through worksheets. When Carol, a reading specialist, responded that she believed the series to be good, but wanted more developed vocabulary.

In summary, the school system did not provide a specific reading philosophy but did provide a mission to focus reading for all students. Materials found at the administrative offices reflected the national reading agenda. According to the teachers in this study, the basal series was appropriate and used by all. There was no overall goal, with the exception to have all students reading on grade level by third grade. This matched the national reading agenda.
CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Implications

Research Problem

This study focused on the decisions experienced elementary public school teachers made about their reading instruction. No current research was found that examined how experienced elementary teachers deliver reading instruction to students in grades 2-4. More than 20 years after the government report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, “A Nation at Risk” (1983), researchers continue to focus on the connections between test scores, teacher behaviors and what teacher qualities are important for student success (Brophy, 1988; Cody & Sherman, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Young, 2002; Marzano, 2003). The decisions teachers make have consequences for student success.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the decisions 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade experienced teachers made in selecting reading instructional practices in the current accountability driven environment. Making sense of the factors that influenced teachers’ decisions through observation of teacher behaviors during reading instruction, teacher interviews about reading instruction, and instructional artifacts provided insights that may contribute to understanding research-based practices in reading instruction. A case study methodology was chosen in order to create a rich description of each participant. Within the case study, a collective cross case study format compared the decision making by participants across grade levels.

Research Questions

Two research questions framed this study:

1) What decisions are 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade teachers making for reading instruction?
2) On what basis do teachers make these decisions?
Overview

Based on the data in this study, very few decisions about reading were made by individual teachers. Reading instruction centered on what teachers chose to teach and the decisions of how to teach students. Three themes were identified relative to teacher decisions: (1) grouping; 2) instructional focus; and (3) strategies. Grouping was identified as a theme, even though teachers in this study did not have the opportunity to make many decisions about how students were grouped. The lack of individual teachers making decisions about grouping at Oceanside Elementary was noteworthy as a contradictory theme for teacher decision making. Patton (2002) reminds researchers to be open to search for alternative classifications of data and to look for the negative cases. With grouping, administrators made initial decisions about grouping for third and fourth-grade teachers, and these teachers made additional grouping decisions with other specialists who worked with their students. These two facets of grouping were collapsed together and termed directed/collaborative decisions. The other classification for grouping included individual decisions. From the data, few individual decisions were made by the participants in this study.

There was a noteworthy divergence within the decisions teachers made about instructional focus and strategies, creating two distinct factions by grade levels. Second-grade teachers’ decisions clustered together and third and fourth-grade teachers’ decisions created a second group. For both groups, comprehension was a central, connecting thread for the themes of instructional focus and strategies that each teacher used in their classrooms. Second-grade teachers’ decisions about reading instruction had an instructional focus for students to develop skills in order to read for pleasure. Decisions about reading instruction made by third and fourth-grade teachers had an instructional focus and used strategies designed to prepare students to pass the state mandated test, or SMT.

In this study, the data suggests that teachers in second grade base their decisions about reading instruction differently than those in third and fourth grade. For research question #2, the basis of each group’s reading decisions in the theme areas of instructional focus and strategies was contradictory. Second-grade teachers made instructional focus decisions based on their understanding of how to develop their students into readers who were motivated to read for enjoyment. Third and fourth-grade teachers based their instructional focus and strategy decisions on the development students who could pass the SMT. This divergence in purpose created
dissonance between second-grade teachers and third and fourth grade teachers. Shavelson (1973) expanded the concept of decision making as the most basic of skills necessary for teaching; therefore, the divergence between these two groups is notable. The dissonance deserved further exploration.

The following sections are presented by grade level where the research questions will be explored for each grade level. The contrasting positions found in the data for the two groups (second-grade teachers and third/fourth grade teachers) will be discussed in order to further elucidate the dissonance identified in the data. Following these sections, each theme will be reviewed for decisions made. Finally, this chapter will close with conclusions, implications for practice and implications for further research.

**Second-Grade Teachers**

The decisions second-grade teachers made about reading instruction in their classrooms centered on the premise that reading should provide opportunities for student enjoyment. Frank Smith (2006) stated, “What encourages children to read, and thus learn to read… [is] being able to read” (p. 13). Smith makes the argument that children read for the experience of reading, and when children are engaged in reading, the satisfaction of reading is evident through observation. My observations of the second-grade teachers in this study demonstrated that students in their classrooms were given opportunities to read trade books, where the stories were carried over from day to day. By reading chapters in trade books and reading supplemental trade books associated with the basal reading series, students in these classrooms were provided opportunities to read stories that connected to their lives and other content areas being studied. For example, I observed Frannie’s students using a Venn diagram to visually represent a discussion for comparing of two different stories from their basal series. Some of the ideas discussed with Frannie by the students were different kinds of restaurants, city markets in a story and the one found in their town, karate schools and karate moves they knew, as well as parks found in the stories and parks in which they played. Frannie she stated that she used the Venn diagram, “to help them review the story in a different format than just talking about it or doing a story map.” This instructional activity represented a method chosen by Frannie to connect student reading to their prior knowledge and real life experiences.

Similarly, Tracey stated her main goal was to read, “…for pleasure. I’m really big into just reading to kids for reading, for the entertainment… I this it’s good for them to just sit down
and read.” Snow, Burns & Griffin (1998) confirmed the need for students to have frequent exposure and intensive opportunities to read. Students in Tracey’s classroom were provided with opportunities to read with a partner as well as read individually. Tracey allowed students to discuss what they read with each other as well as orally answer questions asked to check comprehension. Tracey guided students to make connections between the stories they read and other content areas, such as map study from social studies and insects in science. This integration of information from other content areas was an approach used to support Tracey’s students in developing their understanding of what they read.

I observed little overt strategy instruction in both Tracey and Frannie’s classrooms. No strategies were observed to be taught by Frannie and when asked in her interviews, she stated she did not teach any strategies. Borko and Putnam (1996) viewed a teacher’s beliefs as a filter for their actions. Frannie stated she believed her purpose was to provide opportunities for students to have time to read. She used the basals as minimally as possible, stating that students finished basal stories in one day. She refused to prolong working on stories in the basals. Instead, she chose trade books like “The Twit” and “The Magic Finger” by Roald Dahl and “Marvin Redpost” books by Louis Sachar, both of these authors reported as being popular with students. Frannie felt these books would be of interest to her students and she used them to provide reading opportunities for her students.

I spend a little time on what I have to do [as required by the schools system such as spelling tests and basal reading tests on basal stories] and then I spend as much time as I can on actually reading and getting these kids to want to read, go to the library and check out chapter books to read.

Tracey taught a few reading strategies in an informal way, selecting what to teach through observing her students and deciding at that moment what were needed. For example, when students were having difficulty decoding, I observed Tracey guiding students to use context clues. She spoke about using this strategy to assist decoding. “… if you get stuck on something, you try to look at the whole sentence, you look at the beginning of the word, think about what makes sense, you self-correct.”

In relation to instructional focus, I observed both teachers using round robin reading, where a small group of students took turns reading. This method of providing opportunities for students to read remains a long-standing technique used by teachers and has been proven to be an
ineffective method for oral reading (Eldridge, Hollingsworth & Reutzel, 1994). Round robin reading does not assist teachers in attending to poor readers’ needs and promotes many flawed reading habits. Tracey spoke about the use of round robin reading. “…we probably do round robin on an average of two to three times [per week], but some days we’ll do read with a partner… and some days they will read to themselves.” As I observed Frannie doing round robin reading, I recognized her purpose was not to correct reader errors because she simply provided students words with which they had difficulty, often providing the word when students would pause. When asked about providing the unknown words to students, Frannie stated, “I basically want them to spend their time reading for understanding.” Decoding was not part of her purpose with round robin reading; rather opportunity to read aloud was her purpose.

Based on the data, it was obvious from observations and interviews that Frannie was less willing to share her ideas about reading instruction than Tracey. However, I did observe consistent opportunities for student reading in Frannie’s classroom. Both second-grade teachers provided artifacts that helped to illustrate their planning of opportunities for students to participate in reading activities. Students in Frannie’s classroom created “parts of speech” booklets where they cut out pictures to represent various parts of speech. Students in Tracey’s classroom were encouraged to use materials posted in the room to assist their reading. Students were directed to use the “Word Wall” as well as the science and social studies materials on the walls. By providing choices for students, both of these teachers allowed students to engage in reading in ways that were significantly different from the other group (third and fourth-grade teachers).

These decisions second-grade teachers made concerning organizational methods and materials for reading instruction are in keeping with recommendations for reading instruction based on reading research and represent a balanced approach to reading instruction (Adams, 1990a; Allington & Johnston, 2002; Austin & Morrison, 1963; Camborne, 2002; Chall, 1999; Cunningham & Cunningham, 2002).

Third and fourth-grade teachers

In answering research question #1, the decisions teachers made by this group of teachers were associated with daily planning for the instructional focus in their classrooms and the strategies taught to students. The basis for the decisions (research question #2) of third and fourth-grade teachers was to prepare students for state mandated testing (SMT). For example,
Max (3rd) stated, “My first day in reading, I sit down with the kids and talk to them about reading… and I get them to see that taking a test on reading is just one of the things you have to do…” He also added in another interview that, “Oceanside Elementary was getting to the point that if we hadn’t passed the test [SMT], the state would be coming in and taking over.” In addition, Carol (4th) stated,

I feel sort of pressured with the SMT skills, … in the past three years… because… if they don’t practice these skills that they will be asked to do on that test, if they don’t have some practice with it, their chances are not good for passing the test…

In their interviews, third and fourth-grade teachers spoke often about using materials in SMT format. The use of materials that simulated the SMT was observed, and the majority of the artifacts provided by each third and fourth grade teachers were examples of short reading passages with multiple choice questions following the passage. This triangulation (the interviews, the observations and artifacts) supported the finding that third and fourth-grade teachers in this study made decisions based on their perceptions of how to prepare students for the SMT.

What was missing in these decisions? In his book *Standardized Minds*, Peter Sacks (2000) stated,

…if teachers are teaching to the test via rote teaching styles, rushing through lots of drills and worksheets and practice tests – all aimed to boost test scores – then teachers and schools are ignoring substantial content that lies beyond the narrow scope of the standardized tests. Also shortchanged are thinking, analyzing, synthesizing, performing and articulating, and other modes of in-depth learning (p. 130).

