How Elementary Teachers Craft Their Instruction During a 90-minute Reading Block to Meet the Needs of Readers who Struggle

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How Elementary Teachers Craft Their Instruction During a 90-minute Reading Block to Meet the Needs of Readers who Struggle

By: Jennifer Berrigan

June 2012

A Thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education
How Elementary Teachers Craft their Instruction during a 90-minute Reading Block to Meet the Needs of Readers who Struggle

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# Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction ............................................................................................. 1  
  Problem Statement ................................................................................................... 5  
  Purpose of Study ..................................................................................................... 8  
  Study Approach ....................................................................................................... 9  
  Rationale .................................................................................................................. 10  
  Summary ................................................................................................................ 11  

Chapter Two: Literature Review ................................................................................. 13  
  Readers Who Struggle ............................................................................................. 13  
    Teachers .................................................................................................................. 15  
    Reading and Writing ............................................................................................... 15  
    Differentiated Instruction ....................................................................................... 16  
  Grade Level Literacy Responsibilities ....................................................................... 17  
    First and Second Grades ....................................................................................... 18  
    Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grades ............................................................................ 18  
  Teacher Planning ..................................................................................................... 19  
  Effective Literacy Instruction for Students Who Struggle With Reading ............... 22  
    Differentiated Instruction ....................................................................................... 22  
    Learning Profiles .................................................................................................. 25  
    Responsive Teaching ............................................................................................. 26  
    Balanced Literacy ................................................................................................. 27  
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 29  

Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures ..................................................................... 31  
  Research Question .................................................................................................. 31  
  Proposed Participants ............................................................................................... 31  
  Context of Study ..................................................................................................... 32  
  My Positionality as the Researcher ......................................................................... 33  
  Data Collection ....................................................................................................... 35  
    Teacher Interviews ................................................................................................. 35  
    Classroom Observations ......................................................................................... 36  
    Research Journal ................................................................................................... 37  
  Data Analysis .......................................................................................................... 38  
    Teacher Interviews ................................................................................................. 38  
    Classroom Observations ......................................................................................... 39  
    Research Journal ................................................................................................... 39  
  Procedures ............................................................................................................... 40  
    Week One .............................................................................................................. 40  
    Week Two ............................................................................................................. 41  
    Week Three .......................................................................................................... 41  
    Week Four ............................................................................................................ 41  
    Week Five ............................................................................................................. 42  
    Week Six ............................................................................................................... 42  
  Criteria for Trustworthiness .................................................................................... 42
Chapter Four: Results .................................................................................................. 45
Research Question .......................................................................................... 45
Case Studies .......................................................................................................... 47
Mrs. Day: Third Grade Teacher ........................................................................... 47
   Classroom Environment .................................................................................. 48
   Student Behaviors ......................................................................................... 51
   Teacher Instructional Strategies .................................................................. 55
   Summary ........................................................................................................ 58
Mrs. White: Fourth Grade Teacher ...................................................................... 59
   Classroom Environment ................................................................................ 61
   Student Behaviors ......................................................................................... 64
   Teacher Instructional Strategies .................................................................. 66
   Summary ........................................................................................................ 69
Mrs. Kay: Fourth Grade Teacher .......................................................................... 70
   Classroom Environment ................................................................................ 72
   Student Behaviors ......................................................................................... 76
   Teacher Instructional Strategies .................................................................. 78
   Summary ........................................................................................................ 81
Mrs. Luck: Fifth Grade Teacher ........................................................................... 81
   Classroom Environment ................................................................................ 83
   Student Behaviors ......................................................................................... 88
   Teacher Instructional Strategies .................................................................. 90
   Summary ........................................................................................................ 93
Mrs. Filup: Second Grade Teacher ...................................................................... 93
   Classroom Environment ................................................................................ 94
   Student Behaviors ......................................................................................... 95
   Teacher Instructional Strategies .................................................................. 98
   Summary ........................................................................................................100
Mrs. Fitz: Fifth Grade Teacher ...........................................................................100
   Classroom Environment ................................................................................102
   Student Behaviors .........................................................................................104
   Teacher Instructional Strategies ................................................................105
   Summary ........................................................................................................107
Mrs. Waiters: Third Grade Teacher ..................................................................108
   Classroom Environment ................................................................................109
   Student Behaviors .........................................................................................111
   Teacher Instructional Strategies ................................................................113
   Summary .......................................................................................................115
Looking Across the Case Studies .................................................................115
Classroom Environment ...............................................................................116
Literacy Instruction .......................................................................................117
Literacy Assessments...................................................................................119
Summary .......................................................................................................120

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations ......................................121
Conclusions ...................................................................................................122
The Teachers Created Classroom Environments That Were Conducive To Learning Where Students Who Struggle Felt Comfortable To Take Risks .................................................................................................................................122
The Teachers Use Their Knowledge Of Their Students And Individualize Balanced Literacy Instruction In Order To Best Support Students Who Struggle With Reading and Writing ........................................................................................................123
The Teachers Use Reading And Writing Together In Literacy Instruction In Order To Best Support Students Who Struggle With Reading And Writing ........................................................................................................126

Implications for Student Learning ................................................................128
Individualized Instruction Based On Students’ Needs, Abilities, Strengths, And Interests Will Be Most Effective For Students Who Struggle With Learning How To Read And Write ................................................................................................................128
Students Who Struggle Should Engage In Sustained Independent Reading During The School Day In Order To Improve Their Reading Skills And Abilities ........................................................................................................................................129
Students Who Struggle With Reading And Writing May Have Increased Motivation If They Are Engaged And In Activities That Relate To Their Interests .........................................................................................................................130

Implications for My Teaching ........................................................................131
I Should Create A Classroom Environment That Is Reflective Of My Students’ Interests, Needs, And Personalities In Order To Best Support Students Who Struggle With Reading And Writing ................................................................................................................131
I Should Plan My Literacy Lessons For Students Who Struggle With My Grade Level Colleagues While Keeping My Knowledge Of Students In Mind ........................................................................................................133
I Should Use My Students’ Needs, Abilities, And Interests To Guide My Literacy Instruction In Order To Be Effective With Students Who Struggle With Reading ................................................................................................................134

Recommendations for Future Research .........................................................135
Research Teacher Planning And Instruction For Readers Who Struggle In Multiple Schools Or School Districts .........................................................................................................................135
Include Interviews With Students Who Struggle In Order To Understand Both Teacher And Student Perspectives On Instruction ........................................................................................................135
Research For Longer Periods Of Time During Literacy
List of Figures

Figure 4.1: Participant Information ........................................................................46
Figure 4.2: Buddy Reading Poster ..........................................................................48
Figure 4.3: Student/Teacher Responsibility Poster ..............................................62
Figure 4.4: Literacy Log .......................................................................................75
Figure 4.5: Fluency Reading Poster .................................................................95
Figure 4.6: Writing Process Poster .................................................................102
Figure 4.7: Magic Tree House Elements Poster ..............................................110
Chapter One: Introduction

I watch Ella (a pseudonym) try and follow her teacher’s multi-step direction: get up, push in her chair, get her book, fill out her reading log, and then read for twenty minutes by herself. Knowing that she struggles following multi-step directions, I take a step back from prompting her and watch as she attempts to figure out what to do on her own. I notice that she uses some skills to remember and understand the directions. She watches her peers and imitates what they do to remember and understand the directions. She eventually goes through the motions herself, gets her book and settles down into a comfortable spot in the classroom.

“Oh, and I would like you to stop reading after twenty minutes today and write about what you have read, what you like about your book, and what you might not like,” her teacher directs just as Ella finds her place in the book she is reading. I see Ella’s shoulders droop a little, knowing that she fears writing about what she has read. She can read words fluently, but can only remember one or two details from a chapter independently.

I watch as Ella reads approximately ten pages and then silently gets up when the timer rings after twenty minutes. She quietly returns to her seat and takes out her reading journal. From my experiences working with Ella over the last two months I know that she does remembers things about what she has read, but benefits from prompts or visual cues in order to use reading and writing strategies. Ella and her teachers know that she struggles comprehending texts and writing details in a logical
and sequential way. Her teachers also have a good understanding of what works for Ella and what she needs to be successful.

Ella stares at the blank page in her journal for approximately two minutes before her teacher walks up to her and asks Ella what she read about today, she answers, “I don’t know.” Knowing the book that Ella is reading, the teacher asks her several questions to jog her memory about the story. Ella writes three sentences about what she read before the time is up.

Observing this short conference between Ella and her teacher made me think about the teacher and her work. I wonder how she planned her reading lesson today. I wonder if she planned the lesson with the intention of supporting and engaging Ella and other students who struggle with reading and writing.

Readers who struggle can be defined in many ways, but in one way or another they have difficulties with decoding, reading or comprehending text or reading fluency (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009; Martin & Pappas, 2006). Some students may struggle with one aspect of reading, but be successful in others. For example, Ella is a great word caller, which is to say she knows a significant amount of vocabulary, but she does not yet comprehend what she is reading. It seems to me that this is because Ella has received a lot of instruction focused on phonics and decoding, but little on strategies related to comprehending and monitoring while she is reading.

I am a new special education and consultant teacher in Ella’s school, a suburban elementary school in western New York. I teach reading as a resource room intervention teacher and as a support to a fifth grade classroom teacher. In this school,
the teachers do something I have not seen before with reading instruction in the classroom: All students are in the classroom for whole group reading instruction in 90-minute blocks.

Ella’s reading block in this fifth grade classroom has been structured with the first forty-five minutes reserved for reading and the second forty-five minutes reserved for writing. She usually begins her reading lessons with a whole group lesson about reading strategies. She then has the students “build their stamina” by reading to themselves for a specific amount of time that gradually increases throughout the school week. The school district administrators have asked teachers to have their students practice building their reading stamina this year because stamina was something that failed students last year during state testing. Last year, the students were used to short bouts of time (about fifteen minutes or less) of uninterrupted reading and when it was time to take the state tests, the students did not have the stamina to sit through a test or work through long reading passages for seventy minutes.

After Ella and her peers read independently, the teacher asks the students to write about what they read. During the second block of time, the teacher teaches or re-teaches writing strategies. Then she asks the students to write either to a specific prompt or free-write for a specific amount of time, slowly building their stamina for writing. At the beginning of the year, students were asked to write for one minute and the teacher has gradually increased the time students are expected to write, building their stamina to twenty minutes now.
As a new teacher, I am constantly thinking about how I should plan my instruction in order to make it meaningful for my students’ learning and development. I have looked at examples of lesson planning such as lesson plan books, teacher made Word document plans, calendar planning, and charts. I have seen examples that teachers use, but am still conflicted on how my planning should meet the needs of my students, use enough purposeful material, accomplish personal goals, and meet New York state standards, district standards, and grade level goals.

I wonder, too, how classroom teachers effectively use their planning for instruction and support of students who struggle with reading. How do they accommodate their whole group lessons for readers who struggle and what their planning looks like in action?

My past experiences with teaching students who struggle to read has lead me to believe that every student is unique and every student can learn. As Vlach and Burcie (2010) explained, a teacher is the “most qualified person to help learners shift their thinking from ‘I can’t’ to ‘I can’” (p. 523). I agree with Vlach and Burcie that teachers are the most qualified people to help students shift their thinking and become motivated to learn. I believe that a big part of teachers being prepared to help shift students’ thinking is done through their planning and use of strategies to support readers who struggle during instructional times. This is why I wanted to explore how several elementary teachers plan and implement reading and writing instruction for readers who struggle during the 90-minute reading block.
Significance of the Problem

Reading and writing are activities that are a part of everyone’s daily life. We read street signs, emails, letters, books, magazines, newspapers, directions, and more. We write to correspond, track our thoughts, make notes, and link information. We read to learn new information, revisit old information, correspond with others, and for pleasure. We read and write without even thinking about it. As Briggs and Anderson (2011) stated, “when we write, we read; when we read, we compose meaning” (p. 546).

Reading and writing are intermingled and use many of the same skills. For example, students use searching, monitoring, and self-correcting in both reading and writing (Briggs & Anderson, 2011) in order to expand or confirm their learning. For this reason I wanted to explore instruction that involves reading and writing during the 90-minute reading block.

As a teacher, I know and understand how important reading and writing are and how often people use these skills in their daily lives. In my experience, it often seems as though students who struggle with reading also struggle with writing. Fountas and Pinnell (2009) recognized, “Just about every teacher in the U.S. teaches children who find literacy learning difficult” (p. xi). Readers who struggle need support with reading text, comprehension, reading fluency, and decoding. Fountas and Pinnell (2009) stated, “Learners who have difficulty [with reading] are highly diverse” (p. 31). This is an important perspective for all teachers to remember in order to be prepared to support students who struggle with reading and writing. When
teachers believe that they are capable and responsible for teaching students who struggle, they provide instruction that challenges students and enables them to be engaged and active learners (Scharlach, 2008). This type of teacher uses wait time after prompts and gives students time to apply the strategies and skills they are learning (Scharlach, 2008). This is the type of teacher I strive to be.