It was evident from observations that teachers in third and fourth grade did not provide opportunities for students to think deeply about the content of their reading, but rather only to demonstrate their understanding of what they read by answering multiple choice questions which followed the format of the SMT. Seldom were critical thinking skills observed where analyzing what was read and connecting it to other information was thoughtfully planned. Some teachers led discussions with students to infer information from the short passages read, however this practice was observed to be unproductive because the majority of the students did not answer the
questions successfully. Although the U.S. Department of Education indicated that annual testing provided the information to determine what works and doesn’t work in schools and how well students are achieving, Linn (2000) stated “assessment systems that are useful monitors lose much of dependability and credibility for that purpose when high stakes are attached to them” (p. 14). Since third and fourth-grade teachers planned their instructional focus and strategies in correlation to the SMT, would continuous practice on the formatting truly create in-depth readers?

Each participant in this study was given the opportunity to respond to a statement in their member check folder, “Overall, I believe I make decisions about reading instruction in my classroom.” Ida Mae (4th) reflected on this statement, “This is the only thing I believe I have some control over [reading instruction in her classroom]; however, the administration dictates the class make-up; thus, in reality, I have no control.” This statement was a representation of the lack of decision about reading instruction among the fourth-grade teachers. Borko, Shavelson & Stern (1981) studied teacher planning for reading instruction and found that teachers made decisions about grouping students on the basis of ability. However, at Oceanside Elementary, homogeneous grouping had been established by the administrators and teachers made few grouping decisions. When these teachers made decisions to group students it was in association with specialist teachers (ELL, special education, reading) and involved students being pulled out of their classrooms for these services. In effect, these teachers did not make individual decisions about grouping for reading instruction within their classrooms.

Themes

In this section, the three identified themes, (a) grouping; (b) instructional focus; and (c) strategies will be discussed across the grade levels. Using observations and interviews as well as a review of artifacts provided by seven participants, these themes represented decisions these teachers were making in their classrooms. The following discussion of these themes includes the similarities and differences found in this collective case study analysis.

Grouping

Grouping was one theme identified in some of the participant data. For the purpose of this study, grouping was defined as the ways in which students were clustered for instructional delivery. Homogeneous grouping was prominent in Oceanside Elementary. Research is divided about ability grouping (Eder, 1981; Slavin, 1987). Although ability grouping
may increase efficiency for teachers, a growing body of evidence in educational research reflects
that it is not effective for increasing student achievement (Eder, 1982; Finn, Gerber, Achilles &
Boyd-Zacharis, 2001). Many advocates for educational change call for an eradication of ability
grouping so that there will be students who are good models for reading in each classroom and/or
group (Merrit, 2007). Meijnen & Guldemond (2002) stated, “By grouping pupils according to
ability, the teacher is clearly indicating that demands and expectations are not the same for all
pupils” (p. 246). Eder (1981) found that lower ability groups had more inattentiveness and
teacher management issues. She stated, “…those students who were likely to have more
difficulty learning were assigned to groups whose social contexts were much less conducive for
learning” (p. 151). Barr (1975) and Borko, Shavelson & Stern (1981) examined the composition
of reading groups and found the pacing to be much slower in lower ability groups. Dispersing the
lower academically performing students across all classrooms allows teachers to give more
individual attention to those students who need more developmentally appropriate teaching,
since there would be fewer in most classrooms.

Second-grade teachers met during the summer to decide how to divide students for their
classrooms. As explained by Tracey and Frannie, these grouping decisions were made
collaboratively by all of the second-grade teachers. The second-grade grouping decisions placed
students homogenously by achievement in classrooms. Above grade level and grade level
readers were placed in three classrooms and the lower performing students were placed together
in a fourth classroom. Tracey and Frannie believed this allowed teachers to meet student needs
more efficiently. However, Frannie admitted she was not prepared to teach decoding skills to
students. Was this a wise choice to divide students homogeneously, knowing the strengths of
personnel? Some research supports aligning the strengths of teachers to what they teach. Darling-
Hammond (2000) reported, “…while student demographic characteristics are strongly related to
student outcomes at the state level, they are less influential in predicting achievement levels than
variables assessing the quality of the teaching force” (p. 39). In light of research on effective
teachers, grouping students who do not need decoding skills into Frannie’s classroom may have
been a worthy decision. Having teachers teach in the realm of their personal strengths could be
important.

Homogeneous ability grouping was evident at all three grade levels; however school
administrators made decisions about grouping students into third and fourth-grade classrooms.
These decisions were made in collaboration with the teachers affected by these grouping decisions. Students placed in Kathleen’s (3rd) classroom included five average to above average achieving students and all of the ELL students. She reported that she agreed with administration to this configuration. More ELL students were placed in her classroom after the start of the school year, and Kathleen (3rd) stated that next year, she would rather have all the ELL students than the mixture she had this year. Students in Max’s (3rd) classroom were reported to have average to above average achievement in reading, and the special education students in his classroom were pulled out for reading as specified by their individual educational plan (IEP). These students left Max’s classroom and met the special education teacher in her classroom for reading instruction. As Carol (4th) previously explained, the current principal spoke with Carol prior to the decision was made to place students who did not pass the 3rd grade state mandated test (SMT) in Winnie’s classroom. Carol agreed to this placement because it benefited her schedule and she believed it would allow students to receive better services for reading instruction. Winnie (4th) stated that this was a good decision to assist these students, but it put a lot of pressure on both teachers. They both felt accountable for these students passing the SMT.

There was an entwined connection of the theme, grouping, to the other two themes, instructional foci and strategies. When Winnie (4th) and Carol (4th) were observed, it was during the third year that they worked as co-teachers to prepare their students to pass the SMT test now given in fourth grade. For the past two years, students in their classrooms had an average passing rate of over 85%. The basis of this grouping model affected Winnie and Carol’s decisions in reading instruction in that they chose to split the group during their reading instructional time. Each teacher worked with groups of 7 students and the decisions they made were based on perceptions of how to help students pass the SMT. In turn, this directed/collaborative decision was reinforced by success in passing rates on the SMT. So, the grouping of students who had not previously passed the third-grade SMT affected the decisions these teachers made about their instructional foci and the strategies taught in these classrooms. The decisions Winnie (4th) and Carol (4th) made about instructional foci and strategies were reinforced when the majority of their students passing the SMT, contributing to students’ success on the SMT. Wilkinson (1988) stated that patterns of instruction were closely associated with grouping; thus offering insights about the interconnectedness of decisions about grouping with teachers’ decisions about instructional foci and strategies by the participants in this study.
The school itself profited when these students passed the SMT because as these student’s scores were counted twice, once as “recovery students” for third grade and then as students in fourth grade. The term “recovery students” referred to students who had not passed that SMT in third grade and were categorized as needing remediation. The unrelenting need to have the students in Winnie (4th) and Carol’s (4th) classrooms pass the SMT was evident in the data. This need further reinforced teacher decisions for students in order to pass SMT.

Could the component of very small grouping be the contributing factor to student success, instead of the instructional focus (summarizing) of Winnie (4th) and Carol (4th) teachers? The research of Finn, Gerber, Achilles and Boyd-Zacharis (2001) explained the lasting effects of small class sizes on reading achievement. The authors stated: “Students who attended small classes performed significantly better on all achievement measures in all grades than did students in full-size classes…." (p. 173).

The only individual or personal decisions about grouping made by individual teachers related to individual reading groups occurred in second grade. These teachers had on and above grade level students and made decisions about how to group them into smaller units to provide opportunities for reading instruction. Frannie (2nd) stated that she liked to change her groups around and preferred to have students grouped more heterogeneously within her classroom. Tracey (2nd) recognized students who needed support and scaffolding to increase their reading ability. She decided to provide more differentiated instructional opportunities for her students and chose to arrange her students in heterogeneous fashion for reading groups. Teachers in third and fourth grade demonstrated no individual reading instructional decisions related to grouping.

In summary, individual third and fourth grade teachers did not make grouping decisions in their daily reading instruction. Some individual decisions for grouping were made at the second grade level. Most decisions about grouping occurred at the administrative level with input from teachers. Although grouping was a theme found in the observations and interviews, it was not widespread as an individual decision these teachers were able to make. Not having the opportunity to make decisions about grouping had implications about the kinds of overall decisions teachers made about reading instruction.

*Instructional Focus*

The theme of instructional focus was a complex premise to classify. Reviewing many examples from each of the 7 participants, I created the following operational definition:
instructional focus includes areas of knowledge these teachers selected as important to teach the students in their classrooms. Instructional focus can be likened to the objectives teachers used to direct their lessons.

The main area within the theme of instructional focus that was consistently found across all participants was comprehension. Within comprehension were the subcategories of: (a) vocabulary; (b) use of questions; (c) inference; and (d) summarizing. Each of these subcategories was mingled within the larger theme of comprehension. All participants were united under an umbrella instructional focus of comprehension. This focus matched the reading philosophy of Oceanside Elementary School that stated: “… learning to read is a process that requires children to create meaning from a variety of printed materials, to apply the meaning found in print to specific purposes…developing comprehension skills…” (See Appendix C.).

The individual teachers varied in the approaches used to direct their teaching toward comprehension. For instance, Winnie (4th), focused on only one method of supporting comprehension, summarizing. Although it was clear that Winnie’s students understood what was read was important, several were unable to decode words within the assigned reading passages. The students who could not decode well were not observed to receive any instruction in decoding.

The need for differentiated instruction was also evident for students in several other third and fourth-grade classrooms. Valli & Buese (2007) tracked the change in fourth and fifth-grade teachers’ ability to differentiate instruction for students in connection with the effects of educational policy on teachers in classrooms. Their findings over a four-year period demonstrated that the roles of teachers in their study changed to adhere to the new policies enacted by their school system resulting in less differentiation. These role changes included a change in the institutional role, which began to shape the instructional goal. “Teachers’ roles had, indeed, become more hierarchically controlled” (p. 551). Teachers in this study found their instructional roles to be progressively more regulated and monitored through assessment and data analysis expectations. These authors reported a decrease in the number/range of literacy skills teachers taught and how they addressed skill through instruction, representing a de-skilling of teachers creating a conflict between the pedagogical perspectives of these teachers and the mandates from policy makers. Allington (2002a) stated, “Current policy development seems
headed in the direction of less and less professional autonomy [for teachers]… there is no professional accountability without professional autonomy” (p. 33).

At Oceanside Elementary, I observed little differentiated instruction. There were students at each grade level for whom teachers stated there was a need for more individualized planning and instruction in reading. For example, students in Max’s third-grade classroom worked on comprehension by reading passages and answering questions about these passages. If students could not keep up with the expected pace of completion for these worksheets, Max (3rd) explained that those students would have to move to another classroom. Both Winnie (4th) and Carol (4th) spoke about one student in their charge who had great trouble decoding, yet they stated that they could not offer decoding as an instructional focus. Each participant in this study recognized individual needs among their students and some spoke about the difficulty in providing instructional foci that did not fit the larger need of the school to pass the SMT. For example, Kathleen (3rd) stated that students in her classroom, many of whom were ELL, received specialized decoding skills outside of her classroom and she reinforced these skills through the use of worksheets with multiple choice answers. Ida Mae (4th) stated she did not teach decoding skills because that was the responsibility of the special education teacher. Like the teachers in the Valli & Buese (2007) study, teachers at Oceanside Elementary spent time on test taking strategies, with little time devoted to differentiating instruction.

There were some ways in which these teachers attempted to provide some differentiation within their instruction. In Ida Mae’s (4th) classroom, all students were working on skill-related worksheets that special education students needed to complete correctly in order to demonstrate their understandings of concepts for their portfolios (which were alternatives to the state mandated testing SMT). Kathleen (3rd) spoke extensively about using trade books and allowing students creating their own projects to demonstrate their understandings of the books they read. Carol (4th) spoke of using trade books to enhance motivation to read, but at the time of this study, she had moved away from allowing individual student projects because she felt she didn’t have time. Although teachers discussed using these methods of differentiation, none of this was observed; thus there was no way to triangulate this differentiated instruction.

**Vocabulary**

Instructional focus encompassed many approaches to reach the umbrella goal of comprehension, most of which connected directly to test taking strategies. A prominent aspect of
the subcategory of vocabulary was direct instruction on the identification of the meanings of unknown words. Second-grade teachers, Frannie and Tracey chose their vocabulary based on the basal readers. Max (3rd) stated that his students did not come with a wealth of prior knowledge about the third-grade curriculum content; therefore, he had to provide opportunities for his students to be exposed to words. Examples included vocabulary words from economics in the social studies curriculum such as “opportunity cost,” “supply,” “demand,” and terms from ancient civilizations such as “aqueduct.” In addition, Max, as well as the rest of the teachers in this study, used skill-based worksheets for vocabulary instruction, where reading a passage may have included a question at the end about the meaning of a word from the passage.

Vocabulary is an important aspect in reading comprehension. Word consciousness integrates metacognition about words with motivation for learning words, including enjoyment, a sense of purpose and interest (Graves & Watts-Taffe, 2002). This term was defined by Anderson and Nagy (1992) and refers to instruction that creates awareness for using words in a skilled and precise way, yet making words playful and fun. One of the most important teaching aspects of word consciousness is to promote word play, using idioms, puns, clichés, homophones and homographs. Many examples of word play fun can be found in children’s literature, such as Judith Viorst’s *The Alphabet from Z to A (With Much Confusion on the Way)* or Louis Sachar’s *Holes.* Graves & Watts-Taffe (2002) stated:

> Students who are word conscious know many words, and they know them well. Equally important, students are interested in words, and they gain enjoyment and satisfaction from using them well and from seeing or hearing them used well by others… developing students’ word consciousness so that they have both the will and the skill to improve their vocabularies is essential (p. 159-160).

Frannie (3rd) was one of two teachers observed in an attempt to use the concept of word consciousness. She provided a poem that followed the spelling pattern for that week and had students find words that followed the same pattern. Ida Mae (4th) had students creating pictures for homophones, which were then posted on the walls in her classroom. No other teachers were observed to integrate vocabulary in ways that developed metacognition, or where students were playing with the words.
Questioning

In this study, teachers deliberately chose to use various types of oral questioning to assess student understandings of the texts they had read. However, no documentation of student comprehension from the use of oral questioning was observed. Teachers were not observed to record any responses from students, that is, they collected no data to review to inform their practice. When asked about the use of anecdotal notes as informal assessments, both Kathleen (3rd) and Tracey (2nd) stated that they did not take time to write down what they observed about students and their understandings of what they read. Both declared that after about a month of school, they knew their students well enough to remember which students needed additional practice in comprehension, as well as other reading instruction needs. One teacher, Tracey (2nd) stated that she used the information she remembered from her questioning as a data base for grouping students together as reading partners. These reading partnerships included matches of students with stronger and weaker abilities for the purpose of providing models of comprehension. Some teachers used a reading test on the basal story of the week to examine the comprehension of students. Other methods included grades on worksheets and practice tests to document student improvement in comprehension. These findings are consistent with those of Duke and Pearson (2002) who stated, “No comprehension activity has a longer or more pervasive tradition than asking students questions about their reading…” (p. 222). Questioning to assess comprehension of text was widely used as an instructional focus by these teachers, with few other methods to support comprehension. In her famous study, Durkin (1978) stated that asking questions is not teaching comprehension, but simply evaluating students’ comprehension. From my observation, a divide existed between the way second-grade teachers and the group of third and fourth-grade teachers taught comprehension. Second-grade teachers used reading instructional practices such as having students create mental images of what they read, and using an inner voice to determine if what they read made sense. For example, Tracey (2nd) spoke about how she encouraged students to “let their brains get it” by pausing to be sure what students read made sense. No teaching for comprehension was observed in third and fourth-grade classrooms; only the use of questioning as a way to assess comprehension was observed at these levels in which the SMT was administered.
Inference

In order to help students construct meaning, teachers often use questions to support and assess reading comprehension (van den Broek, et. al., 2001). Teachers in this study focused their instruction on questioning in many different forms, including questions about text inferences as a part of their instructional focus. Therefore, inference formed a foundation for reading comprehension (Thorndike, 1971) and was integral in creating memory for text (Anderson & Pearson, 1984).

Student understandings of inferential questions were identified as a school-wide weakness at Oceanside Elementary through analysis of previous data from the SMT. Therefore the development of inferential understandings in students at Oceanside Elementary was viewed as imperative. According to Phillips (1988) “inference is a cognitive process used to construct meaning” (p. 194). I observed the use of questions by third and fourth-grade teachers as a way to develop inferential understanding from reading passages. These teachers encouraged students to use context clues to understand inferential questions on worksheets. However, I did not observe any direct instruction to develop understanding of characters beliefs and motivations or the interactions between characters. Nor did I observe any teachers use the setting or the author as a basis to develop deeper understandings of the connections in what was read. Using short reading passages with multiple choice questions at the end was an inadequate decision to assist the development of understanding inference in that many types of inferential understandings were not addressed. Further, there was no instruction observed or discussed that involved teaching students how to effectively make inferences.

In contrast, second-grade teachers created opportunities for students to discuss the characters in their reading. These discussions assisted students in developing a rich understanding of the characters, the settings and the plots of the stories they read. The choice to use trade books rather than short reading passages on worksheets created the opportunity for students to begin their understandings of how inferential questions could be answered. Inferential understanding requires drawing personal meaning from text and I observed second-grade teachers making connections to students’ lives. These connections tapped into students’ prior knowledge which may have supported the development of their inferential skills. Tracey (2nd) explicitly taught the concept of antecedents for pronouns in a teacher created paragraph. Although Tracey felt this lesson was not as successful as she expected, the connections she made
between herself and her students in this paragraph and the way in which she delivered the concept was a solid example of developing inferential understanding through reading. This divide between the decisions made by second-grade teachers and third and fourth-grade teachers regarding instruction to develop inferential understanding represented the dissonance in reading instruction.

Another example involves student generated questions. One of the most prevalent ways to increase student understanding of inference is to allow students to generate their own questions (Duke & Pearson, 2002). When asked if he had engaged students in trying this technique, Max (3) stated that this would be a good idea, but he had not thought to try it. No third and fourth-grade teachers were observed asking students to make up their own questions from their reading. Second-grade students were observed to ask one another questions while they were reading, and this practice was encouraged by second-grade teachers.

**Summarizing**

All of the third and fourth-grade teachers used summarizing to improve comprehension and both second-grade teachers spoke about using summarization, but it was not observed at that grade level. Summarization is one of the most difficult methods to teach students for improving comprehension. Pressley (2000) stated that in order to construct meaningful summaries, students must have a full understanding of what they have read, using their prior knowledge as well as conscious and automatic processes of association with what they read. This means students must actively be involved in the act of reading through the use of skills such as predicting, rereading, self-monitoring for comprehension, and making meaning through the interpretation of what they read. It is the active self-regulation for summarization that promotes comprehension.

At Oceanside Elementary, students who were unable to pass the state standards on the SMT in third grade were placed in Winnie’s fourth-grade classroom, where she used summarization as a major instructional focus. However, other teachers used summarization to support students in demonstrating comprehension of what they had read. Duke and Pearson (2002) discussed direct instruction of summarization as being a supportive strategy for increasing comprehension of text. This instructional focus was widespread and used in a variety of ways by the participating teachers in this study. However, I did not observe students using summarization independently. Even in Winnie’s classroom, she led the summary practice every time I observed. She spoke about one student who was clearly able to summarize efficiently, but stated that the
rest of her class “need my help to complete their summary correctly.” Other third and fourth-grade teachers used summaries to find the main idea of a reading passage and often guided the summary orally with a whole group. No self-regulation by students was evident.

These four aspects of comprehension - vocabulary instruction, questioning for comprehension, inference and summarizing - formed the instructional focus on comprehension in the classrooms I observed in this school. All of these methods are in keeping with research on increasing students’ success in reading instruction (Duke & Pearson, 2002) but are incomplete for teaching comprehension. In particular, questioning was used only for assessment of comprehension, not to teach students ways to elicit comprehension. In addition, I did not observe any these methods to be self-actualized by students in the classrooms of third and fourth-grade teachers who participated in this study.