As Fountas and Pinnell (2009) explained, “reading difficulties are revealed when the instruction children receive is not appropriate to their experience. That is, the instruction assumes knowledge that is not there, is very limited, or is confused” (p. 32). Teachers should be aware of their students’ individual abilities and needs. Implementing meaningful and purposeful lessons, instruction, activities, and support for students who struggle with reading and writing are important aspects of being an effective teacher for these students (Fountas and Pinnell, 2009; Tomlinson, et al., 2003).

Components of effective instruction for readers who struggle include small group size, trained teachers executing explicit and systematic instruction in frequent and short periods (Johnson, 2006; Reynolds, Wheldall, & Madelaine, 2010; Smith, Fien, Basaraba, & Travers, 2009). Prior to my research study I wondered if classroom teachers thought about these components when planning for their whole group reading and writing instruction.

In my experiences as a fifth grade consultant teacher, second grade special education teacher, 6:1:1 teacher, and substitute teacher in several school districts, I have seen many creative ways that teachers provide services to students who are
struggling with reading. I have seen a variety of pull out services such as literacy labs, academic intervention services, and literacy intervention small groups. But in all of these services the students who are struggling significantly with grade level expectations leave their classroom for reading interventions during whole group lessons. As a result, I have seen that when students return to the classroom they are often lost or confused during math/science/social studies lessons because their instruction is not consistent. Also, the students who leave for intervention services often have not learned the skills the other students have learned to help them be successful in the content areas lessons.

In the elementary school in which I conducted this study, intervention services for students are done during what is called a flexible instructional time (FIT). Students who need physical therapy (PT), occupational therapy (OT), speech, counseling, or resource room receive services during this forty minute time block. Classroom teachers are not expected to introduce or teach any new content material during FIT, but instead provide enrichment opportunities for students who remain in the classroom. The FIT block enables students who normally go to instructional interventions during the day to be in the classroom for all grade level instruction. Observing FIT is another reason why I wanted to investigate how teachers in this particular school plan and implement instruction, while supporting those who are struggling.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how elementary teachers craft their literacy instruction during a whole group 90-minute reading block to support and include all students, even those who struggle. I designed this study to parallel my personal philosophy that all students can and will learn how to read. It was my hope that conducting this study would help me to better understand the processes teachers use to purposefully plan, implement, and support all students who struggle with reading.

Through this six week study, I hoped to answer the research question: How do elementary teachers craft their reading and writing instruction to meet the needs of readers who struggle during a whole group 90-minute reading block?

The experience of researching a topic that is relevant to my current teaching practices helped me improve and build upon my researching and teaching skills. During the process of this study, I enhanced my researching skills such as effective data collection, analysis, and synthesis, and I learned effective qualitative research methods and ethical practices that I can use in future research projects.

I also hope to become a more effective observer of classroom reading instruction in order to become more purposeful and knowledgeable in my own literacy instruction. Through the collection and analysis of qualitative data in this study, I hoped to build relationships with my new colleagues, which would be beneficial for my professional development and success as a teacher.
Study Approach

My research study followed a practical research design. There were seven teachers who participated in this research study who were colleagues of mine and who currently teach reading in second through fifth grades. I collected qualitative data through the process of interviewing the teachers (see Appendix A) and observing how they conducted reading instruction in their classroom (see Appendix B).

I observed each classroom teacher during a 90 minute reading block. I paid close attention to teacher language (non-verbal and verbal), teacher clarification, teacher directions, teacher movement, teacher redirection, non-verbal and verbal language of struggling students, and the types and kinds of questions asked by students who are struggling (see Appendix B). I then interviewed the teacher about her beliefs related to reading instruction and areas of interest generated from my first observation (see Appendix A). The purpose of the interviews was to gain insight into how teachers plan reading instruction and support students who struggle. Within a few days, I observed the teacher a second time during her reading block.

Prior to each observation, I asked the teacher for her plans so I could review them and be prepared for the lesson during my observations. My observations focused on how teachers execute their plans for instruction and support for those students who are struggling. I compared and contrasted teachers’ instructional plans to their teaching to see how the plans influenced instruction and support of readers who struggle in the classroom.

The process of data collection lasted approximately six weeks.
Rationale

I chose to focus on teacher planning and implementation of reading instruction in my school because I am a special education teacher within the school, and it was most convenient for me in terms of data collection. I used a qualitative research design, which allowed me to use, as Hoepfl (1997) suggests, “a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings” (p.1). I anticipated that my research process will give me a deeper understanding of how the elementary teachers plan for the 90-minute whole group reading block with readers who struggle in the classroom.

I used the interview process to gain insights into how the teachers plan their instruction and support for readers who struggle (see Appendix A). I used open-ended interview questions in a private setting with the teacher participants in order to allow them to have an honest discussion with me about reading instruction and readers who struggle. Using open-ended interview questions I was able to, “encourage a full, meaningful answer using the subject’s own knowledge and/or feelings” (Wavelength Media, n.d. para. 2).

I observed in the classrooms of four teachers I interviewed to gain insights into how the teachers’ planning looks in action (see Appendix B). During this stage of my research, I was a non-participant in the classroom, observing teacher and student interactions during a whole group reading lesson. I did not interact with the students or teachers during my observations, but observed student and teacher behaviors and taking notes. The purpose during the observations was to see how the teacher uses her
planning to implement instruction and support those students who are struggling. I used descriptive field notes describing exactly what is happening during my observation. I also used reflective field notes in a research journal at the end of my interviews and observations to track my own insights about what I am noticing and to record my ongoing questions and wonderings about the teachers’ practices. I then used the various data sources to triangulate my findings.

Summary

As a new special education and consultant teacher I struggled with effective ways to plan my reading lessons to accommodate the range of students, particularly those students who struggle with reading and writing. I began working in an elementary school in western New York at the beginning of September and noticed that all of the students, even those in need of interventions, are in the classroom for the entire 90-minute reading block. Those who need intervention services do so during a time where there is no new instruction happening in the classroom. After understanding and observing this process, I became curious to learn how the classroom teachers in this school then plans for the instruction and support for students who struggle with reading and writing during the whole group reading lesson.

Through this six week study, I hoped to gain a better understanding of how experienced teachers craft their reading and writing instruction to meet the needs of
readers who struggle and how I might integrate some of the teachers’ practices into my work with my own students.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This research study explored the question: how do elementary teachers craft their instruction during a 90-minute reading block to meet the needs of readers who struggle? This chapter describes researched literature on readers who struggle, teacher planning and preparation, and effective instructional practices. Each section is then further broken down to smaller sections related to the topic being reviewed.

Readers Who Struggle

Readers who struggle are unique and often recognize early on that they are struggling with reading (Vlach & Burcie, 2010). This often leads students who are struggling to expect rejection, which is why they need teachers who believe that every child can learn and contribute to the classroom in order to change his/her struggling reader narrative (Vlach & Burcie, 2010). As Vlach and Burcie (2010) explained, “Once struggling readers have a place in this community, they can transform their present narratives” (p. 524). In order to succeed, students need to feel that they are equal and integral members of the class. Teachers can help students by creating literacy environments that provides opportunities for all students to contribute. Vlach and Burcie (2010) described an effective literacy environment that provides all students equality in the classroom as:

The children have their own canvas books bags filled with a variety of books. They acquired some books from the teacher after small-group reading lessons and selected other books from the classroom library.
No two students have exactly the same books in their bags. The children choose where they will sit and when they will complete their independent reading for the day. They know that, at least once a week, the teacher will sit down beside them during independent reading to coach them individually. Furthermore, after each conference, the children record their thinking in their reading response journals (p. 523).

This example of an equal opportunity literacy environment enables the wide range of students to see each other as equal members because they are all responsible for work, have the same schedule, use the same materials, receive direct instruction from the teacher at the appropriate level, and call their work the same thing.

Students struggle with a wide range of reading skills including decoding, fluency, and comprehension (Vlach & Burcie, 2010). No two students are alike and they all learn how to read at different rates. No two students struggle with the same reading skill or strategy and will require different instructional accommodations to support their learning. Compton-Lilly (2008) separated the differences in struggling readers into two categories: reading processes and ways of being. Compton-Lilly described reading processes as perception, attention, memory, problem solving, reasoning, language acquisition, and comprehension. Ways of being refer to the social and cultural dimensions, which affect the student’s literacy learning. These are important categories for teachers to reflect on when teaching students who struggle with reading in order to fully understand their students and be aware of the reading
processes that students control. Once teachers understand what their students can control, they can effectively plan and support their student’s literacy learning.

**Teachers**

Teachers can discover the characteristics of their students through interviews and observations to find out what they know and do (Compton-Lilly, 2008). Observations of student behavior involves noticing small details such as, how students attend to sequence across a page or within a word and what decoding skills do they use when they come across an unknown word. These observations will unveil reading processes that students bring to literacy learning. And can help teachers plan for future instruction. Interviews with students and family members are crucial when understanding a student’s way of being which includes their educational background and home culture. Compton-Lilly (2008) explains,

> when teachers align attention to reading processing with attention to students’ ways of being, rich learning experiences can be provided that are particularly effective and potentially powerful-not only in helping children to read but also in helping children to value themselves as readers and learners (p. 669).

**Reading and writing**

Several researchers (Anderson & Briggs, 2011; Tompkins, 2002; Wharton-McDonald, et. al, 1997) have noticed and researched the reciprocity between reading
and writing. The common ground between reading and writing is that students use semantics, syntax, and graphophonic information as they read and write. When reading, students use semantics when searching, monitoring and self-correcting using meaning. Students use semantics in writing when they are drawing on meaning. Syntax is used in reading when students search, monitor, and self-correct using structure. It is also used in writing when grouping words together to represent meaning. Students use graphophonic information when searching, monitoring, and self-correcting using sound-letter patterns of words. Graphophonic information is used by students in writing as a way of expressing themselves using their knowledge of conventions of print (Anderson & Briggs, 2011).

In order to accelerate the learning of readers who struggle, teachers should teach with a balance of connecting reading and writing (Anderson & Briggs, 2011; Tompkins, 2002; Wharton-McDonald, et. al, 1997). As Anderson and Briggs (2011) state, “making explicit connections in searching, monitoring, and self-correcting exponentially increases children’s opportunities to develop parallel processes for reading and writing” (p. 549). This is important because the skills used in reading and writing are reciprocal (Anderson & Briggs, 2011; Tompkins, 2002; Wharton-McDonald, et. al, 1997).

**Differentiated instruction**

Several researchers (Compton-Lilly, 2008, Fountas and Pinnell, 2009; Tomlinson, 2003) have concluded that elementary students who struggle with reading
respond best to teachers who use differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all learners, and incorporate students’ learning styles into lessons by allowing for multiple opportunities for learning. For example, a teacher using differentiated instruction instructs students according to their instructional levels. There may be different groups of students doing different activities that are matched best to their strengths, needs, and abilities. Students also respond best to responsive teaching, which takes into account all students’ levels of understanding and ways of being (Compton-Lilly, 2008). Responsive teaching involves teachers, as Compton-Lilly (2008) states, “realizing and capitalizing upon the vast range of differences that students bring to classrooms” (p. 668). Teachers can achieve this by including religions and cultures celebrated by all of their students and creating an accepting classroom environment.

Students respond best to a balanced literacy approach that incorporates reading, writing, listening, and speaking taught with reciprocity (Compton-Lilly, 2008; Fountas and Pinnell, 2009; Tomlinson, 2003; Wharton-MacDonald, et. al, 1997). For example, a teacher who has a balanced literacy classroom will use a reading block that incorporates reading, writing, listening, and speaking together.

**Grade-Level Literacy Responsibilities**

The New York State Education Department has defined the responsibilities of students in grades one through five in accordance to the New York State Common Core Standards
First and Second Grades

The literacy focus in first and second grades is on demonstrating meaning of texts by using a variety of information (visual, meaning, structure, and the organization and basic features of print). Students are expected to use decoding skills focused on visual information, phonics, and word analysis skills. Students are expected to make connections when reading and use information in the text to describe characters, the setting, and the plot.

In writing, students are expected to compose a variety of pieces (informative, opinion, and narrative). There is a high level of teacher guidance and support through the practices of modeling and guided practice at the primary level.

Third, Fourth and Fifth Grades

Beginning in third grade teachers are expected to provide more scaffolding and gradually release responsibility to students during literacy activities. According to New York State Common Core ELA standards, students are expected to be more detailed and go more in depth in their descriptions of a variety of texts (stories, drama, or poems). Students are expected to make explicit connections with specific evidence between texts. They are also expected to practice higher level thinking skills (inferring, predicting, connecting, and reflecting) in a deeper context using evidence for their thinking.
In writing, students in grades three through five are expected to write informative, opinion, and narrative pieces that have fully developed ideas with specific details. Students are expected to write with a variety of sentence structure and sophisticated vocabulary that is concise, logical, organized, and sequential. They are also expected to draw from a variety of texts to respond and expand on literature.

**Teacher Planning**

Fountas and Pinnell (2009) recognized that “in every classroom, school, and district, teachers are working with children who find literacy learning difficult” (p. x). In order for teachers to effectively teach readers who struggle, they need to value and believe in success, inquiry, and have a passion for teaching (Fountas and Pinnell, 2009; Kropiewnicki, 2006; Scharlach, 2008). As Scharlach (2008) stated, this is because “teachers, like all human beings, make decisions based on their beliefs” (p. 159). Effective instruction is influenced greatly by the teacher’s attitudes and beliefs about teaching, students, and the education process that students bring to the classroom.