Strategies

The last theme was strategies, operationally defined as any actions that teachers were actively teaching students to take in order to improve their skills. According to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), strategy instruction includes direct instruction as well as guided practice. Strategies should provide motivation and be empowering to students in gaining higher levels of self-efficacy in reading. Creating self-regulated readers is the major purpose of teaching students strategies for reading (Alexander & Jetton, 2000).

There were three strategies found most prominently: (a) rereading passages; (b) highlighting/underlining information; and (c) elimination of possible answers to questions. Additional strategies included the use of fingers to frame words, putting words into blanks, and drawing or removing pictures. A marked difference was found between strategies used in second grade and those used in third and fourth grade, adding to the dissonance.

Rereading

Pressley (2000) identified rereading as a strategy used automatically by mature readers in making sense of what they read. Rereading, underlining and paraphrasing are actions students can take to support comprehension of what is read. There was evidence that six of seven teachers in this study encouraged students to use rereading as a strategy. Students used rereading to find answers to questions asked orally and questions found on worksheets. For instance, Winnie (4th) required that her students to reread passages a minimum of three times before beginning summarization. For other third and fourth-grade teachers, rereading was taught as a strategy for
looking back at the text to find information for answering questions. For second-grade teachers, rereading was used to clarify meaning within the story and make sense of vocabulary not easily understood. Tracey (2nd) directed students to reread when words or sentences were skipped or missed and stated that rereading is a strategy that “good readers use.” The purposes for rereading were different for second-grade teachers as opposed to third and fourth-grade teachers. The second-grade teachers encouraged their students to use rereading to assist comprehension during reading stories. The third and fourth-grade teachers expected students to reread to assist their comprehension for answering questions in a format that matched the SMT. Routman (2003) wrote that “rereading is the strategy that is most useful to readers of all ages. When given opportunities to reread material, readers’ comprehension always goes up” (p. 122).

**Highlighting/Underlining**

The strategies of highlighting and underlining were identified in both third and fourth grade as methods of supporting students in locating important information in what they read. These two strategies were used interchangeably and a few students were observed using one or both strategies without prompting. Some teachers modeled the process of identifying important information in their reading with underlining or highlighting. For example, Ida Mae (4th) modeled these strategies using an overhead copy of a reading passage and talking aloud what she was doing and why. Second-grade teachers did not use these strategies.

No current research was located to support the use of highlighting text as a strategy to increase reading achievement. Hartley, Bartlett, & Branthwaite (1980) reviewed the literature on the effectiveness of underlining and reported that the majority of studies failed to demonstrate any significant effects supporting the use of underlining. From this review, these authors stated three major points: (1) studies have been limited in the ways learning was assessed; (2) long-term retention of information was not tested; and (3) no specific knowledge of about how children might benefit was found. The widespread use of this strategy by third and fourth-grade teachers at Oceanside Elementary is not supported by research.

**Eliminating Answers**

This strategy was used in the third and fourth-grade classrooms. The purpose was to teach students to look at answers on worksheets or practice simulation tests and identify answers that would least likely be correct choices. This strategy was taught to support test taking and gave students a measure of control when reading a passage and answering questions. Roth, Paris
& Turner (2000) identified elimination of unlikely answers as a positive strategy for test taking. Ida Mae (4th) named this strategy “slash and trash,” and students were observed using it and even shouting out the words “slash and trash” as they used the strategy. Motivation to use strategies is important if they are to be effectively employed (Roth, Paris & Turner, 2000). Second-grade teachers did not teach this strategy.

Second-grade teachers were not observed to teach directly strategies. Tracey encouraged some rereading when students appeared uncertain as they read aloud. Frannie stated that she did not teach individual strategies. She believed her students would imitate higher ability students and improve their reading by simply reading. Upon review of the research, Pressley, Johnson, Symons, McGoldrick, & Kurita (1989) concluded that specific strategy instruction was important for the self-regulation of young readers where the goal is to “use the trained strategies autonomously, skillfully, and appropriately (p. 26).

Conclusions

In 2001, the federal government set standards for all school systems through the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Metaphorically, the passage of NCLB was an earthquake that affected all teachers, creating a shifting of expectations and great uncertainty. While most states had already designed and implemented standards for instruction with related tests on achievement of those standards, NCLB introduced federal requirements for schools with serious consequences for schools, teachers, and children if minimal required scores are not achieved (U. S. Department of Education, 2002).

Instruction was shaken by these expectations and the clarity of what was expected was unclear creating great uncertainty. For seven years, teachers have felt the aftershock of tremors from NCLB through their state standards and the pressure exacted for each school system to meet these standards. Over and over the tremors of these expectations have continued to rock the foundation of instruction (U. S. Department of Education, 2002). Oceanside Elementary felt the aftershocks when the school failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP). As a result administrators and teachers were under extensive pressure to achieve AYP success in the future. Without this achievement, there would be consequences, including the state taking over the management of their school, or potential school closure (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

In effect, NCLB requirements led to a shift in the purpose of education for many of the nation’s schools. When the federal government imposed the standards of NCLB and the tremors
created wave after wave of uncertainty for teachers, the shifting plates of instruction began their motion. At Oceanside, after the first failure to meet NCLB’s AYP requirements, there was a significant tremor leading to a shift in purpose. That is, the purpose of education became that of assuring the children at Oceanside pass the SMT, which would allow the school to take itself out of danger. Along the way, this shift began to manifest itself in the ways teachers thought about their teaching and provided instruction to children. This shift in purpose created a dissonance which filtered into pitting the best practices for teaching reading to students against passing the state mandated tests.

The results of the current study demonstrate differences in teacher thinking about reading instruction at Oceanside Elementary School between grades who would not take the SMT and those that would. Data were collected for a short period of time, only a few months during the second semester of the school year. This was during the time period prior to the yearly administration of the SMT at Oceanside. An unmistakable purpose for reading instruction was common across the third and fourth-grade teachers. All reading instruction in these classrooms had the purpose of providing opportunities test taking practice for their students in preparation for the SMT. Their purpose was so far removed from that observed in second grade that a gap of enormous expanse was produced. This gap, or chasm, existed as a space of philosophical difference that set reading instruction decisions apart from second grade to third and fourth grade.

The chasm of difference between second-grade and third and fourth-grade teacher comments and activities observed represents a space between the philosophical understanding and purpose of reading instruction among the participants in this study. Carol (4th) and Kathleen (3rd) recognized this fractured space and spoke in their interviews how they were torn between what they believed about reading instruction and what they felt they had to do to provide support to students with regard to the reality of the SMT. On the other hand, Tracey (2nd) spoke about how she did not believe in the testing and would not work on preparing her students for testing that would occur at the next grade. This dissonance of purpose for reading from second grade to third and fourth grade reflects a chasm.

Second-grade teachers centered their reading instruction around the purpose of teaching their students to enjoy reading. They used trade books and basal stories as the basis for their reading instruction and focused their instruction on making connections between the characters,
setting and main ideas found in the reading to students’ lives and perspectives. On the other side of the chasm, the third and fourth-grade teachers used worksheets with short reading passages and followed by questions that matched the format for the SMT. These teachers focused their reading instruction activities solely on student preparation for taking the SMT. These two purposes are at extreme ends of a spectrum. Based on the data, these seven teachers could be placed on a continuum of purposes for reading instruction.

Figure 5. Continuum of purposes of reading instruction by grade levels, teachers, and number of years experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frannie</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>(21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ida Mae</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winnie</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The numbers in italics on top of the names represent the grade level of the teacher. The numbers in parentheses below the names represent the number of years of experience for each teacher. This continuum line provides a visual representation showing that the teacher with the most experience, Carol (4th), was the one most conflicted about her instructional focus and strategy decisions, thus hovering above the chasm. She stated: “I don’t mind, you have to be accountable… but the consequences of not passing the test… I don’t agree with that and I think the outside world doesn’t realize what we are asking these kids to know and have to do.” Carol understood that she taught in a context that required preparation of students to pass the SMT, but she believed that reading instruction should also include experiences that engage children in the aesthetic goals of reading. She spoke eloquently about the ways in which she balanced her knowledge about reading instruction with test preparation by providing reading in trade books.
during the first semester of school. However, Carol reported that it had become necessary to give up opportunities for students, like projects about the novels, due to a lack of time. Although she provided reading instruction using trade books at the beginning of the school year, Carol stated that she felt a responsibility to afford students with year-round opportunities to practice test taking skills. For this reason, Carol provided worksheets about the trade books with questions in a multiple-choice format matching what her students would find on the SMT. Carol viewed these actions as a compromise of her philosophy, the purpose being to address the testing demands.

Carol (4th) felt dissonance about her instructional choices. She was torn between her actual beliefs about best practices for reading instruction, those designed in purpose to supporting a lifelong habit of reading, and the demand for test preparation. Carol understood that both teachers and students should be held accountable for reading achievement, but she did not support the implementation of reading instruction designed with test taking as the sole purpose. The dissonance felt by Carol may be the new reality of education for some teachers.

However, Carol was the only teacher in this study who overtly discussed the experience of dissonance between her beliefs about the purpose of teaching reading and the need to provide reading instruction centered on test taking. Both second grade teachers stated they did not believe in the testing and were committed to the purpose of supporting students in becoming readers who appreciate literature and connect what they read to their own prior knowledge and understandings of the world. Other than Carol, all of the third and fourth-grade teachers explicitly designed and delivered reading instruction with the primary purpose of test preparation.

The chasm between second and third and fourth-grade teachers also related to the mission of the school. The stated mission of Oceanside Elementary was the development of broad literacy skills and successful skill for school and life. This mission was bolstered by the school’s reading philosophy (See Appendix C.). Clearly comprehension skills can be considered broad literacy skills that can lead to success in school and life. All of the participants in this study focused their instructional and strategy decisions on methods for improving student comprehension. The third and fourth-grade teachers stated that the purpose of their instructional and strategy decisions was to prepare students to pass the SMT. Observations in these classrooms as well as artifacts provided by these teachers supported their stated purpose of comprehension instruction.
The mission of Oceanside Elementary had no mention of any purposes related to testing (See Appendix E.). Pressure to prepare students for the SMT had apparently overridden commitment to the mission of the school at the third and fourth-grade levels. Perhaps the mission had been set aside because of the pressure for Oceanside to make AYP. On the other hand, second-grade reading instruction centered on developing broad literacy skills through opportunities for students to read and respond to authentic books and real stories. Second-grade reading instruction was in keeping with the stated mission of the school. The data provided a dissonance between the mission of the school and what teachers stated was their purpose, thus reinforcing the chasm found between grade two and grades three and four. The mission statement was placed on the continuum line (Figure 5.) to demonstrate where the mission of the school fit in alignment with the teachers in this study.

Second-grade teachers made decisions about the design and delivery of reading instruction based on the state and local curriculum standards for second grade. They used the basals as stipulated by the school system, and supplemented their reading instruction as time allowed by using trade books and integrating cross-curricular content areas, like using map skills in reading instruction. These teachers did not teach test taking strategies in their classrooms.

Third and fourth-grade teachers also made decisions about their reading instruction based on the state and local curriculum standards for their grade level. The distinction was that these teachers based their decisions about instructional focus and strategies on the state mandated test (SMT). The majority of the artifacts provided were practice worksheets that imitated the format of the SMT. All of the third and fourth-grade teachers stated they used basals as stipulated by the school system; however, Winnie stated she would probably not finish the basal stories because she needed to work on summarizing to prepare her students for the SMT. Each of these teachers supplemented their reading instruction with worksheets that met the instructional focus and strategies identified as supporting student preparation for meeting the challenges they would face on the SMT. All but one of these teachers used these supplemental materials exclusively during the time frame of this study. One teacher, Ida Mae (4th) used a basal reader during the twelve weeks I was present in this school. Most third and fourth-grade teachers had either finished the basal series for the year (Max 3rd) or had put the basal series aside to work strictly on test preparation. Although all of the teachers in the school designed and delivered reading instruction
based on the state and local curriculum standards, there was a chasm between text materials and instructional activities between the second and the third and fourth-grade levels.

The data demonstrates vast differences, or a chasm, between the second and the third and fourth-grades with regard to the purposes of reading instruction, the mission and stated reading philosophy, the kinds of activities in which students were engaged, and the kinds of materials used during reading instruction lessons. The second-grade teachers were empowered to make decisions about reading instruction that met student needs without concern about the pressure for students’ success on state mandated tests. However, this empowerment appeared to be a direct result of the fact that second-grade students were not required to take the SMT. The third and fourth-grade teachers felt they did not have autonomy to make decisions because the ever-present need for their students to be successful on the SMT. For Winnie (4th), Max (3rd) and Ida Mae (4th), there appeared to be no philosophical dissonance, but for Kathleen (3rd) and Carol (4th) convolution was conspicuous. For example, Winnie described her job as that of preparing her students for passing the SMT. She expressed no discomfort with her decisions to approach each day with test preparation strategies, like summarization. Her co-teacher, Carol was conflicted. She stated that her job was to prepare her students to pass the SMT, but she recognized that her instructional focus and the strategies she taught did not create readers, but test takers. Carol taught in the manner that she felt would best prepare her students for test taking, but she felt dissonance about her actions because she found them to be at odds with her beliefs about effective reading instruction.

The earthquake NCLB created set off tremors of uncertainty for teachers and the aftershocks are continuing to be felt even today. Maybe the instructional ground has not moved much for teachers in non-testing grades. It is possible that in schools where there have been no NCLB or AYP problems, the instructional ground hasn’t moved at all, no tremors or aftershocks. It is clear that more research is needed to investigate the phenomenon.

In summary, five of the seven teachers in this study had a narrow focus on student preparation for test taking in making their decisions about reading instruction. There was a substantial chasm between second-grade teachers who made reading instructional decisions based upon a purpose of preparing students as readers and third and fourth-grade teachers who made their decisions based on a purpose of preparing students as test takers. The divide between the teachers whose students needed to pass the SMT and the teachers whose students did not take
the test defined the chasm between the decisions of these teachers. It is reasonable to characterize this chasm as having been created by an earthquake in education. This earthquake occurred when the federal government passed the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, the point at which the federal government stepped into the educational programs in each state for the first time in our nation’s history and made test scores the single most important measure of school, student and even teacher success.

The implementation of state standards for all students was not an issue with these teachers. Two teachers spoke about how the state standards were helpful in identifying the curriculum for each grade level. Upon review of the materials from the school system about reading instruction it was noted that all were publications from the federal government. In effect, the federal government controlled the reading curriculum for this school system. For example, pamphlets and soft cover books published by The Partnership for Reading were available for teachers, parents and school administrators. This organization was established by the U. S. Department of Education and works in conjunction with the National Institute for Literacy, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. In the National Institute of Literacy publication *Shining stars second and third graders learn to read: How parents can help their second and third graders learn to read*, Goldman and Adler (2006) state that their aim was to “make evidenced-based reading research available to educators, parents, policy makers, and others with an interest in helping all people learn to learn well” (backflap). In another publication entitled *Using research and reason in education: How teachers can use scientifically based research to make curricular & instructional decisions*, Stanovich and Stanovich stated that evidence for instructional effectiveness is based on: … “student achievement in formal testing situations implemented by the teacher, school district, or state” (p. 1). These publications are representative of the expectations for the school system. For Oceanside Elementary School, meeting the criteria set by the federal government was critical because federal penalties for not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) threatened changes in the school structure and management. As previously mentioned by Max (3rd), one possible repercussion of repeatedly not achieving AYP would be for the state to take over the school from the school system. Concerns about possible consequences related to federal regulations affected the instructional focus of teachers at Oceanside Elementary School.
Implications for practice

My suggestions are based on my research of the literature on reading. I trust that each of these teachers were dedicated to their profession and made decisions about their reading instruction based upon what they believed to be the best for their students and their school. I know that motivating children to read increases reading. Research supports my premise (Guthrie, 2002; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). In this school, teachers in third and fourth-grade could reduce the overwhelming amount of time on test preparation and provide independent reading time during reading instructional time. Further, students need opportunities to talk daily about their reading. Reading comprehension instruction should be expanded to include strategies to support metacognition such as students make their own questions using techniques like QAR (Raphael & Wonnacott, 1985). By using their “on my own” strategy (which gives students the responsibility to use their prior knowledge and text to develop self-efficacy and confidence in questions), students could use their metacognition to be empowered in reading.

I don’t believe teachers should be told how to teach in their classrooms. However, the time spent on preparation for testing should not take precedence over good reading instructional decisions. There are ways to prepare students for high stakes testing without giving up good reading instruction practices. Guthrie (2002) discussed a framework for preparing students for high-stakes testing. Upon his review of the dimensions of reading test performance, only ten percent of success related to the format of the test; thus, it is reasonable to take a position that teachers should spend only ten percent of their reading instructional time on practicing the format of any test. Third and fourth-grade teachers spent the majority of the each observation on practicing answering questions in the format of the SMT.

The most important dimension of success on high stakes testing is the actual reading ability of the students (Guthrie, 2002 p. 374). The second grade teachers taught reading with the purpose of increasing reading ability. Teaching testing skills may increase testing skills, but research does not support the notion that testing skills increased reading ability. Upon review of the literature, Guthrie (2002) observed these reading comprehension strategies found to be effective:

- Using background knowledge (prior knowledge)*
- Searching and locating information
- Summarizing
In addition, he listed these direct instruction foci that were important:

- Teacher modeling of strategies
- Explanation of when and how to use them
- Repeated opportunities for guided practice
- Extended independent reading* (p. 380)

Third and fourth-grade teachers in this study made use of some strategies and instructional foci from both lists to promote reading comprehension. Many areas were not addressed by the participants in this study (marked with an asterisk). All of the unaddressed strategies related to metacognition, or thinking about one’s own thinking and learning. Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) stated that: “literacy growth, at every level, depends on learning to treat language as an object of thought, in and of itself” (p. 45). Thinking about how to understand what is read provides a link to additional strategies these teachers could teach to assist student comprehension.

Allowing opportunities for students to think about what they are thinking as they are reading and knowing when to use such strategies are important facets that could be taught to developing readers. Pressley (2000) supported the use of active meaning construction while reading through teacher explanation and mental modeling of the use of strategies in a transactional way. The teaching of transactional strategies came out of the work of Rosenblatt (1994) and Goodman (1994). For example, when teaching transactional strategies the teacher would demonstrate a specific strategy by thinking out loud how to apply the strategy in their own reading. Transactional strategies use direct explanations and teacher modeling of these strategies, then use guided practice of to maintain the use of these strategies. Some transactional strategies would include:

- make predictions
- relate the text to background knowledge
- ask self questions
- seek clarification by rereading or using picture clues
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- visualize the meaning (make pictures in your head)
- summarize

Although some of these strategies were observed and identified in the data, direct explanation and teacher modeling of these strategies was needed and the strategies remained the work of the teacher rather than the students. Students were not independently using the few strategies that teachers had presented for the purpose of developing their own understanding of texts. For example, Winnie used summarizing extensively, but her students were not independently using summarizing. She was still modeling and directing the development of her students’ summaries. In addition, Baker & Brown (1984) suggested the following strategies to teach students:

- clarify the purpose of reading
- identify the important aspects - focus attention on major content
- monitor ongoing comprehension
- engage in self-questioning
- take corrective action when detecting comprehension fails (p. 354)

By not providing independent reading opportunities, the third and fourth-grade teachers missed the strongest predictor of reading comprehension; extended independent reading outweighed intelligence, economic background, and gender (Guthrie, 2002). Since some of the teachers stated that their students didn’t read outside of school, providing extended reading opportunities at school can be considered an essential component of the reading program for these children. By not providing metacognitive strategies instruction or extended reading opportunities which are not addressed on the SMT, these teachers demonstrated that preparing for the test exceeded all else.

Implications for Research

The results of this study provide fodder for how reading instruction has become test taking instruction. Looking at reading instruction in terms of the time spent on test taking instruction would be important. Does time spent on test taking instruction indeed increases achievement on mandated tests? Do teachers believe the mandated tests to be assessments or final evaluation for reading? Does achievement on mandated tests correlate with reading achievement? Does passing the SMT equate with reading achievement? If elementary students were followed to middle school and high school, do they continue to use the strategies taught for
test taking? Accountability by testing is everywhere. I believe developing actual reading ability is the best test preparation. Guthrie (2000) stated that, “creating balanced [reading] instruction with vitality is the best antidote to excessive test-based accountability” (p. 388).