Research on teacher planning focuses largely on teacher preparation and professional development programs (Feagans, Kainz, Hedrick, Ginsberg, and Amendum, 2010; Kropiewnicki, 2006; Scharlach, 2008). It has been observed that teachers who plan for instruction use what they have learned in professional development opportunities, pre-service teaching education, and their experience to plan for their classroom (Kropiewnicki, 2006; Vernon-Feagans, Kainz, Hedrick,
Kropiwnicki (2006) believed that pre-service teachers should be taught in preparation programs in order to better plan and be effective with their students. In her study, Kropiwnicki investigated effective instructional methods used to train elementary education pre-service teachers to apply reading comprehension strategies as readers and teachers. Data was gathered over the course of a semester through observation of students in strategy practice, performance, and through document analysis of lesson plans and course assessments. Kropiwnicki’s most significant finding was “the need of pre-service teachers to be shown what we want them to do and how to do it correctly through modeling and practice” (p.12). She concluded that there should be less lecture and theoretical discussion in pre-service teacher programs and more modeling and practice of effective teaching behaviors.

Vernon-Feagans, Kainz, Hedrick, Ginsberg, and Amendum (2010) found similar results to Kropiwnicki (2006) in their research study of an intensive teacher coaching program, Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI). The study included 648 students and teachers who had an average teaching experience of fifteen years in sixteen rural schools from five rural counties in the United States who receive Title I funding. Typically, TRI is a fifteen minute one-on-one session with the student and teacher. It can evolve into a small group session, based on student progress. Each session during this study was taped so that literacy consultants could directly coach the classroom teacher using TRI strategies. Vernon-Feagans, et. al (2010) concluded that “intensive teacher training programs that emphasize “learning while doing” can
produce better teacher knowledge, beliefs, and practices in comparison to programs that only emphasize knowledge and beliefs” (p. A-1-A-2). This is an important aspect for teachers to remember when thinking about how teacher preparation programs affect teacher instruction (Kropiewnicki, 2006; Vernon-Feagans, et. al, 2010). In order for teachers to effectively plan for literacy instruction they need to be explicitly taught and practice planning as pre-service teachers (Kropiewnicki, 2006; Vernon-Feagans, et. al, 2010).

Scharlach (2008) examined the beliefs of six female pre-service teachers, who were working as tutors, about teaching readers who struggle and how those beliefs influenced teacher expectations, instruction, and evaluation in a case-study approach. Data collection for this study included pre-service teachers’ background information sheets, pre-service teacher’s autobiographies, interviews with pre-service teachers, observations of pre-service teachers while teaching struggling readers, and pre-service teachers’ written expectations and evaluations of struggling readers (Scharlach, 2008). The most significant finding was that when pre-service teachers believed they were capable and responsible for teaching all of their struggling readers to read they had higher expectations and their students were more successful. Scharlach (2008) stressed that “teachers’ beliefs are congruent with their teaching behaviors and influence teachers’ expectations as well as student achievement” (p. 159).

In order for teachers to be effective in their literacy instruction of students who struggle they need to plan for instruction by taking into account a student’s
interests, ability levels, and learning styles (Fountas and Pinnell, 2009; Lyons, 2003; Shaw, 2010; and Tomlinson, 2003). Teachers should incorporate researched best practices of literacy instruction such as differentiated instruction, responsive teaching, and balanced literacy in order to reach more students and promote effective literacy learning. Students will also be more engaged and motivated in the classroom if their teachers incorporate these practices into their daily instruction.

**Effective Literacy Instruction for Students who Struggle with Reading**

As Blair, Rupley, and Nichols (2007) stated, “it is generally accepted that the teacher plays a major role in determining the effectiveness of a reading instructional program” (p. 432). In the following section I describe ideas, theories, and examples of researched best practices of literacy instruction that teachers might use when teaching students who struggle with reading.

**Differentiated Instruction**

The idea of differentiated instruction as a best practice for literacy instruction for students who struggle with reading has been researched by Fountas and Pinnell (2009), Lyons (2003), Tomlinson, Brighton, Hertberg, Callahan, Moon, Brimijoin, & Reynolds (2003), and Shaw (2010). Differentiated instruction focuses on teaching based on individual student’s needs and strengths. By practicing differentiated literacy instruction teachers can meet the needs of readers who struggle and support students’ achievement of established standards. The key elements of differentiated instruction are student readiness, interest, and learning profile (Tomlinson, et. al,
The idea that students learn best in accordance with their readiness to do so was proposed by social cognitive theorist and psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003; Tomlinson, et. al, 2003). Vygotsky’s theories about student learning are from the 1890s, but were not well-known in the United States until after his death in 1934 (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003). Vygotsky’s idea of student readiness has since become widely known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003; Tomlinson, et. al, 2003). The ZPD refers to the concept that a student cannot be successful alone, but can be with scaffolding and support from the teacher or a more experienced peer (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003; Tomlinson, et. al, 2003). The purpose of scaffolding instruction is to provide students with support through the use of models and guided practice while systematically reducing the teacher support to move the student to independent practice (Tomlinson, et. al, 2003). Vygotsky’s ideas about the effectiveness of teaching according to each student’s ZPD, scaffolding, teacher modeling, and guided practice have been widely accepted as differentiated instruction and further researched in recent years (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003; Tomlinson, et. al, 2003).

Research suggests that when students encounter reading tasks at moderate levels of difficulty they are more likely to maintain learning efforts and be successful (Tomlinson, et. al, 2003). If students are presented with reading material that is too difficult, they will become frustrated and confused (Tomlinson, et. al, 2003). If
reading material is under-challenging, students will not grow (Tomlinson, et. al, 2003).

Student interest is also a large part of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, et. al, 2003). Learning how to read is more likely to be rewarding and motivating for students if their interests are incorporated into lessons (Tomlinson, et. al, 2003). Reading and writing tasks that are interesting to students are more likely to lead to enhanced engagement, greater creativity, motivation, and productivity (Tomlinson, et. al, 2003). Tomlinson, et. al (2003) stated that “allowing students to do something they love is likely to help them develop both a positive attitude about learning and their creative potential” (par. 31). For example, creating a classroom environment where students can complete assignments in multiple ways will give students motivation because they have power over their learning. A student who is interested in drawing may be able to draw a story; whereas, a student who is interested in using the computer may be able to type a story. Both students are completing the same assignment, just in different ways. Permitting students to complete assignments using their interests contributes to determination and positive learning behaviors such as persistence with challenges. Of course not all students have the same interests and should be allowed to make choices in the classroom to create and enhance their own learning.
Learning Profiles

Teachers should also consider students’ learning profiles when practicing differentiated literacy instruction at the elementary level in order to be effective. A student’s learning profile as defined by Tomlinson, et. al (2003) is “a student’s preferred mode of learning that can be affected by a number of factors, including learning style, intelligence preference, gender, and culture” (para. 36). Learning style has been defined by Tomlinson, et. al (2003) as “environment, emotions, interactions, and physical needs such as light, temperature, seating arrangements, demand for concentration, degree of learner mobility, time of day, and perceptual mode” (para. 37). For example, a teacher may support a student who is a visual learner, who is struggling with reading, and works better in a quiet area with low lighting by giving the student a visual decoding checklist to reference when reading and allowing him or her to be in a quiet area of the classroom with dimmed lights. The checklist might include pictures and words that reference skills the student has learned and been working on in the classroom.

As reported by Tomlinson, et. al (2003), “a meta-analysis of research on learning styles reported that addressing a student’s learning style through flexible teaching or counseling results in improved achievement and attitude gains in students from a wide range of cultural groups” (para. 37). It is important for teachers to remember to be flexible and incorporate different learning styles into their teaching in order to be supportive and effective with students who struggle with reading.
Responsive Teaching

Responsive teaching is an instructional strategy that has been shown to be effective with students who struggle with reading and writing because it involves teachers recognizing and capitalizing on the vast range of differences students bring into the classroom (Compton-Lilly, 2008). Responsive teaching requires teachers to not only focus on academic differences, but also on differences in literacy experiences, language, interests, and communicative interests (Compton-Lilly, 2008). In the classroom, teachers can teach responsively by celebrating diversity by including aspects of different cultures, backgrounds, and religions into daily lessons. This can be achieved by teachers by gaining a good understanding of students through observations and interviews.

Responsive teaching can be considered a best practice of literacy instruction for students who struggle with reading because it is closely related to differentiated instruction. Both practices focus on student’s interests, abilities, needs, and learning styles. Teachers need to know and learn about their students through observations and interviews in order to be able to practice responsive teaching in their classroom (Compton-Lilly, 2008). Once teachers know their students they can meaningfully create reading and writing opportunities for combining students’ ways of being with their learning of reading processes. An example given by Compton-Lilly (2008) included a girl who struggled with reading and writing, but liked Dora the Explorer on television because Dora spoke Spanish, which was an important language for the student because it was what was spoken at home. Compton-Lilly recognized the
importance of Spanish to the student and helped the student see and understand the connection between Spanish and English. This insight helped the student better understand English because she was able to relate sounds in English to those she knew in Spanish (Compton-Lilly, 2008).

**Balanced Literacy**

Balanced literacy is an instructional framework that is especially beneficial for the primary level students who struggle with reading (Wharton-McDonald, Rankin, Mistretta, Ettenberger, 1997). It is defined by Spiegel (1998) as a “decision making approach through which the teacher makes thoughtful choices each day about the best way to help each child become a better reader and writer” (para. 3). As Fountas & Pinnell (2009) explains, the classroom is the only place where “children will have the opportunity to hear a wide variety of texts read aloud, to discuss these texts with peers, and to read and write for long periods of time” (p.6). Fountas & Pinnell (2009) also states, “An elementary education curriculum must comprise an articulated, cohesive system of language and literacy experiences” (p.6).

As Johnson (2006) states, “a balanced literacy approach builds in time for meeting with small groups and individually with students” (p. 20). The components of balanced literacy include shared reading, read aloud, interactive writing, shared writing, reading workshop, and writing workshop (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009; Johnson, 2006; Marshall, 2011; Mermelstein, 2006). Teachers use the various components of balanced literacy to support students progressively become more skillful readers and writers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009; Johnson, 2006; Marshall, 2011; Mermelstein,
Shared reading is when a teacher reads an enlarged text aloud while students read along using multiple decoding strategies throughout. The teacher’s responsibility during shared reading is to build meaning and structure, so students can learn and compose meaning from a text (Mermelstein, 2006; Fountas & Pinnell, 2009).

Read alouds are often used by teachers to teach or reinforce a reading strategy. The teacher will model reading strategies while thinking aloud during the reading. Read alouds allow students to deepen their understanding as the teacher guides thinking before, during, and after the reading. The students learn from the modeling and will have the opportunity in the future to practice the strategy (Mermelstein, 2006; Fountas & Pinnell, 2009).

Interactive writing is when the teacher composes a text with students while focusing on building up students’ independence. The students participate in the activity by writing parts of the text while the teacher may write other parts that are too easy or too difficult. The teacher builds up meaning and structure so students can compose meaning (Mermelstein, 2006; Fountas & Pinnell, 2009).

Shared writing is used by teachers as an instructional tool used by teachers to help teach or reinforce writing strategies while building student independence. The teacher develops a variety of texts with his/her students by modeling his/her thinking while he/she writes. The students learn by listening to the teachers’ thought process and then practicing the strategy being taught. The purpose of the teacher writing is to take away the visual aspect of writing so that students can focus on constructing
meaning and structure (Mermelstein, 2006; Fountas & Pinnell, 2009).

Reading and writing workshop have the same basic structure of a mini-lesson directed by the teacher, independent student work time, and then student sharing. Reading and writing workshops can be flexible and teachers can work with students individually or in a small group setting. Independently, students are expected to use meaning, structure, and visual sources of information to understand and compose meaning from texts (Mermelstein, 2006).

Wharton-McDonald, et. al (1997) believe that balanced literacy instruction is a best practice used by highly effective literacy teachers. The researchers found that the instruction of highly effective teachers of primary level students (as identified by their supervisors) had a high level of balance that included explicit skills instruction, authentic reading and writing activities, and incorporated both reading and writing across the curriculum. The teachers in the study encouraged students to be self-regulated learners so that the students would learn to be independent and progress on their own. The students in these balanced literacy classrooms had higher levels of engagement, consistently high levels of reading, and produced sophisticated writing products. (Wharton-McDonald, et. al, 1997).

**Conclusion**

My review of literature has revealed that elementary readers who struggle are diverse and have a wide range of needs and abilities. Effective teachers of students who struggle with reading and writing plan and embed best practices of literacy
instruction (differentiated instruction, learning profile, responsive teaching, and balanced literacy) in their daily routines. As Fountas and Pinnell describe, “Teaching must be designed to meet the needs of each child and educators must constantly search for effective ways to serve the children they teach” (p. 3). These students need highly effective teachers who have been explicitly taught ways to support students through professional development and pre-service opportunities.
Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures

The main purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate how elementary teachers craft their literacy instruction during the whole group 90 minute reading block to support all students, especially those students who struggle. It was my hope that the findings from this study would yield insights into effective teacher planning and implementation of whole group reading instruction that supports students who struggle with reading. It was also my hope that by conducting this research study I would become better acquainted with the beliefs and values of the new school in which I work, and that I would expand my skills as a researcher and teacher of literacy.

Research Question

During this six week study, I focused on the research question: How do elementary teachers craft their instruction during a 90-minute reading block to meet the needs of readers who struggle?

Proposed Participants

I asked ten teachers from grades one through five who work in an elementary school to participate in my study (see Appendix C for consent form). Only seven teachers were willing and available to participate. All of the teachers are females, are my colleagues and are tenured. All of the teachers have their master’s degree and have teaching experience that spans from eleven years to eighteen years.
I selected my participants purposefully with the expectation to gain insight into the teachers' planning and implementation of whole group reading instruction. I interviewed all seven participants about how they craft their whole group reading instruction to support students who struggle with reading (see Appendix A). I randomly selected four of the seven teachers to observe during reading instruction (see Appendix B).

**Context of the Study**

I conducted this study in a suburban elementary school in western New York. The population of the community is middle class; the median household income for the area is $59,192 (publicschoolreview.com). The school services students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. There are 468 students and 33 teachers in the school. There is one universal pre-kindergarten, two kindergarten, four first grade, four second grade, four third grade, three fourth grade, and four fifth grade classrooms in the building. Two classrooms are self-contained.

The community is encouraged, involved, and supportive of the students' education (www.websterschools.org). In the school district, there are eleven schools, pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade with enrollment at 8,829 total students. The demographics of the student population for the district are: 91 percent Caucasian, 2.8 percent African American, 2.3 percent Hispanic, 3 percent Asian, and 0.1 percent American Indian (publicschoolreview.com).
The elementary school in which I conducted my research consists of thirty-three teachers. Thirty-two teachers are female and one is male who range in years of experience and credentials. I am the only first year teacher in the building. All of the teachers, except me and one other teacher are tenured and have completed their master’s degree.

My Positionality as the Researcher

I am a 24 year old Caucasian female living in western New York. I grew up in a middle class family in a suburb of Syracuse, New York. I completed my undergraduate studies at The College at Brockport, State University of New York, receiving my bachelor of science in childhood inclusive education and health science. I hold New York State initial certificates in elementary education (grades one through six) and students with disabilities (grades one through six). I am currently pursuing my master’s degree in literacy education, when I am finished I will be certified in literacy birth-grade six.

Currently, I am a special education and consultant teacher for fourth and fifth grade in the suburban elementary school in which I will conduct the study. I teach three fourth grade students who have an individualized education program (IEP) in a resource room setting each day. I also go into a fifth grade classroom to support a teacher with four IEP students. This is my first year teaching in this school and in this school district. Previously I have worked in a different suburban school district as a fifth grade consultant teacher, 6:1:1 teacher, and second grade special education
teacher, in long term assignments ranging from two to eight months since May of 2009.

I have experience with a wide range of students including those with autism, traumatic brain injury, mental retardation, dyslexia, attention-deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), emotional disturbances, pervasive developmental disorder, and cerebral palsy. I have used many different reading programs throughout my career such as Fountas and Pinnell’s (2009) Leveled Literacy Intervention Program (LLI), Wilson Reading Program (developed by the Massachusetts’ Center for Students with Language/Learning Disabilities in the late 1980’s), SunSprouts (ETA Cuiseneaire, 1997), Reading A-Z (Holl & Morgan, 2002), and Scott Foresman Reading Street (Pearson, 2008).

I believe that all students can and will learn how to read, albeit at different rates. I believe as a special educator it is my job to guide, scaffold, and differentiate my instruction in order to support my students’ independence and success in reading. It is also my job to be an advocate for my students and work with colleagues, administrators, and parents to ensure that the students’ educational experience is appropriate and purposeful. This means that I should tailor my reading instruction to meet the differentiated needs, backgrounds, abilities, and interests of each of my students to ensure what I am doing is meaningful, appropriate and authentic. For these reasons, I work hard at planning appropriate reading lessons and activities for each of my students. I believe I need to build a rapport with students and create a
classroom environment that is safe and welcoming in order to help students feel comfortable, safe and ready to learn.

As a teacher, I support being a life-long learner; therefore, I take advantage of all opportunities to further my professional education and reflect on past experiences. All of these beliefs guide and shape my instruction, planning, and interaction with students.

**Data Collection**

I collected data for this research study through the use of interviews with and observations of elementary teachers. Through my analysis of the observation and interview data, I found patterns between and among the teachers' planning and instruction styles that are the most effective for supporting students who struggle with reading.

**Teacher Interviews**

Prior to beginning the interview process, I asked the participants to give me concrete details about their background in an effort to ground their opinions shared during the interviews (Seidman, 2006). I conducted one-on-one interviews with seven teachers across a series of grade levels from the school in which I teach. I observed four of these teachers during their whole group classroom reading instruction.

The interview questions were be pre-determined and open-ended (see Appendix A). As stated by Seidman (2006), "an open-ended question, unlike a
leading question, establishes the territory to be explored while allowing the participant to take any directions her or she wants” (p. 84). Using open-ended questions allowed me to gain insight into each teacher’s honest perspectives in how they plan and implement reading and writing planning instruction while effectively supporting students who struggle. Each participant was able to control her answers while I actively listened and recorded her responses. Each interview will took approximately 30-45 minutes in the teacher’s classroom at a time that was convenient for her. When I needed to follow-up with the teachers to clarify confusion on my part the teachers who participated were cooperative.

Classroom Observations

I conducted a total of eight observations with four teachers (two per teacher) in grade levels three, four, and five. I observed each teacher during her reading instruction focusing on her language (verbal and non-verbal), her use of clarifications directions, movement, and redirection. I also noted the non-verbal and verbal language of struggling students, the questions they asked, and how the teacher responded to those questions.

I was a non-participant during my classroom observations in order to collect purposeful information on how the teacher uses her planning to guide her instruction and support students who struggle. I had access to all of the teacher’s lesson plans prior to the observation in order to become familiar with the lesson.
I created a map of each classroom layout to note teacher and student proximity, movements and interactions. I also asked the teacher, prior to my observations, to identify the students who struggling with reading as a way to inform my attention and focus during the observation. I recorded notes on my observation protocol (see Appendix B).

It was my hope that the collection of multiple field notes would enable me to unveil patterns of how the teachers and students who are struggling behave and interact during reading and writing instruction.

**Research Journal**

Throughout my six week study I kept a research journal in order to track my experiences and reflections. I used my research journal in ways similar to what Borg (2001) identifies as the benefits of keeping such a journal. One benefit of using a research journal, according to Borg, is that it provides a space through which to explore concerns about the research process and to identify ways to address them. Another benefit is that the journal will provide a place for me to systematically air my anxieties and therefore be able to work through them. A third benefit, as explained by Borg (2001), is that using a journal will enable me a medium, i.e., writing, through which deal with negative feedback in a productive and reflective way. One final benefit for using a journal is to further develop thoughts into concrete action. I used my research journal as a reflective tool after each observation and interview. I also used it when necessary to track anxieties, new ideas, frustration, concerns, and plans
of action. My study was more effective and insightful because of my use of a research journal.

Data Analysis

My data consisted of teacher interview transcripts, teacher plans, field notes from observations, and entries in my research journal. I coded and categorized each data source shortly after I collected it. Doing this, I was able to find patterns which informed my continued data collection processes.

Teacher Interviews

I read and reread the interview transcripts in order to gain a complete understanding as to how each participant responded. This process also helped me understand if further interviews were necessary to clarify information. After interviewing a teacher I had already observed, I did ask some follow up questions which clarified questions on why she did what she did during my observation in order to gain a clear understanding of her intentions. I coded each transcript by reading and rereading it. I then sorted, organized, and categorized the codes. I looked for specific patterns of teacher perspectives and strategies for planning, supporting, and implementation of instruction in my interviews. I searched for similar codes in data in order to find major themes and perspectives. At the conclusion of my data analysis, I found find patterns and themes related to how the teachers planned instruction and
supported students who struggle during a whole group 90-minute block of reading instruction.

Classroom Observations

During my observations I used an observation protocol (see Appendix B) to capture what I saw happening in the classroom and the behaviors of the targeted students and teacher during the reading block. After I completed all the observations, I looked across the observations for patterns and themes among the teachers’ instructional strategies that support students who struggle with reading. I coded my observation data through the same process I used to code the interview data, a process that involved reading and reading the data. I used my field notes from my observations to compare and contrast how teachers use their plans to guide their instruction and support of students who are struggling. I tracked any questions I had during my observation in order to get clarification from the teacher during the interview. If after the second observation, I had questions about the teacher’s instruction or strategies for support I scheduled a time to meet with the teacher in order to gain clarity.

Research Journal

Throughout my study, I recorded my insights and perspectives of the behaviors of the teacher and struggling students during the whole group reading block in a research journal. I used the data from my research journal to develop new ideas,
address concerns/problems, and further my research. My research journal tracked my evolving thoughts and perspectives as I moved through the interview and observation processes. My research journal supplied an account of events and procedures, allowing me to recall and reproduce thinking, be physical evidence of my thinking, and be an instructive narrative of my professional growth. I consider my research journal to be proof of my research process and referred to it as I began to triangulate the multiple sources of data (interview transcripts, teacher plans, a research journal, and field notes from observations) I had.

**Procedures**

The process of data collection for this research study took approximately six weeks. The following sequence was my plan for data collection procedures during these six weeks.

**Week One**

I started my observations of classroom teachers. I observed two teachers during whole group reading instruction. Observations lasted approximately 80-90 minutes depending on my availability. I used my research journal as a reflective tool to record my evolving insights and perspectives on the research process.
Week Two

I continued my observations of teachers during whole group reading instruction. Observations will last approximately 80-90 minutes depending on my availability. When I had conducted all of my observations I began coding data looking for specific patterns. I also recorded any questions I needed to be clarified during the interview process. I used my research journal as a reflective tool to record my evolving insights and perspectives on the research process.

Week Three

I conducted interviews with four classroom teachers. I used my research journal as a reflective tool to record my evolving insights and perspectives on the research process.

Week Four

I continued to conduct interviews with three more classroom teachers. When all of my interviews have been conducted I began to code the data, comparing and contrasting it to the first observations. I was able to find patterns or themes among the interviews on teacher planning, instructing, and support for struggling students. I used my research journal as a reflective tool to record my evolving insights and perspectives on the research process.
Week Five

I observed at least two classroom teachers for the second time. Observations lasted approximately 80-90 minutes depending on my availability. I used my research journal as a reflective tool to record my evolving insights and perspectives on the research process.

Week Six

I finished my classroom observations. Observations lasted approximately 80-90 minutes depending on my availability. I conducted any clarifying interviews with participants in week six. I also continued the analysis of all of the data, creating categories related to the specific, recurring patterns. I used my research journal as a reflective tool to record my evolving insights and perspectives on the research process.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

I was firm in my goal to make the findings of my research study reliable by following procedures that are ethical and free from any biases. I used prolonged engagement throughout the six week study by constantly observing and interviewing participants. I engaged in persistent observation by observing classroom teachers during their reading block as a non-participant. I ensured trustworthiness through the use of multiple sources of data: interviews of ten teachers and eight observations from four teachers. My triangulation of data sources enabled me to find specific patterns
and themes regarding the teachers’ perspectives and practices. The collected data from interviews and observations made the study more valid and reliable because the data was from multiple sources. The common themes I discovered throughout the data analysis process were reflective of the data that I collected from the teachers I observed and interviewed.

After collecting all of my data, I conducted member checks with the teachers in order to check the accuracy of my findings. As Cohen and Crabtree (2006) state, “this is when data, analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions are tested with members of those groups from whom the data were originally obtained” (para. 1). This is important because it enabled the participants to correct any misinterpretations I may have made during the analysis process.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study is bound by several limitations. One limitation is that I only researched the topic in one elementary school. It would be ideal to research this topic in other elementary schools in order to get differing perspectives; however, at this time I did not have access to other participants. Another limitation is the timeframe. Six weeks is a rather short amount of time to gather data on how teacher plan effective instruction for and support of students who struggle with reading. I have learned through my experiences that students who struggle will need more instructional time, modeling, and repeated opportunities to purposefully read and write.
Summary

The main purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate how elementary teachers craft their literacy instruction during the whole group reading block to support all students. In this research study, I interviewed seven experienced elementary teachers and observed four of the seven during a 90-minute reading block that also incorporates writing skills. By interviewing and observing teachers during their 90-minute reading blocks, I discovered how the teachers’ plans influenced their instruction and support of students who are struggling with reading. This helped me better understand how to structure my own planning to best benefit the students in my classroom who may be struggling with reading. I used multiple sources of data (interview transcripts, teacher plans, a research journal, and field notes from observations) which I then triangulated to find reoccurring patterns within the multiple data sources.
Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate how elementary teachers craft their instruction during a 90-minute reading block to meet the needs of readers who struggle in order to guide my own professional development. During this study I explored how classroom teachers from across a range of elementary grade levels used various strategies to plan and implement instruction in order to be effective for those readers who struggle during whole group instruction. During my observations of the teachers I focused on the classroom environment, teacher planning, teacher behaviors and strategies during instruction, and struggling student’s behaviors.