Other areas for consideration would be the exploration of the number of years teachers have been teaching and the philosophical stance about reading instruction. Do teachers coming through current teacher preparation programs reflect a current reading instructional philosophy that is influenced by state mandated testing? Does this chasm exist in other schools in this state, where teachers in non-SMT grades reject test preparation skills in favor of extended reading opportunities, while teachers in SMT grades embrace the need to practice test preparation skills? Since other states test at different grade levels, does this chasm exist in other grade levels in other states? Is the chasm reported in this study a phenomenon or just part of the culture of this one school?

Précis

Looking through the lens of each of these teachers opened the door of a new reality in education. Teachers at Oceanside Elementary realized the challenge of teaching students who faced the certainty of performance testing. The teachers recognized that their students’ success was a reflection on their teaching and their classroom influenced school success as measured by state testing. No longer were third and fourth-grade teachers at this school teaching children as learners. The primary goal of reading instruction for the teachers in testing grades was to create competent eight and nine year-old test takers. Thus, understanding decision making for reading instruction at this school required understanding these teachers, including their choices of instructional foci and the strategies they taught to their students. Understanding the factors that influenced the decisions teachers made, in concert with observed teacher behaviors, provided insights necessary to develop research-based practices that will have long-term influence upon pre-service and in service teachers. This important finding must be evaluated by those who are training pre-service teachers. If the teachers we train go into teaching positions where the expectation is to teach students how to be test savvy, we must assure that pre-service teachers have a strong understanding of what can be done to teach reading effectively in this accountability and testing environment. Good reading instruction prepares students for standards testing. We must keep looking through the lens of teachers.


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http://www.messiah.edu/boyer_center/basic_school/about_the_network.html


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APPENDIX A

Teacher Interview Questions

***to use as a guide for conversation during interview

Questions are listed with numbers however, the researcher will determine the order and the use of any of these questions during the interview because some questions will be obvious from the observations.

**What have been your experiences teaching?**

What endorsements do you hold?**

*(standard question for all teachers interviewed!)*

1. How do you teach reading?
2. What materials do you use in your reading program?
3. Can you tell me about your schedule and when literacy instruction happens?
4. Tell me about your grouping strategies during reading instruction?
5. Is there a common curriculum across the school?
6. Do teachers and administrators share a common vision of reading?
7. Do you feel pressure to teach reading in a particular way?
8. Do you talk with children about their reading? What do you talk about?
9. Do you teach word-recognition strategies or skills? Phonics? Comprehension? Vocabulary? How do you teach these?
10. How do you individualize reading instruction?
11. How do you individualize for students experiencing difficulty in learning to read?
12. Tell me the story of how your reading program evolved.
13. In the past years what changes, if any, have you made in the way you teach reading?
14. In what direction do you anticipate your program going over the next few years?
15. Why do you think your school was successful on the SOL tests?
16. What needs to happen in your school for more children to do well in reading?
17. What impact has the building administrator had on reading instruction?
18. What assessment information do you collect?
19. What influence have the various state/federal initiatives had on your teaching practice?

From Appendix A

## APPENDIX B

### Overview of Artifacts

#### Frannie’s Artifacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>F-1-1</strong></th>
<th><strong>F-1-2</strong></th>
<th><strong>F-1-3a &amp; b</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is a copy of a student booklet about parts of speech. Each page has the definition for the part of speech and pictures to represent the part of speech.</td>
<td>This is a list of spelling words and reading homework for the week. The spelling words come from the basal reading series.</td>
<td>These two sheets are copies of Venn diagrams. One is my copy that I filled in as the lesson progressed and the other is a copy of a student’s Venn diagram from class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Tracey’s Artifacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>T-1-1</strong></th>
<th><strong>T-1-2</strong></th>
<th><strong>T-2-1</strong></th>
<th><strong>T-2-2</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spelling contract sheet for week of 3/26-3/30</strong> – on this sheet were 15 words for the week and expectations for homework each day. The first 10 words were comparative and superlative forms of adjectives, 11-15 were general words with no pattern.</td>
<td>This grammar worksheet came from the basal workbook – p. 71. At the top was a skill reminder about verbs. There are 8 fill in the blank questions. On the back (p. 72) is a test prep page about consonant digraphs – ph &amp; gh. There are 3 multiple choice questions to bubble in their answers.</td>
<td>This was a packet entitled Tests for Higher Standards – Reading, Literature and Research for 2nd grade. This was a simulation test for the SMT created by Flanagan &amp; Mott to coordinate with the state standards. There were 18 pages. For each multiple choice question the numerical state standard is listed.</td>
<td>This was an answer sheet Tracey developed to use with the simulation test. It has numbers for students to write their answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>T-2-3</strong></td>
<td><strong>T-3-1</strong></td>
<td><strong>T-3-2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This was a list of spelling features Tracey has covered this year in reading. The first 3 on the list came from Words Their Way, the rest from the spelling workbook associated with the basal series.</td>
<td>This was a packet entitled Test for Higher Standards Writing for 2nd grade – 18 pages of multiple choice questions in the same fashion of T-2-1. For each multiple choice question the numerical state standard is listed.</td>
<td>This was a teacher made worksheet. Students are asked to circle the past tense verbs in each sentence of the reading passage, write them on the lines and then write their own sentence using a past tense verb.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Kathleen’s Artifacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K-1-1</th>
<th>K-1-2</th>
<th>K-2-1a&amp;b</th>
<th>K-2-2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test for Higher Standards – Reading &amp; Literature Simulation Test for 2002 Format different from</td>
<td>{State Name} Spring Release Test – Grade 3 Reading Core 1 Has numbered paragraphs and questions.</td>
<td>3rd Grade Reading Daily Review #6 – about using table of contents entitled “A Child’s Book of Folktales” – 16 questions on ‘b’ sheet</td>
<td>3rd Grade Reading Daily Review #7 – has literal and inferential comprehension, structural analysis &amp; elements of literature – story is entitled “Fieldtrip” on one side, 16 questions (4 for each day, 4 days represented) on the other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is a booklet with multiple stories</td>
<td>This is a booklet with multiple stories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>K-3-1</th>
<th>K-3-2</th>
<th>K-3-3</th>
<th>K-3-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tests for Higher Standards in Reading, Literature &amp; Research – {state name} Student Achievement Bank worksheet – nonfiction about plants; numbered paragraphs with multiple choice questions that list the state standard each question is reviewing</td>
<td>Tests for Higher Standards in Reading, Literature &amp; Research – this is a non-fiction worksheet that has paragraphs with no numbers and multiple choice questions that list the state standard each question is reviewing</td>
<td>Teacher made sheet on homophones #3 &amp; 4 done as lesson in class; students write in the sentences as they orally work with teacher in guided practice</td>
<td>3rd Grade Reading Daily Review #12 – glossary on one side and 16 questions (*see K-2-2) on the opposite side</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Max’s Artifacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M-1-1</th>
<th>M-2-1</th>
<th>M-2-2 a-f</th>
<th>M-2-3</th>
<th>M-2-4 * (*self)</th>
<th>M-2-5*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus skill worksheet – entitled “Decode Long Words” The skill reminder at the top relates to using spelling and letter patterns to</td>
<td>Two page reading on Perseus and the Gorgons (Evan-Moor Corp – literature packet – Greek and Roman myths followed by</td>
<td>This is a packet of sheets that are from a worksheet book entitled “3rd grade {state test name} Daily Reading Reviews”</td>
<td>Using Context Clues - Apply worksheet-practice exercises with just 2 m-c questions and place to bubble in answers – non-fiction</td>
<td>Review worksheet – Planning and Revision: Main Idea. Uses a graphic organizer as a reference and guided practice.</td>
<td>Main Idea Worksheet Practice – read paragraph, each sentence numbered and answer 2 questions – 1 question asks student to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
decode non-familiar words. It is set in state testing format with paragraphs numbered and 5 multiple choice questions following the reading part.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M-2-6*</th>
<th>M-2-7*</th>
<th>M-2-8*</th>
<th>M-2-9*</th>
<th>M-3-1</th>
<th>M-3-2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Another Main Idea Worksheet – Apply</strong> where paragraphs are numbered and 2 m-c like artifact M-2-5 but no tip and has bubble in answers at bottom like M-2-3 artifact. This is a friendly letter to read.</td>
<td>This is another 2 pages of reading on Greek &amp; Roman myths entitled “Pandora’s Box”. 3 pages of 10 teacher made questions following the SMT format.</td>
<td>This is an informational sheet where students read a poster about a race they can enter. There are 5 m-c questions at the end.</td>
<td>This sheet was used for H-W. This is a fiction worksheet like M-2-8 where there are 5 m-c questions to answer, following the reading.</td>
<td>This worksheet is a flyer from the 3rd grade Daily Reading Reviews (M-2-2). The questions for this were put up on an O-H for students to answer.</td>
<td>This worksheet is a entitled Building Spelling Skills – Visual Memory #26. There is a word find, a list of the words, some of which are spelled incorrectly and must be identified and corrected. The last part of the sheet has sentence where a word is misspelled and must be rewritten.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(self) = I picked these up myself. I was encouraged to take whatever I wanted.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IM-1-1</th>
<th>IM-1-2</th>
<th>IM-1-3</th>
<th>IM-1-4 &amp; 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This worksheet is called a ‘JumpStart’ (#28) which is a sheet used by this teacher. These sheets have math and language parts, with sections that include an analogy and a word of the day. It is used to give a daily review for students as they enter the classroom in the morning.</td>
<td>This is a spelling worksheet that comes from the spelling practice book that compliments the basal reader. This week’s words are homophones. Included is a paragraph where incorrect homophones are to be found, vocabulary clues to write the words and a strategy box about homophones.</td>
<td>This worksheet has a paragraph and a graphic organizer (web). Students must find the topic sentence in the paragraph to begin filling in the graphic organizer, followed by identifying the supporting details with minor supporting details. It is about a long neck dinosaur. I-M uses this as guided model for the next sheets (IM-1-4 &amp; 5)</td>
<td>These two worksheets, 4-a passage reading and 5-a graphic organizer to be filled in. These two sheets were an independent practice for the students to complete on their own. It also followed the format of a story map by having a problem and solution section, and a place to record the details of the passage reading from the previous page.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IM-2-1</th>
<th>IM-2-2</th>
<th>IM-2-3</th>
<th>IM-2-4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This sheet has a bulls-eye target used as a format to practice various aspects of vocabulary words, such as definitions, synonyms, using the vocabulary word in a sentence, etc.</td>
<td>This worksheet has a passage to read on one half and 8 questions to answer on the other half. These 8 questions include multiple choice and short answer, with some of these asking for factual and others asking for inferential answers. A strategy to underline sentences or clues from the reading passage is included in some of the questions</td>
<td>This worksheet has a heading “Sample Test”. It has a short paragraph from which students will use the Venn diagram to compare the information about the North and South Poles.</td>
<td>This worksheet is another example of a ‘JumpStart’ (#30) which was explained in IM-1-1. The format is the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM-3-1</td>
<td>IM-3-2</td>
<td>IM-3-5</td>
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<tr>
<td>This worksheet is entitled ‘Homophone Puzzler’. This is a crossword puzzle with sentences that use two homophones within the sentences. At the end of the sheet, the learning extension is to for students to write sentences using homophones.</td>
<td>This worksheet has a title ‘Reading Practice Test’ about plants. There is a reading passage and 6 questions about the passage. All questions are multiple choice questions which include factual answers that can be found in the reading and inferential answers that must be decided based on a broader understanding of the passage.</td>
<td>This worksheet states ‘skills: adverbs. There is a list of numbers 1-8 where students are to list adverbs to describe how Chicken Little walked across the superhighway. Students are to list the adverbs and then in extension, students are to write a sports fairy tale featuring a favorite character playing soccer or driving a race car. The sheet tells students to use lots of adverbs.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Carol’s Artifacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C-1-1-a,b,c</th>
<th>C-2-1</th>
<th>C-2-2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>These 2 worksheets are entitled “SMT Practice –page 35” This is a teacher made artifact that has numerous skills including homophones, reference materials, phonics, ABC order, contractions, order of events, and genre identification.</td>
<td>This sheet is entitled “Practice on Pronouns and Proper Names” This is a teacher made artifact that included work on I, me or proper name and I or me.</td>
<td>This sheet is entitled “Punctuation Capitalization Spelling”. This sheet has directions – Read the story. Some parts have a line and a number under them. Look for the spelling, capitalization or punctuation mistakes in the underlined parts. Look at the 4 choices given below for each numbered part. If there is a mistake, mark the “No Mistake” choice. There are 8 examples of bubble fill in sections for the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-2-3</td>
<td>C-3-1</td>
<td>students to mark.</td>
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<tr>
<td>This sheet has 4 paragraphs that students were asked to number and Carol used for an oral cloze activity where students read aloud the words that I have underlined. There are questions at the end and students also had 3 additional questions to copy from the board to add to the end of the worksheet.</td>
<td>This is a teacher made sheet to supplement the reading of novel Junie B. Jones Chapters 8, 9, &amp; 10. Most are simple factual questions – some are fill in, some are multiple choices. There is a short discussion question at the end – students are asked to write about their own experience like one of the incidents in the novel.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Winnie’s Artifacts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>W-1-1a &amp; b</th>
<th>W-1-2a, b &amp; c</th>
<th>W-1-3a &amp; b</th>
<th>W-1-4a &amp; b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a story to read (a) with numbered paragraphs (not indented but left justified) entitled “America’s First Lady 2000-2008”, so the information is very current. The second page (b) is 10 multiple choice questions about the story.</td>
<td>Worksheets entitled “The Little Gray Dog” (a &amp; b) has story with numbered paragraphs and (c) is a 10 questions multiple choice page following the reading</td>
<td>The first sheet (a) is a poem entitled “Opposites” and shows two little cartoon boys. Each line of the poem is numbered. The second sheet (b) begins with the #21 and goes to #30. It has 10 multiple choice questions about the poem</td>
<td>This worksheet is entitled “Naughty or Nice” and each paragraph is numbered (not indented, but left justified). This is a non-fiction reading about piranha. The following sheet of questions begins with #31 to #40. It has 10 multiple choice questions about the reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W-2-1a &amp; b</td>
<td>W-3-1</td>
<td>W-3-2</td>
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<td>------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Worksheet is entitled Reading Selection #8 – Gotcha!</strong> Each paragraph is numbered, and because of the dialogue in this fiction piece, many paragraphs have just one sentence in them. The follow up sheet is a 4th grade reading Daily Review sheet #8 that has 16 questions in blocks of 4 per line that encompass literal &amp; inferred comprehension, structural analysis and elements of literature, which are stated as headers for boxes.</td>
<td><strong>This worksheet comes from the basal series and states it is stated as “test prep” for compare and contrast. It gives a skill reminder about what these words mean at the top. There is a paragraph to read and then 3 questions to answer. At the bottom is a home school connection for parents to practice Venn diagrams</strong></td>
<td><strong>This sheet is also a worksheet on compare and contrast with a skill reminder about what these words mean. There is a passage to read with numbered paragraphs to read and 5 questions to answer. The state standards are listed at the bottom right that correlates with this worksheet. (Harcourt)</strong></td>
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APPENDIX C