My research question was how do elementary teachers craft their instruction during a 90-minute reading block to meet the needs of readers who struggle?

I observed four teachers who represented four different grade levels in one suburban school in western New York. The observations ranged in length between one and two hours each time. I also interviewed the four teachers I observed plus an additional four teachers from the same school for thirty-minutes. The goal of the interviews was to gain insight into their planning for students who struggle with reading and what specific strategies they use in the classroom to support these students. All of the participants in this research study are female and their teaching experiences range from eleven to seventeen years. All of the classrooms included in this study are inclusive. Table 4.1 lists the teachers’ demographics and teaching
experience. I used pseudonyms for the teachers’ names in order to maintain confidentiality.

**Figure 4.1 Participant Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Mrs. Day</th>
<th>Mrs. White</th>
<th>Mrs. Kay</th>
<th>Mrs. Luck</th>
<th>Mrs. Filup</th>
<th>Mrs. Fitz</th>
<th>Mrs. Waiters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<td>O/I</td>
<td>O/I</td>
<td>O/I</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Teaching Experience</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of reading level in classroom as assessed with Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) and Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)</td>
<td>DRA: 20-44</td>
<td>BAS: L-U</td>
<td>BAS: L-X</td>
<td>BAS: J-Z</td>
<td>DRA: 6-40</td>
<td>BAS: I-W</td>
<td>DRA: 18-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this chapter, I present the four teachers’ individual case studies. These case studies helped me address my research question. After presenting each case study, I provide a cross-case analysis in which I make comparisons between and among the case studies.
Case Studies

Mrs. Day: Third Grade Teacher

“There is not one quick fix for readers who struggle; it involves a lot
of trial and error.”

-Mrs. Day, 1/23/12

Mrs. Day has been teaching for seventeen years and has taught first, second, third, and fifth grades throughout her career. She has been teaching third grade for seven years. She has the support of a consultant teacher to support three students with Individualized Education Plan (IEPs) during half of her English Language Arts and three students with IEPs during her math block. Mrs. Day has two students who read at a DRA level 20 (beginning of first grade reading level), the lowest reading level in the class. Alex (all student names are pseudonyms) is diagnosed with autism and Nate is diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). There are other students in the classroom who struggle with aspects of reading, but Mrs. Day said, “This is the highest class of readers I have had in third grade. Some struggle a little with comprehension – but benefit from using graphic organizers and more guided instruction.”

On January 23, 2012 I sat in a corner of Mrs. Day’s classroom for my first observation. All twenty (nine boys and eleven girls) of Mrs. Day’s students sat on the carpet quietly listening to her read *The Stranger* by Chris Van Allsburg (1986). I immediately noticed Alex fidgeting with his hands. When Mrs. Day turned the page in the book he would look up, but then would go back to fidgeting.
Mrs. Day continued reading, "He helped the stranger inside, where Katy, their daughter peeked into the parlor room." Suddenly Alex shouted, "Mrs. Day! What is a parlor?" Mrs. Day asked the other students, "Does anyone know what a parlor is?"

The students looked around at each other, but did not raise their hand to respond to her question. Seeing the students' confusion, Mrs. Day explained, "A parlor room is a room that is usually in old houses that was used to entertain guests." Alex was sitting up on his knees and asked, "Like a party?" Mrs. Day nodded her head and replied, "Yes, exactly - people would host parties in the parlor room." Alex nodded his head as did other students. I suspect that Mrs. Day was satisfied with their thinking and so she continued reading.

**Classroom Environment**

I observed that Mrs. Day's classroom was set up in a way that celebrated students. Student work hung all over the room. There were student created pictures on the wall and a spot behind her desk that had dozens of student notes and letters pinned to the wall. There were, educational posters around the room, some teacher created others store bought. Most of the posters related to literacy strategies and skills. For example, one reminded students how to buddy read.

![Figure 4.2: Buddy Reading Poster](image)

- Read to a buddy: EEKK
- Elbow to Elbow
- Knee to Knee
During my interview with Mrs. Day she told me that all of the teacher-made posters were made with the help of her students. She stated,

I like to include the students in creating posters about classroom rules or learning skills and strategies in order to ensure they know what it is expected. It also reveals their thinking to me and helps me better understand them as learners. (1/23/12)

She also explained that the classroom created posters were intended to “support students with visual strategies when working independently. For example, students use the poster about writing choices as a reference when they can’t think of what to write about.” (Interview, 1/23/12). There were approximately thirty posters throughout the classroom with reading, writing, and math strategies.

During both of my observations (1/23/12 and 1/25/12), students were working at their desks during part of the whole group instruction. Students were seated at desks arranged in groups of two that faced the SMARTboard. A chart paper easel was set up in the front of the room during both observations. The classroom schedule was on a whiteboard at the front of the room, in front of the student who has autism. There were four lap top computers at the back of the room for students to use for various activities throughout the day. Mrs. Day explained, “I use the computers for writing and reading activities. Students use sites such as PBSkids, Spelling City, Wordle. I also use SMARTboard exchange for various games and lessons for content.” A teacher table that Mrs. Day uses for conferencing and small group instruction was located in the back of the room. The consultant teacher was in the classroom
supporting the teacher and the students throughout both of my observations.

During my observation on 1/23/12 the students listened to a story on the rug, had whole group instruction at their desks, and worked independently reading and writing in various places in the classroom. During my second observation on 1/25/12 whole group instruction was delivered at the front of the room by Mrs. Day while the students were at their desks.

I perceived the emotional environment in Mrs. Day’s classroom as safe and supportive of student independence and interest. This was evident to me by students’ participation in the activities. Most of the students were smiling and contributing to the discussions throughout both lessons I observed. They asked Mrs. Day questions and raised their hands to answer her questions. For example, some students asked “What should I do if I run out of room?” Mrs. Day promoted problem solving in her class by responding, “What do you think you could do?”

During independent work time, students were able to choose what reading activities they wanted to engage in such as independent reading, buddy reading, spelling, writing workshop, and read to a teacher. Mrs. Day asked each student before independent work time started what he or she was going to work on and kept track of where they were starting on her clipboard. Students were expected to switch to a different activity after twenty minutes. Mrs. Day reminded students, “You can sit wherever you want as long as it is a good reading or writing spot.” Some students worked on the floor, some got out carpets to read on, some sat at their desks, some went to the long table in the back of the classroom, and some students went to the
computers. Students were able to read and write about something they were interested in during independent time. Some students were reading non-fiction texts, some reading chapter books, and some reading picture books. Mrs. Day told me that during this independent work time, “students are reading books at their independent levels. I use guided reading groups to teach students at their instructional level and use writer’s workshop to review student’s independent writing.”

I saw Mrs. Day use a lot of her experience and real life examples to engage students and connect learning to real life situations. For example, when talking about Jack Frost who was a character referenced in the story, she shared her background knowledge saying,

Well, I know that I’ve heard of Jack Frost before in movies, and he is a man that represents winter who is cold, but this book made me wonder what his role is in this book that takes place in the springtime.

(1/23/12)

She then asked the students what they knew about Jack Frost. Mrs. Day wrote all of the students’ background knowledge of Jack Frost on the chart paper while students copied it into their notebooks.

**Student Behaviors**

I was able to closely observe the entire class during both of my observations during whole group instruction. I walked around the room throughout both of my observations to examine student work, their engagements, and their struggles. I
noticed in both observations of whole group instruction that the two students who Mrs. Day said struggle were very off-task. On 1/23/12 when Mrs. Day was reading aloud to the class, Alex and Nate were distracted by their peers and by their own hands. Mrs. Day refocused both students by asking clarifying questions during the reading such as, “Why do you think Jim went there?” Her use of questions brought all of the students’ attention back to thinking about the text as evidenced by their participation in discussions.

During whole group instruction, I observed Nate and Alex constantly fidgeting with things in their desk, flipping through their papers, playing with their pencils, and staring out the window. Mrs. Day used visual cues to redirect and refocus her students. For example, there was a chart taped to the top of Alex’s desk with a bulleted list of appropriate behaviors (e.g., raising hand, listening, taking turns, participating with peers) for whole group instruction. When Alex was off task or being disruptive Mrs. Day quietly walked over and tapped on his chart. Alex would then look at his chart of appropriate behaviors and change his behavior. Or when Alex was staring out the window during a whole group lesson Mrs. Day quietly walked to his desk and pointed to his chart lightly. Alex looked at his chart and then looked back at Mrs. Day, the writing on the chart, his writing on his paper, and continued writing what was on the chart in his notebook.

I also observed that Mrs. Day used close proximity with the students who struggle with reading in order to help them focus. While observing on 1/23/12 I noticed that Alex and Nate were having difficulty keeping up with copying text clues
from the board that Mrs. Day was writing on a t-chart piece of paper as students in the classroom came up with examples. This started to affect both boys’ attention as they were constantly behind what Mrs. Day was talking about and were not able to write and listen at the same time. Mrs. Day noticed this as well and went over to both students and made lines on their chart to help them focus because there were not lines before. This was a whole group lesson with the intention of having students select text clues from *The Stranger* (1986) that clue the reader into who the stranger might be.

I observed Alex become increasingly fidgety in his seat and unable to keep up with the discussion and copying of Mrs. Day’s notes. After about ten minutes, he started laying across his desk and tapping his pencil in the air. He was getting increasingly frustrated and started yelling, “I’m hungry! I’m so tired!” Mrs. Day quietly came over to him and pointed to a Post-it note that had ‘blue car’ written on it. During the interview Mrs. Day explained,

Andrew has a goal each week to control his behaviors and act appropriately. Each week he works toward something different and writes down what he is working towards on a Post-it note. Usually, when Alex is being disruptive or behaving inappropriately I will point to the Post-it and it helps him regain focus during lessons because it is a reminder of how he is supposed to act and what he is working towards. (1/23/12)

At this point, Mrs. Day saw that Alex was behind in his copying of the text
and wrote down the text clues he was missing so he could attend to the discussion. This was all done nonverbally. During the interview when I asked her why she did this, she explained, “Sometimes when Alex gets behind I will help move him along so that he does not get frustrated and can attend to the discussions going on in the classroom.”

When Mrs. Day caught him up, Alex sat up in his chair and looked around at the other students talking. He was able to write down the remaining three text clues on his own. Mrs. Day reinforced Alex’s good behavior of sitting in his seat, copying the notes, and not being disruptive three minutes later by saying to the whole group, “Alex and Lisa are being great thinkers today.”

Nate asked Mrs. Day about her expectations during the whole group instruction saying, “What did you say?” Mrs. Day responded by asking another student near Nate to repeat the directions. During whole group instruction, I noticed that Nate did not participate and was often playing with things in his desk and looking out the window. The students around Nate did not appear to be disrupted by his actions. Mrs. Day went over to Nate twice during her lesson to ask him to put what he was playing with away. And both times he responded by putting the papers away.

I observed that Alex did participate in whole group discussions, but appeared confused. For example, on 1/25/12 Mrs. Day continued her lesson from 1/23/12 on inferencing and using background knowledge to determine unknowns in stories. Mrs. Day asked the whole group, “What do I mean by background knowledge?” Alex raised his hand and when Mrs. Day called on him he said, “I like background noises”
Mrs. Day acknowledged his response, saying,

That is a similar way to think of it because background noises could be like the background knowledge of a book. It is the knowledge that is there in the back of your mind that helps you connect to books and complete a whole picture. Just like background noises contribute to a whole scene. (1/23/12)

Alex nodded his head towards Mrs. Day and continued writing.

**Teacher Instructional Strategies**

Mrs. Day plans her reading lessons with her consultant teacher. Mrs. Day explained, “When we plan together we can best support our students using cohesive and consistent instruction” (1/23/12). Together they review the students’ DRA levels, Running Records, AIMSweb scores, student interest surveys, content area topics, student background knowledge, student needs and abilities to plan for instruction.

Mrs. Day uses pre-teaching strategies with Nate in order to build his background knowledge before lessons. She does this by connecting reading to content area topics being taught at the time. Mrs. Day explained,

When I am teaching about the rainforest I like to include a lot of books about rainforests in my guided reading groups. I do this so that students are still accessing grade level material at their instructional levels. I also have special book bins that are filled with the current topic we are studying. This way students can access the information
during independent work time and free time to learn more. (1/23/12)

Mrs. Day also gives Nate opportunities to preview material before whole group instruction so he is more familiar with it. She uses one on one instruction with Nate to preview content vocabulary before learning about it. For example, when she taught a unit on the rainforest she previewed vocabulary such as “poachers,” “life span,” “mate,” “predator,” and “prey” with him. “This helps him better attend to lessons and gain meaning from them,” Mrs. Day explained. She uses a variety of books such as non-fiction, fiction, series books, poems, reader’s theatre, and short stories. She also uses materials from Fountas and Pinnell, *Words Their Way* (2008), Reading A-Z, and ideas from other colleagues to support student learning in the classroom.

In our interview, Mrs. Day said that she finds that “most students in third grade struggle with thinking about the big idea or theme of a text” (1/23/12). She explained, “In order to support students with understanding the big idea and theme I use a lot of modeling and scaffolding in whole group and small group instruction.” Mrs. Day said that she and the consultant teacher create small groups dependent on the goal of the lesson, abilities, and interests of students. She meets with small groups of three to five students while the other students are in twenty minute rotations of reading independently, reading to a buddy, writing, and word work. She gives the students to choose where they start in the rotations and what they work on as long as they are able to progress towards a goal she has set for students. For example, each student has to read independently, do spelling activities, write, and read to a buddy,
but can start wherever they choose in the rotation. She does this because she has found that “letting students choose what they do motivates and engages students in activities” (1/23/12). She keeps track of student rotations at the beginning and end of each English Language Arts block in order to ensure that students participate in each activity throughout the week.

In order to support students who struggle with reading, Mrs. Day “offers more direct instruction in small groups, differentiate activities, uses more modeling, flexibility, slower pacing, and knowledge of students abilities, interests, and needs to plan for instruction” (1/23/12). She also mentioned that “it is important to include and follow up with parents in instruction in order to support student learning” (1/23/12). She shared that she has six parent volunteers who come in regularly, emails parents to keep them up to date and to discuss student progress, and has at least three scheduled conferences with parents throughout the year.

Mrs. Day includes writing as a daily rotation during her ELA block. She explained,

I devote an entire ELA block, 90 minutes, every week to writing. I do this because I value writing and find that it is often a skill that students lack. In my experience, I think students lack this skill because the focus is so much on reading that writing sometimes gets left behind.

(1/23/12)

The first twenty minutes of the block she gives students direct instruction on a writing skill such as informative writing, how to vary sentence structure, and how to
edit writing. Then students work on various writing activities that often relate to what they are learning in science or social studies. For example, Mrs. Day showed me a writing piece a student wrote about her favorite animal in the rainforest using information from a variety of texts. During the ELA block, students also participate in writer’s workshop. In writer’s workshop, Mrs. Day said that students to work independently on writing and she uses conferences to support students with sentence structure, editing, planning writing pieces, and formulating ideas. She told me that the amount of time she spends with students differs according to their individual needs.

Mrs. Day explained,

I don’t always find that a student who struggles with reading struggles in writing as well. I have a student who is a very high reader, but struggles with his writing mechanics. I help this student by using direct and guided instruction on how to use an editing checklist to his revise work. (1/23/12)

Summary

I observed Mrs. Day on 1/23/12 and 1/25/12 during an English Language Arts block where I was able to observe large group instruction and independent practice. Mrs. Day is an experienced teacher of seventeen years, seven of those being in third grade. She has a range of readers in her classroom who has individual strengths and needs which Mrs. Day takes into account when planning her instruction. Mrs. Day uses the support of a consultant teacher to collaborate and plan for instruction for
students.

In order to support students who struggle with reading and writing Mrs. Day uses more modeling, direct instruction, conferences more often with students, and has students preview new vocabulary and concepts prior to new learning. She targets students’ individual interests and gives students choices in meeting objectives in order to increase motivation and engagement. Mrs. Day gives students ample time throughout the school day to read texts at their independent levels and instructs students in small guided reading groups at their instructional levels as assessed with the Developmental Reading Assessment. Mrs. Day believes in the importance of home support in a student’s literacy learning and because of this works hard to include parents into classroom activities. She uses computer programs such as Microsoft Office and webgames in her classroom to extend student learning.

Mrs. White: Fourth Grade Teacher

"Struggling readers need books that are matched to their interests and are something they enjoy in order to be motivated to read."

-Mrs. White, 2/16/12

Mrs. White has been teaching for twelve years and has only taught fourth grade. In her current classroom, she has twenty-four students and has the support of a consultant teacher during half of her English Language Arts and her math block to support six students who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). As assessed using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS, 2009) Mrs.
White’s students’ reading abilities range from levels L (middle of second grade) – U (middle of fifth grade). Two students have been diagnosed with Autism, four have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), three have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and two students have been diagnosed as having an emotional disability. Mrs. White explained,

A lot of students in my classroom have trouble decoding, have an inability to self monitor, and lack reading fluency. In order to plan for these students I use ‘good fit’ books that are at student’s instructional and independent levels. I also listen to them read, and conference every other day with each student. (2/16/2012)

On February 15, 2012 I stood on the side of Mrs. White’s classroom for my first observation. All of Mrs. White’s students were attending to a lesson on main idea using a section in their science textbooks about ecosystems. Twenty students, nine boys and eleven girls, were at their seats, while four students (all boys and two of which Mrs. White told me were lower level readers) were sitting on the carpet in front of the whiteboard at the front of the room. Every student had his/her own copy of the science textbook, while Mrs. White projected her textbook onto the whiteboard using an ELMO machine. Mrs. White explained, “I like to incorporate reading strategies into science and social studies in order for students to understand that they should be using reading strategies across the curriculum and to impress upon them the importance of reading.”

Mrs. White started the lesson by dividing the section on ecosystems using
paragraphs. She began by reading a paragraph out loud and asked students to “use their Post-its to mark an important sentence.” She reminded students that these sentences should be “what the paragraph is about.” She then asked students to share their Post-it sentences. One student, Gina, who is a reader who struggles, raised her hand and said, “Ecosystems can be found all over.” Mrs. White responded, “That is a very true statement – a good fact. Is there a sentence that might be more specific about the section?” Another student raised his hand and said, “There are living and non-living things in an eco-system.” Mrs. White asked Gina what she thought of that sentence, and Gina said, “That is what the paragraph was about.” Mrs. White wrote the main idea of the paragraph on the board and instructed students to “write what is on the board and then move on to paragraph three.”

Classroom Environment

I found Mrs. White’s classroom bright and colorful with many pictures and posters in the room. Student work on bulletin boards made the environment feel welcoming and supportive of students. In our interview, Mrs. White explained, “I like to have pictures up on the walls that are relevant to what we are currently learning. That is why I have pictures of different ecosystems on the board.” Mrs. White also had some teacher made posters that she explained she made with students. These posters (about 43 altogether) had classroom rules, school rules, expectations in the classroom, and strategies for reading, writing, and math. For example, Mrs. White had one poster (see Figure 4.3) that explained what was expected of the teacher and
Mrs. White explained that she and the students made the poster during the second week of school as a reminder of what was expected during independent reading time.

During both of my observations (2/15/12 & 2/16/12) students worked at their desks and on the carpet during whole group instruction. Mrs. White used the ELMO so the students could follow her reading and see how she wanted them to use their Post-its notes to identify the main idea of paragraphs.

Student desks were arranged in a U-shape in the middle of the classroom with three student desks in the middle of the U. The classroom schedule was posted near the door on a bulletin board. I noticed during my observation that Mrs. White had the students she identified as struggling the most (four students) seated near the front of the room and separated from each other. During our interview she mentioned she did this “because many of my students are highly distractible so I did my best to separate them so they do not become distractions to each other.”

There were four laptop computers located in the back of the room for students to use during independent work time.

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There were four laptop computers located in the back of the room for students to use during independent work time.
to use for writing, or to visit websites such as FunBrain, Brain Pop Jr., and various other websites that are recommended by colleagues. A teacher table used for conferencing and small group instruction was located on the side of the room by the windows. The consultant teacher was in the classroom supporting the teacher and the students throughout both of my observations.

As evidenced by the amount of student work being celebrated on the wall, the students’ participation and respect shown for each other and Mrs. White, I perceived the emotional environment of the classroom was safe and supportive of students’ independence and interest.

I perceived that Mrs. White respected student space and interest as evidenced by the students’ individual work spaces that had various pencil holders and decorative pictures that resembled the student. For example, one student had a pink toilet paper pencil holder with three wiggly plastic creatures glued around it. Students showed their respect for Mrs. White by acting appropriately by not interrupting her and contributing to the classroom discussions and activities.

Students were able to choose how they wanted to mark the main idea in paragraphs by using different colored Post it notes, highlighter tape, and mini plastic animals that served as pointers. Mrs. Day recognizes her students’ difficulty with attention and that she

Plans for short increments of instruction – usually no longer than thirty minutes at a time. I give my students many brain breaks which I have found help with their attention and engagement during lessons. During
these five minute breaks, students play with Legos, read, take
bathroom breaks, talk with each other, etc. (2/16/12)

**Student Behaviors**

During both of my observations (2/15/12 & 2/16/12) of whole group
instruction, I was able to closely observe the entire class. I walked around the room
throughout both observations to examine student work, the students’ level of
engagement, and their struggles. I noticed in both observations that some of the
students who Mrs. White had pointed out to me as students who struggle were very
off task and unable to keep up with their peers. Mrs. White saw this too as she moved
around the classroom and provided the students with extra wait time, but these
students still seemed to be lost in the reading.

During my first observation on 2/15/12 Mrs. White had students read
independently, come up with main idea sentence, and then share as a group. I noticed
at least four students who struggled to complete the reading in time the rest of the
class was ready to share their main idea sentences. This seemed frustrating to some
students as I observed one student sigh at least ten times during the lesson, putting his
head down on his desk at one point. I noticed that the students who were struggling
to keep up benefited from Mrs. White writing the main idea sentences on the board.
This helped the students who were behind catch up and participate in the discussions.
For example, I noticed that Andrew had not yet picked his main idea sentence, but
was able to attend to the lesson. This was evident when Mrs. White asked him to
share a main idea sentence he came up with his own sentence that summarized the paragraph, “non-living things are things like rocks and dirt.”

Throughout both whole group lessons I observed how Mrs. White continually reinforced her students’ thinking by providing specific feedback and asking questions that extended their learning. For example, when Andrew shared his main idea sentence, Mrs. White said, “Those are two good examples of non-living things. Who can tell me why those things are non-living examples?”

Some of the off task student behaviors I observed were students tapping pencils, playing with things in desk, shuffling through papers, putting their head down on desk, talking with a neighbor, and playing with their chair. I observed that Mrs. White attended to these behaviors usually in a non-verbal way. Often she used her presence as a deterrent for those behaviors. By standing near a student who was off task usually got their attention and the student would stop the distracting behavior. On 2/16/12, I observed Mrs. White ask students several times, “Are you with me?” to check in with individual students and focus their attention. During both observations (2/15/12 and 2/16/12), I observed Mrs. White ask students to respond kinesthetically. For example, she asked them to “Tug your ear if you hear me” or “Tap your shoulder if you agree.” I observed every student in the classroom participate when she asked students to respond in this way. When she asked students to raise their hands to add to the discussion there was much less participation from the students. When I asked her why she did this in our interview she responded, “Many students in my class have attentional issues and are constantly fidgeting so I just focus
their fidgeting and use it as a way for them to respond to me.”

Teacher Instructional Strategies

Mrs. White explained that she plans her literacy lessons by consulting with her grade level team and the consultant teacher to discuss expectations and grade level plans. She said that she collects data (running records and observations) of students’ reading weekly during conferences and uses that data to plan her instruction. “I differentiate books, levels, length, pacing, and book topics based on students’ interests, strengths, and abilities,” Mrs. White explained on 2/16/12. During both observations, I noticed an abundance of books ranging in genres, levels, authors, series, and length available to students. When I asked Mrs. White what materials she uses to plan her instruction she said, “I use Fountas and Pinnell, Words Their Way (2008), Word Journeys (2000), Reading A-Z, SMARTboard Exchange, and ideas from other colleagues to support student learning and instruction in the classroom.”

Mrs. White explained that during both large and small group instruction she uses, Scaffolding, modeling, wait time, real life examples to connect to student lives, and high interest books and topics to teach strategies and skills. For example, Joey, has low comprehension and not a lot of motivation in reading. I picked a book of high interest to him, about sharks, and together we explored the non-fiction text features, author’s purpose, and different facts and details about sharks. This helped him
realize all of the information books give us and how much you can learn from them. It also helped practice a strategy and skill while reading something interesting to him. (2/16/12)

During her ELA block, Mrs. White explained that she begins with whole group instruction reviewing or teaching a reading skill. For example, during my observation on 2/16/12 Mrs. White reviewed the concept of main idea and introduced the restate question, answer questions, supporting details, and conclusion (RASC) model to students for organizing main idea and details. Mrs. White then asked students to “listen as I read to learn about sea ecosystems. While I am reading think about the meaning of an ecosystem and what is in one.” Mrs. White read the text modeling appropriate fluency and expression and then asked the students to restate the question, “What is an ecosystem?” Gina answered; “The word ecosystem needs to be in it!” Mrs. White responded, “Yes, great. What else needs to be in a restatement?”

During this lesson, Mrs. White wrote the students’ responses on the board and had students copy them into their notebooks. Mrs. White gave students a few minutes to copy responses and then asked them to “share your restatements with a neighbor.” She used reinforcement for Sylvia, a reader who struggles with comprehension, by saying, “I love seeing Sylvia writing and working hard.” Sylvia beamed and continued working while others around her who were off task began writing again.