Documents from Oceanside Elementary

Reading Philosophy

We believe that learning to read is a process that requires children to create meaning from a variety of printed materials, to apply meaning found in print to specific purposes, and to write meaningfully. Children learn to read in different ways and progress at different rates. Teachers must know and use a variety of strategies to help motivate children as they learn to read.

In pre-school through third grade, children are learning to read and are involved in a variety of oral language experiences which included applying basic skills in phonics, talking and writing daily about what they read, and developing comprehension skills when reading fiction and non-fiction. Beginning in third grade, emphasis is placed on helping students make the transition from learning how to read to reading to learn in the content areas. Children need continued support as they expand their vocabulary, use reference materials, set purposes for reading and apply a variety of comprehension strategies. Students are taught the writing process and express themselves using both creative and critical writing styles.

The goal of reading instruction at Oceanside Elementary School is to help children become lifelong learners who read with comprehension, enjoy reading for pleasure, and express themselves in writing.

Mission Statement for Oceanside Elementary School

Our mission is to guide students through a variety of connected learning activities that will enable all children to succeed in school and in life. The Oceanside Elementary School curriculum is aligned with our state standards. We stress the development of literacy in the broadest sense of the term. Our students are taught to read, write, think, and express their ideas and experiences through the use of technology, mathematics, and the arts.
## APPENDIX D

Sample Visuals Used for Analysis

### Visual for First Iteration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“C”</th>
<th>State testing</th>
<th>Kinds of learners</th>
<th>Assist attention</th>
<th>Instructional focus/content</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Informal Assess</th>
<th>Grouping-Personnel/children</th>
<th>Emotional Support</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
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<td>#3</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pacing</th>
<th>Parent contact</th>
<th>Making connections</th>
<th>Individual needs of students</th>
<th>Reading Needs</th>
<th>Student choice</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>#2</td>
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<td>#3</td>
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### Second Iteration

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Carol Interviews</th>
<th>Kinds of learners</th>
<th>Assist attention</th>
<th>Instructional focus/content</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Informal Assessment</th>
<th>Grouping-Personnel/children</th>
<th>Emotional Support</th>
<th>State testing</th>
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<td>xxxxx</td>
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<td>#3</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<th>Parent contact</th>
<th>Making connections</th>
<th>Individual needs of students</th>
<th>Reading Needs</th>
<th>Student choice</th>
<th>Pacing</th>
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</table>

### Carol Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Focus</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Grouping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>#2</td>
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<td>xxxxx</td>
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<tr>
<td>#3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# APPENDIX E

Questions Generated from Observations
Second Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frannie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **#1 Field** | 1) How did you get an assistant?  
2) How will the Venn diagram be used?  
3) What is the ‘parts of speech’ students mention as something to do?  
4) How was this read aloud chosen? How does it connect?  
5) How are groups decided? – seem to be set up ahead of time  
6) What are the different strategies that each group needs?  
7) What do you believe as the purpose of questioning? I noticed you used factual questioning almost exclusively, could you explain this?  
8) What ways do you use to help students decode words?  
9) What strategies for decoding words do you see students using?  
10) What strategies do you think students can use for comprehension?  
11) Was the 2nd reading group a higher functioning group?  
12) What other ways do you use reading groups besides round robin reading? |
| **#2 Field** | 1) Do you use poetry always for the start of spelling?  
2) Have you worked on the concept of homonyms prior to this spelling lesson? Will you develop other lessons around homonyms?  
3) Can I have a copy of the spelling sheet as an artifact?  
4) How are the vocabulary used during the week?  
5) Do you even use the vocabulary-writing connection like the one on page 281? (says, write a poem about birds gliding through the air) |
| **#3 Field** | 1) Can you explain your purpose behind using math words this week for spelling and science next week?  
2) For the wonderful words, do you know how the student came up with the word ‘hypocrite’?  
3) Would you talk about the books you’re reading by Roald Dahl – how you chose these and why?  
4) What was your purpose for the quick write? Do you always use a story starter format? Could students have done this without the prompt?  
5) Can you talk a bit about the enthusiasm they have for their own writing?  
6) What do you think about the new students you have now? Can you speak about their reading needs?  
7) Can you talk a bit about the ways you work on fluency?  
8) I noticed students going back and rereading when what they read does not make sense, can you talk about your observation of this strategy that students are using?  
9) With the new student in your small group, you gave her the word ‘chirped’ before she attempted to read it, what was your reasoning for that? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tracey</th>
<th>10) Have you done any vocabulary work with the small group novel or the read aloud? Can you speak about your plans for this novel?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **#1 Field Notes** | 1) Why are there two reading groups? How is this decided? (Tracey called out the student names for the groups, students did not seem to have set reading groups)  
 2) How do you feel about your use of questions to set purpose?  
 3) Do you use round robin often?  
 4) Why did you have the student who read so quietly in first groups begin the second round of reading?  
 5) Do students get their chapter books to read whenever they are finished with other work? |
| **#2 Field Notes** | 1) What is the purpose of the Flanagan test?  
 2) What was your purpose of creating the answer sheet?  
 3) How much experience do they have with tests like this?  
 4) How much time do you spend on testing strategies?  
 5) Would you explain the purpose of the folders standing on some of the student’s desks?  
 6) What is your perception of how they did on this test? How do you think they do on these types of tests? |
| **#3 Field Notes** | 1) Can you talk to me about the changes you made in how you have students taking this test? (O-H, reading the items, etc)  
 2) When you did partner read, how did you decide on who would be partners?  
 3) You identify what good readers do; do you have a list somewhere?  
 4) Can you tell me about the past tense work and how you see it going?  
 5) Please do not worry about having to stop to refocus students – do you have any ideas on why students might not be able to focus today?  
 6) What ways do you practice the spelling words at school? At home?  
 7) Can we talk a moment about the spelling features list you have covered this year? (this is an artifact given to me) |