Mrs. White stated in our interview that she uses a lot of small group instruction in groups of three to four students to teach, review, and reinforce reading strategies and skills according to students’ needs and abilities. She mentioned, “I
continually change my groups in order to be the most effective with my students and congruent in their learning needs.” When Mrs. White is working with students in small groups other students are reading independently, reading to a buddy, writing, spelling, and doing word work. She provides students with the option to choose what they do during reading as long as they are able to progress towards a goal she has set for them. They are expected to build stamina with their reading and read each day for at least forty-five minutes. Students are held accountable through individual conferences with Mrs. White at the end of the week. During this meeting the student and Mrs. White also discuss expectations for the following week. For example, Bobby had a goal of finishing a writing piece on his vacation to Florida this past week. Together Bobby and Mrs. White made the goal on the Friday before. This allowed the two to meet again on the Friday after the conference and review his writing together. Mrs. White explained,

This system works for our classroom because students are able to be independent, knowing that they will be held accountable for their work at the end of the week. The students plan their learning with some guidance for me. This system also helps me understand what students are interested in and how they view themselves as learners. (2/16/12)

Mrs. White explained that she uses “more direct, explicit instruction in small groups that will meet more often” for students who struggle with reading. In addition, Mrs. White also has four regular parent volunteers who help support student learning. She has weekly, monthly, and quarterly communication with parents in order to track
student progress. She explained, “I meet with Gina’s parents on a monthly basis because Gina’s mom wants to learn strategies and skills that she could use at home to help support Gina.” Mrs. White supports Gina’s mom by informing her of her Gina’s progress, what strategies she is learning, and what content they are studying.

Mrs. White includes writing into daily activities and stated that in her experience she has found that students who struggle with reading often struggle with writing too. Mrs. White stated, “Not necessarily coming up with ideas, but manipulating sentence structure definitely. I help these students by connecting reading and writing and having more conferences with these students.”

Summary

I observed Mrs. White, who is a twelve year veteran teacher in fourth grade, during two 90 minute English Language Arts blocks on 2/15/12 and 2/16/12. During my time in her classroom I was able to observe whole group instruction and independent practice. Mrs. White uses her knowledge of students and collaborates with a consultant teacher to discuss student goals, abilities, needs, and future instruction. Mrs. White says this is a beneficial way to plan because, “two heads are better than one.”

In order to meet her students’ needs Mrs. White differentiates instruction, has flexible groupings of students, and uses her reading assessments to guide individual instruction for students. She also tries to find books that will be of interest to students who struggle with reading in order to increase their motivation to read. In addition,
Mrs. White meets more often with students who struggle in order to give them more direct instruction. Mrs. White’s students have multiple opportunities throughout the school day to read books at their independent levels. She uses instructional level texts in guided reading groups that have less than five students and are grouped according to ability, interests, and needs. Mrs. White gives students have many times throughout the day for “brain breaks” in order to break up learning tasks. Mrs. White explained that she regularly communicates with parents in order to keep them up to date with learning in the classroom and finds that regular communication allows parents to feel more comfortable in helping their children at home.

Mrs. Kay: Fourth Grade Teacher

“Connecting reading to personal interest and experiences can be powerful for readers who struggle.”

-Mrs. Kay, 3/8/12

Mrs. Kay has been teaching for fourteen years and has taught third and fourth grade. She has taught fourth grade for seven years. Last year she looped with her students from third grade. Mrs. Kay stated, “I like looping with students because I find that we can get involved in learning faster and easier because we all know each other and the student’s know what is expected of them and what to expect in the classroom” (Interview 3/8/12). Mrs. Kay has the support of a consultant teacher during her English Language Arts and math blocks to support six of her twenty four
students (twelve girls and twelve boys) who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). She

Mrs. Kay has three students who read at a Level L, which is an end of second grade reading level as determined with the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (2009). Mrs. Kay also has some students who read at a Level X, which is a sixth grade reading level. Mrs. Kay explained, “Most of my students are meeting grade level expectations in reading, but I do have a few who are below and a few who are higher than grade level.” There are students with multiple disabilities in Mrs. Kay’s classroom including one student with a traumatic brain injury, three students who have been classified with learning disabilities, and two students diagnosed with autism.

On March 6, 2012 I sat on the side of Mrs. Kay’s classroom during a whole group reading lesson focused on science vocabulary. Students were seated at their desks with their science textbooks out. On the whiteboard in the front of the room Mrs. Kay had written: What is an ecosystem? Ecosystem Community Non-living Living

Each vocabulary word was in a different paragraph in the text and Mrs. Kay asked students to read and look for the words and their definition asking, “Ready for paragraph 2? Ok, let’s look for our word – living, what does that word mean?” While students read, Mrs. Kay walked around the classroom monitoring and checking in with students who struggle with reading. After several minutes, Mrs. Kay said to Riley, a student who she knows struggles with reading, “Riley, what do you think?”
Riley responded, “It’s like plants and flowers and animals.” Mrs. Kay confirmed Riley’s answer saying, “Great! That is exactly what it is. Living things are alive and the living part of an ecosystem.”

Mrs. Kay copied the definitions on the board as students copied them into their notebooks. When the students were finished writing the definitions the class chorally read the rest of the chapter together. Mrs. Kay then said, “You all did a fantastic job finding vocabulary words and defining them. Now please draw a picture that goes with your definition.” One student, Amy, who has been diagnosed with autism, shouted out, “I love drawing!” Mrs. Kay responded, “That’s why we do it Amy, just make sure your drawing represents your definition.” While students were drawing their pictures, Mrs. Kay circled around the room to monitor students’ understanding of the task. I observed her checking in with students asking, “What does that term mean?” or “Can you give me an example of that?”

**Classroom Environment**

In Mrs. Kay’s classroom there were twenty four desks in a U-shape facing the white board located at the front of the room. On the side of the room near the windows is a SMARTboard in front of a circle carpet with a map of United States on it. Mrs. Kay explained, “We use the SMARTboard for a lot of interactive read alouds, shared writing, interactive writing, news articles, pictures to connect reading, and to watch videos.”

On the walls were many pictures related to topics the students have or are
studying, strategy posters for reading, writing, and math, and maps of the United States and New York State. There were also student drawings of communities displayed around the room. Mrs. Kay indicated that they had “just started studying ecosystems and to introduce the topic students drew pictures of their own communities. Tomorrow we are going to go back to our drawings and label living and non-living things.”

On the back wall near four lap tops that were stacked on a bookshelf Mrs. Kay had a word wall on a big piece of paper that was labeled “WOW Words.” I noticed that the words on the wall were Tier 2 and 3 (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009) words such as “merchant,” “outrageous,” “gigantic,” “mediate,” and “domestic.” Mrs. Kay explained,

The students add words to the WOW list when we come across Tier 2 or 3 vocabulary words in our textbooks or in our books. We talk together as a group about new vocabulary words and definitions and then we encourage each other to use them in daily conversations. I have noticed that students use some of the words on our list in their conversations, but it is hard when the words are more content specific.

(3/8/12)

During my interview with Mrs. Kay she told me,

I change up the pictures around the room on a regular basis. I like students to connect the pictures to content. For example, we are currently learning about ecosystems and I have a bulletin board behind
my guided reading table with pictures of ecosystems, communities, living, and non-living things that are also labeled for students to reference. (3/8/12)

During my second observation on 3/8/12, Mrs. Kay was conducting a guided reading group while other students were working on letters, reading, spelling, and cursive independently. The text the four students were reading in the guided reading group was about a mountain ecosystem. This was Mrs. Kay’s lowest reading group. She reviewed what the students had learned from the days before about ecosystems and then help the students connect their knowledge to the information on the bulletin board about ecosystems behind her. The students used the information on the bulletin board during the text introduction by saying, “Living things are plants and animals – just like the picture on the board.” I believe that the students were able to visualize definitions by using the information on Mrs. Kay’s board.

I observed that the students in Mrs. Kay’s classroom were familiar, confident and engaged with the classroom routine. These behaviors were evident during my second observation as the students were not engaged in a whole group lesson, but still understood what was expected and were able to work independently on their individual literacy tasks. “Each child is responsible for filling out a literacy log every week,” Mrs. Kay explained. The log is similar to Figure 4.4:
Mrs. Kay stated, “Students have an hour and a half each school day for literacy and must check the box of every task they do during that time. On Fridays I collect the logs as a way to assess student work, check in with students, and monitor their progress on classroom work.” When students read to self or read to a buddy they also write about their reading using graphic organizers or their writing journal. “I give my students choices because it allows them to be in control and motivated for their own learning,” Mrs. Kay explained.

During both of my observations (3/6/12 & 3/8/12) in Mrs. Kay’s classroom she used real life examples to help her students relate the new vocabulary and concepts to their previous learning and to help the students connect the new learning to their experiences. For example, in my first observation (3/6/12) Mrs. Kay invited the students connect the current learning about (ecosystems) to their previous learning
when she said, “Thinking about what you learned about last year.” Amy shouted out, “Rainforests!” Mrs. Kay said, “Great, and what kind of ecosystems would you think there would be in a rainforest?” Amy, Jesse, Jack, and Michelle shouted out, respectively, “Canopy!” “Trees!” “Underground.” “In the water.”

During my second observation (3/8/12), Mrs. Kay helped the students connect what they were learning about communities to their experiences when she asked, “What kind of communities do you think you could find in your backyard?” One student said, “Ants.” Another said, “Bats.” A third student said, “Deer.” Mrs. Kay then said, “Those are some good examples. Today we are going to learn about a mountain ecosystem and the different communities it has.”

**Student Behaviors**

During both of my observations I was able to closely observe students in whole group lessons and a short twenty minute small group lesson. I walked around the room as a non-participant to more closely examine student work, their engagement, struggles, and other behaviors. I noticed in both observations (3/6/12 & 3/8/12) that students who Mrs. Kay had previously identified as struggling were engaging in off task behaviors such as fidgeting with things in their desk or on top of their desk, getting up for a drink three of four times, tapping their pencils, or staring out the window. During both observations, Mrs. Kay also noticed the students’ off task behaviors and addressed them by using close proximity to distracted students,
pointing to where students should be working in their notebooks, and simply asking, “Do you understand?” She would also repeat directions three to four times and ask students to repeat directions to her.

I did observe that when the students were all together in a smaller guided reading group they were able to better attend and participate in group discussions about the text. In the small setting, the students were not able to fidget with as many things as they were able to when they were seated at their desks because there was not much available to them.

During my first observation on 3/6/12 I noticed that the students who struggled with reading read slower than their peers and so they needed additional time to finish the text. Mrs. Kay gave students as much time as they needed and would only move forward when she had determined, by making eye contact, that every student was finished. I watched Mrs. Kay as she walked around the room and checked in with each student. When she got to Riley who was staring out the window, she asked, “Did you find that word? What does community mean?” These two prompts refocused Riley who answered, “Ummmm…it’s here right? I’m not too sure what it means.” Mrs. Kay then responded, “I’m so glad that you were able to find the word community. Now let’s see if we can understand the meaning by reading sentences around the word.” Riley followed Mrs. Kay’s advice and was able to gain meaning, “Oh! It means where things live – like I live in the community of Webster.”

During my second observation one of the students who is reading at a Level L asked, “Are rocks a living part of a community?” Mrs. Kay answered, “Well, you are
right rocks would be in a mountain ecosystem, but are they living and breathing?"

The student said, "Oh no. So that means they are non-living?" I noticed that Mrs. Kay did not give students direct answers to their questions, but gave them extra wait time and specific prompts so they could gain their own understanding of things.

**Teacher Instructional Strategies**

When planning for literacy lessons during the whole group ELA block, Mrs. Kay meets with the consultant teacher to discuss students’ needs, abilities, progress, and Common Core standards. “Together Mrs. Watson (the consultant teacher) and I review our running records, our knowledge of student interests, and the content being learned in other subjects. Then we decide what our students need to learn and prioritize learning.” In addition to students’ guided reading groups, Mrs. Watson works in a small reading group with some of the students who struggle with reading and vocabulary to preview new books or topics in order to build their background knowledge.

The ELA block in Mrs. Kay’s classroom is an hour and a half long in the morning before lunch. Students work independently according to their literacy charts. Mrs. Kay explained,

Students who are reading to themselves or with a buddy like to read on bean bag chairs, in the hallway, or on the rug. Usually if students are writing or working in their cursive books they will sit at their desks, but I let them choose what works best for them. (3/8/12)
Students meet in one on one conferences with Mrs. Kay at least once every other week to discuss their progress and goals. Mrs. Kay stated, “Students make goals with me throughout the school year according to their abilities, strengths, and interests.” At the beginning of the year, Mrs. Kay discusses with students what her goals are for them and as the students’ progress they begin to make their own personal goals they want to attain. Every student in her classroom has a reading stamina goal for the end of the year. This goal is forty-five minutes of independent reading. Mrs. Kay stated, “It is important for students to build their stamina in reading, not only for test taking but also because the longer they are reading a book the more engaged they get in the story,” (3/8/12). All of the goals are recorded on goal sheets in individual student’s book bins. Mrs. Kay told me, “Student’s book bins contain books that are the student’s independent reading level and their personal goal sheets so they can track their own progress and refer to their goals when reading.”