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**Third Grade**

| Kathleen | 1) You obviously have some strong opinions about the simulation tests, would you like to tell me about your experience with them?  
 2) Can you explain about the students who are not doing the simulation tests? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Do you teach test taking strategies? If so, can you tell me a bit about them?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Can you explain the makeup of students in your classroom for reading?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5) Would you explain about your Word Wall and how you use it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Can you tell me how your reading center is used?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>#2 Field Notes</strong></td>
<td><strong>#2 Field Notes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) How often do you use these worksheets – Reading Daily Reviews? Does this usually last the entire reading period?</td>
<td>2) Can you talk about the purpose of these in your reading program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) There were two instances of punctuation questions that seemed to throw the students – what do you think makes this hard for your group?</td>
<td>4) Do you do most of your review orally, or do you use visuals also?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Can you talk about the reference material information – table of contents, index, etc. and how students understand this information?</td>
<td>6) Vocabulary and analysis of words seems to be an emphasis on this worksheet – can you speak about this need for your students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Can you speak about the difference you see in inferential understanding of students in your class compared to other 3rd graders?</td>
<td>8) Will you talk about the statement you made several times – about not picking an answer when you don’t know what a word in the answer means?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>#3 Field Notes</strong></td>
<td><strong>#3 Field Notes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Do you think vowel sounds are difficult for them – ex: ‘tough’</td>
<td>2) What do you mean by ‘silent speedball’, ‘mind breaks’?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) What are the characteristics of folk tales that you have taught? Was there a component of ‘stretching the truth’, like in tall tales? (Pecos Bill)</td>
<td>4) Why did you choose to go over the spelling of homophones?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Can you explain how you had to review the concept of glossary?</td>
<td>6) Can you explain starting with the questions before reading the glossary information side?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) You worked on many skills, would you speak about how you chose what to review today and how you view reviewing for the testing next week?</td>
<td>8) Would you talk a bit about the novels students are reading, how you grouped them into these groups?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Would you talk about how you use novels for reading throughout the school year? What students usually do with novels and how you run your reader’s workshop?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Max</strong></td>
<td><strong>#1 Field Notes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) How are spelling words chosen?</td>
<td>2) What other purposes do worksheets have besides comprehension?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) You mention word as being phonetic (independence); can you explain what you mean by this?</td>
<td>4) Connection to content is important in your classroom – what other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
kinds of reading do students do?
5) Would you explain what you mean by words that “don’t sound right but are”?

| #2 Field Notes | 1) How long did it take for students to understand the idea of passing? (by your showing them their grades on the board)
2) How do you decide on which strategies to begin with? Is there a hierarchy you begin with? A format of strategies you have used over the year?
3) Do students ever have the opportunity to write summaries about what they read?
4) Do students ever prepare their own SOL format questions?
5) Can you speak about the use of highlighters in their reading? |
| #3 Field Notes | 1) There were some fill in statements on the board, maybe left over from social studies, could you speak about these and what you were using them for?
2) The students were really excited about the news about the last round practice test – could you speak about what you could see from them as you told them?
3) A student came up to you and asked about his spelling sheet – he said something about doing this backwards and you told him something about the 2nd part – could you explain what he was trying to do?
4) The students move effortlessly to each assignment – how have you managed this? |

| Fourth Grade |
| Ida Mae |
| #1 Field Notes | 1) With the mapping worksheet (Artifact #1) can you explain where this comes from and why you chose this to use?
2) Who is the assistant that took a group from the room?
3) Can you explain the spelling worksheet on homophones – where it comes from, how this connects to other things you are doing?
4) Can you explain how you chose who got which words that were highlighted from which to draw their picture?
5) With the SOL’s you have on the board, have you rephrased these for the students?
6) What are portfolio groups? How are these determined?
7) Could you explain the grouping you use for reading? (3 groups of 5 each.)
8) Could you explain the use modeling with your small group – when you did the paragraph mapping? The purpose?
9) Can you give some clarity about the student who had much information to share about dinosaurs and his need to expand the topic?
10) Where did the terms ‘major’ and ‘minor’ details come from?
11) For the follow up worksheet that they did on their own, what was
202

| #2 Field Notes | 1) Is the vocabulary from the basal?  
| 2) What is the purpose of the ‘target’ sheet?  
| 3) How often do you work on synonyms with students? How often do you use reference materials – glossary, thesaurus, etc?  
| 4) Can you explain the ‘slash/trash’?  
| 5) Would you talk about the use of highlighters?  
| 6) Can you talk about the connections of spelling and writing to your reading? [from student asking about using capitals on names of people]  
| 7) When you have them do independent work will you use that for graded work? How do you decide which work to grade? How do you remember who does which work independently? |

| #3 Field Notes | Can you explain the statement about SOL work for 5th grade?  
| Do students often want to draw pictures to help them make meaning?  
| With the bingo game, could you explain what your purpose was?  
| 1) Can you speak about their mixing up verbs and adverbs?  
| 2) When you read the passage about sunflowers, you modeled ways to help yourself understand your own reading – could you talk about that?  
| 3) Would you explain again about how you help students understand what inferred means?  
| 4) The use of the strategy of taking an answer and replacing the vocabulary word was not helpful to students, can you speak about what other strategies led them to use?  
| 5) Can you explain the ‘pirate game’?  
| 6) Would you talk about the answering format on the biography page?  
| 7) You seemed to selectively call on specific readers to read, was there a specific choice for this?  
| 8) Can you speak a little about the aspect of ‘learned helplessness’ that some of your students display?  
| 9) How often are students writing summaries and have they been given a way to do this?  
| 10) Would you talk about figurative language and how you have
worked on this?
11) Would you talk about the reasons for crossing out the picture in the reading passages?

Carol
#1 Field Notes
1) What is the purpose of them copying from the board?
2) What is the purpose of dual matching (found on SMT sheet)
3) Are there other test taking strategies you teach?
4) Do most students have trouble monitoring themselves – self-control, or locus of control? (what is the other term I want?)
5) How often do student work on sheets like the punctuation, capitalization and spelling sheet?
6) Do students have difficulty with the reading or more with the grammar?
7) How far below grade level would you estimate they might be?
8) Do these students demonstrate difficulty with attention to detail? Do they have difficulty reading what is asked to read?
9) Do students ask for words or help with pronunciation often?

#2 Field Notes
1) How important are the punctuation, capitalization and spelling sheets – how much importance on SOL’s?
2) Is this format important?
3) Do you see them working with this format alone – without your help – and how successful do you think they can be?
4) Do you ever observe students using the skill you work on spontaneously?
5) Can you speak about what reading strengths students bring to testing situation?
6) What specific reading skills do you see students still need?

#3 Field Notes
1) When students are reading, your reminders to look over the word miscued once more seems to be effective – why do you think that works?
2) With the student who struggles, is she receiving any work on decoding? What do you think will help her the most?
3) Why do you use the technique of leaving out words and having them fill in orally what you don’t read? (oral cloze)
4) How do you work on fluency techniques?
5) Organizational flow – do the 2 groups ever meet to share information – like the stories they wrote?
6) What do you think of the student who struggles to read and her ability to read her own writing?
7) Will you talk about some of the additional things you do when you read chapter books?
8) Do you ever do reading records on their chapter book reading? Or any other reading passages?
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| **#1 Field Notes** | 1) What is the purpose of the summaries? How often do you do this strategy  
2) What other strategies for comprehension do you teach directly? What other ways do you work on comprehension  
3) Do students ever work with each other to develop summaries?  
4) What ways are students supported in their work on summaries?  
5) Do any of the students have difficulty with the actual decoding of words? Does this group just have trouble understanding what they decode?  
6) How do you decide what strategies you will teach?  
7) How have references been identified as a problem? How often do you work with these?  
8) How often do you work on non-fiction? Is this just where you are now?  
9) What other main theme areas have you covered this year?  
10) Do the SMT questions include much non-fiction?  
11) Are there strategies that are different for different genres?  
12) How did you come up with the idea of ‘dissecting’ the reading?  
13) Do you use ‘interactive note taking’ in other subjects?  
14) Which do you think needs more work – multiple meanings or contextual comprehension? Why do you think students lack these skills?  
15) What reading level are students on and what are the reading levels of the paragraphs you are using?  
16) Why have you chosen 2 paragraphs to summarize? |
| **#2 Field Notes** | 1) Reading the paragraphs 3 times seems important to your process, can you explain this?  
2) I noticed the students decoded the passage easily, is this normally true?  
3) Can you talk about the summaries and explain the way you see students improving in this skill since the first of the year?  
4) Can you explain the purpose of the timer?  
5) Why is identifying a fact from a paragraph acceptable for some students as a summary? How do you decide what is acceptable as a summary?  
6) Do students ever complete summaries on their own? I noticed one student who often uses his own words to summarize, is this a strength of his or has he gained this from your work with summaries?  
7) Do students ever read their whole summaries for all the paragraphs to see if it makes sense according to what they know about the story?  
8) Would you talk about the ways you talk to students – walk them through – about their reasoning for their answers?  
9) How do you help students to isolate their thoughts as they pick |
| Winnie #3 Field Notes | **1)** How important is compare and contrast in SOL testing? How do you think they did – do they understand this?  
**2)** Will you explain about the reading notebooks – what they are used for?  
**3)** What was your purpose in showing the definition for compare and contrast again in paragraph form?  
**4)** Using Venn diagrams – how much have you used these and how long did it take for students to understand how to use these with compare and contrast?  
**5)** Can you explain how you know which students might need more assistance when working on their own? How will they fare on the SOL’s without your assistance?  
**6)** Did these worksheets come from the basal series? If not, how often do you have to either make your own material or find in another reference?  
**7)** Who is the person who came in at the end of class wanting a couple of your students to go with him instead of special? |