Mrs. Kay explained,

I meet with my lower reading groups more often (at least twice a week) and try to use books in our guided reading groups that students can connect to learning in the classroom. I think this is beneficial for students because they are getting a well-rounded experience. (3/8/12) For example, students are learning about ecosystems in the classroom and Mrs. Kay has been selecting non-fiction articles about ecosystems to read in guided reading groups. This is beneficial because students are able to access grade level information and content at their own instructional levels. In the small guided reading groups Mrs.
Kay explained that she “is able to use more modeling, give more direct instruction, and use a slower pace.”

Mrs. Kay expects students to write daily whether they are responding to prompts, free writing, or responding to their reading in their individual writing journals. She stated,

I do find that students who struggle with reading also struggle with writing. Because reading and writing are reciprocal processes I try to provide students with multiple opportunities for both that also connect each other. Just like with their reading and writing response journals. (3/8/12)

In order to support students who struggle with reading and writing Mrs. Kay explained,

I provide my students with multiple opportunities for reading and writing. I give my students choice in achieving goals because I believe it helps student motivation and engagement. I also believe in continuous progress monitoring and observations of student behavior in order to track students and check their understandings. (3/8/12)

Mrs. Kay told me that she administers a running record on her ten lowest students once a week. For the other fourteen students, Mrs. Kay administers a running record at least twice a month.
Summary

I observed Mrs. Kay on 3/6/12 and 3/8/12 during whole group reading and writing instruction as well as small group reading and independent practice. Mrs. Kay is an experienced fourth grade teaching professional who has been teaching for fourteen years with seven of those years in the fourth grade. In order to plan for her literacy instruction Mrs. Kay meets with the Mrs. Watson (consultant teacher) at least once a week to discuss individual student’s needs, abilities, data, and interests. They discuss lesson objectives and how they can help students to succeed and meet individualized learning goals.

Mrs. Kay supports her students who struggle with reading and writing by directly instructing students in small guided reading groups. She slows down the pace, builds their background knowledge, and addresses student’s individual needs. She has regular reading and writing conferences with students who struggle in order to support their individual needs.

Mrs. Luck: Fifth Grade Teacher

“Goal setting in reading and writing helps raise student awareness of their own abilities and needs.”

-Mrs. Luck, 2/15/12

Mrs. Luck has been teaching for eighteen years in all grades K-6. Last year she taught fourth grade and looped with her students into the fifth grade this year. She has taught fifth grade for a total of three years. Mrs. Luck has twenty three students
(eleven boys and twelve girls), including four students who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and two students who have a 504 plan. One of the students with an IEP is diagnosed with multiple disabilities, two of the students have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and the other student is diagnosed with a learning disability. One of the students with a 504 plan is diagnosed as emotionally disturbed and the other student has a hearing disability.

Mrs. Luck has a support of a consultant teacher during ELA and math and a classroom aide who provides services to one student throughout the day.

Mrs. Luck’s students’ reading abilities range from Fountas and Pinnell’s Level J (beginning of second grade) to Z (eighth grade).

During my first observation on February 10, 2012, I sat on the side of the classroom behind two students with IEP who were both reading at a Level J. All of the students were on the carpet with a clipboard in hand looking at the SMARTboard. Enlarged on the SMARTboard was a text about bullying, the students also had a copy of on their clipboards. The student who had been identified with having multiple disabilities, Hannah, was lying down in the middle of the carpet with the clipboard next to her. Other students were sitting around her or on stools and random chairs near the carpet. Students were reading aloud the text while starring key sentences on their own copy. Hannah was listening, but was not starring anything on her paper. Mrs. Luck told Hannah three times to “Please sit up.” Hannah listened and sat on a nearby chair. Her aide came over to help her identify the key sentences.

Mrs. Luck sat near three students she had identified as readers who struggle:
Jason, Michaela, and David. I observed her guiding the students and refocusing them using her finger to point to the section they were supposed to be reading when their attention was distracted by another student or a noise. Mrs. Luck asked Michaela, “What does aggressive mean?” I recognized that Mrs. Luck took this as a teachable moment and stopped the reading to ask the question to the whole class. Jason raised his hand and said, “Like when someone is running fast?” A few students giggled, but Mrs. Luck quickly answered Jason saying, “Aggressive could be compared to running, but that is not quite the definition.” No one else raised their hand so Mrs. Luck explained aggressive as “an attacking behavior.” David shouted out, “Like when someone kills someone else?” Mrs. Luck confirmed his answer and asked for other examples of aggressive behavior. One student said, “Fist fights!” Another student said, “When my dog wrestles with the neighbor’s dog.” Mrs. Luck then turned towards Michaela and asked, “Do you better understand what aggressive means?” Michaela nodded and when asked for an example she said, “If I beat up my brother that would be aggressive?” Mrs. Luck said, “Great example! John, can you continue reading?”

Classroom Environment

The walls of Mrs. Luck’s classroom contained many posters and schedules. One wall had a decorated puzzle piece for every student. When I asked about them, Mrs. Luck stated, “The students created a puzzle piece for themselves on the first day of school with drawings that represented themselves. It symbolizes that we all fit
together.” There was a white board the length of one side of the room, student
cubbies on another side, windows on one side, and a SMARTboard on the back wall.
There were many books that were categorized in bins and labeled with Fountas and
Pinnell (2009) levels. Mrs. Luck explained,

I wanted to encourage students to choose “just right” books and share
their reading levels with them. I think organizing my books this way is
a good way to support student’s independence in book choices that are
appropriate for them. (2/15/12)

During my interview with Mrs. Luck she explained that she uses the
SMARTboard to enlarge text during the whole group reading, to show videos, to
engage in interactive writing activities, to read poems, to listen to stories, and to play
games. Mrs. Luck said,

I also use a timer from the internet that I put on the SMARTboard
when students are reading so that they know how long they are
expected to read. This has been effective in building stamina in my
classroom because students can track how long they can read for.

(2/15/12)

There are four lap top computers that students use to complete writing
assignments, play games to extend learning, and conduct research. For example, the
students had just finished reading a book about George Eastman and were able to
show their learning through writing, using Microsoft Word or PowerPoint. Students
were encouraged by Mrs. Luck to extend their learning by finding answers to
questions they had on the Internet. Mrs. Luck explained,

There is such a wide range of abilities in my classroom that I have to offer my students choices in order to meet their needs. I find this to be very effective with my students and given choice they tend to have a more positive attitude about assignments. (2/15/12)

On the side of the classroom near the window there were individual student book bins filled with what Mrs. Luck described as,

4-5 books at their independent level and their writing journal. Students are expected to read independently every day for at least a half hour and then spend ten minutes writing about what they read. The students and I write back and forth in their writing journals. I find this is a great way to check in with students and better understand their thinking.

This allows me to be able to give students specific prompts or ask questions that extends student thinking. For example, if I think a student needs to work on connecting texts I might ask how the text he/she is reading is similar to a different text I know he/she has read. (2/15/12)

Mrs. Luck usually collects writing journals on Fridays and gives them back to students on Mondays. In addition, Mrs. Luck has a weekly one on one conference with students where she listens to them read and then asks specific prompts or questions to get students to use higher level thinking skills such as reflecting, connecting, or analyzing during reading. Mrs. Luck explained, “How I conduct my
reading conferences depends on what my students needs are and what goals they have set.” Each student creates his/her own reading goals and reflects upon the goals during conference time.

During both of my observations in Mrs. Luck’s classroom, the consultant teacher was present and meeting with small groups of students or supporting students one on one at their desks or on the carpet. During the second observation on 2/16/12, Mrs. Luck read a story aloud and then modeled the next big project the students were to be working on which was writing letters back and forth between another fifth grade class discussing a book that the two students were reading at their independent level. I noticed that the consultant teacher gave the requirements for the letter and an example to each of the six students she serviced. When I asked Mrs. Luck about this she explained,

We try to modify assignments for the students who need extra support in our classroom so that the students are still doing the same thing as others, still accessing grade level expectations, but have more tools to do so. The students who got the extra sheet with requirements and an example learn better from visual cues. I will put the requirements on the board for everyone to see, but it helps those specific students to have something right in front of them. (2/15/12)

I perceived the emotional environment in Mrs. Luck’s classroom as inviting, accepting, and supportive of students. Mrs. Luck has a very diverse classroom with a range of reading abilities, and physical and mental disabilities. I perceived that the
students are very comfortable with each other and support each other. When Hannah was reading out loud to the whole class during my first observation on 2/10/12 and was stuck on a word I watched three students jump to her rescue and show her how to break apart the word. When I asked about her classroom Mrs. Luck said,

My students are very used to each other because most of them have been together since Kindergarten. I have been amazed this year at how helpful they are to one another and how they all treat each other as equals despite their differences. (2/15/12)

During both observations, I noticed that the students were very familiar with the classroom routine and knew the expectations and rules. Mrs. Luck reflected,

I try to help my students become responsible for their own learning. We set goals together in our one on one conference and talk about things that need to be done, but students are in charge of getting the work done themselves at their own pace. (2/15/12)

During both observations, I noticed how Mrs. Luck connected reading to real life and used a lot of modeling and think aloud, which sparked student to think of a question no one had previously answered. For example, during my first observation when the students were discussing bullying, Mrs. Luck asked her students, “What is an example of bullying?” No one raised their hands. Mrs. Luck followed with, “Can you think of a time when you or someone you know has been bullied? What was the situation? How did that make you feel?” Instantly after she asked these questions, five hands went up.
**Student Behaviors**

During both of my observations I closely observed student behaviors during whole group reading instruction. I frequently walked around the room in order to understand the students’ behaviors, their struggles, and their successes. I noticed during both observations that the students Mrs. Luck had identified as readers who struggle were off task often during whole group instruction. Hannah was often lying on the ground during instruction and at one point started rolling on the carpet. Jason and David were often distracted by their peers, but also stared out the windows and fidgeted with things in their pockets. Michaela had a glazed look in her eyes during both observations and often played with her shirt. Jordan was constantly touching other students or talking.

When I asked Mrs. Luck how she manages these behaviors she said,

I have found that some students just need to fidget during lessons and that’s okay. It becomes a problem when it is distracting to others. Often the students who are way off task already have problems with following multi-step directions so I will do a quick conference with these students after small group instruction to make sure students understand what is expected. (2/15/12)

During our interview, I asked Mrs. Luck how she knows when students are struggling with reading. She responded, “I can tell by their behaviors. Often these students will be off task, avoiding reading, or pretend to read.” In order to support these students Mrs. Luck “offers students multiple opportunities for reading and has a
classroom library with a wide variety of genres, topics, and levels. Students will improve their reading skills if they are given many opportunities to read texts at their independent level.” Mrs. Luck also told me that she can determine if students are struggling when they are reading with her in small groups or a one on one conference. She often administers running records with students to track their reading progress.

In our interview, Mrs. Luck said,

I have found that students in fifth grade usually struggle with comprehending grade level texts. In order to tackle this problem I will conference with these students more, create attainable short term goals with students, and meet with students in small group (four or five students) strategy groups. (2/15/12)

Mrs. Luck assesses students’ needs and abilities in one on one conferences with students and then will create strategy groups that reviews and/or teaches a reading skill that is needed by a group of students. For example, Mrs. Luck told me that she noticed in her conferences with students that many struggled when she asks them about an author’s purpose. As a result, Mrs. Luck created an author’s purpose strategy group that met twenty minutes every other day for two weeks. Mrs. Luck explained,

In the group we did a lot of repeated readings and discussions around author’s purpose. This supported students because they were able to get a lot of practice with the skill and I was also there to help students understand and guide their practice.” Students’ success with the skill
was evidenced during individual conferences with Mrs. Luck in the weeks following the strategy group. (2/15/12)

**Teacher Instructional Strategies**

Mrs. Luck and her consultant teacher plan literacy lessons together. Mrs. Luck explained, “Because we teach together we need to plan together in order to be effective for our students.” Together the two teachers look at the Common Core Learning Standards and set those as outcomes. Then we work backward to figure out what we need to do in order to meet those standards. We also take into account student abilities, interests, individual goals, and struggles in order to plan how challenging a lesson will be. (2/15/12)

Mrs. Luck and the consultant teacher meet twice a week during the students’ specials time to discuss students and lessons. Mrs. Luck continued, “We will also meet before and after school if necessary.” Mrs. Luck explained in our interview that she models her instruction by Fountas and Pinnell (2009) and Calkins’ (2008) principles.

Mrs. Luck structures her 90 minute reading block in the following way: half hour of read to self, 20-30 minutes of whole group instruction, and 30-40 minutes of independent time. During independent time students are responsible for filling out weekly checklists that include spelling, grammar, read to self, read to buddy, conferences, free write, and response writing. The students hand their weekly
checklists in to Mrs. Luck every Friday. She stated, “Students in my classroom are responsible for their own learning and can decide when and how they want to accomplish tasks. I have found this shared responsibility of learning results in students becoming more independent and insightful learners.” I asked Mrs. Luck how this works with students who struggle with reading. She responded,

I treat all of my students the same and expect the same from my students. However, students achieve goals by working at their independent levels, which is not the same for every student. The students who struggle respond best to this model because they are allowed to work at their own pace, their own level, and use their interests as motivation. (2/15/12)

Students in Mrs. Luck’s class create individual short term goals during one on one conferences with her that are based on student interests, strengths, and needs. For example, in January a student who struggles to read grade level text made a goal to be able to sequence events in a story after reading a text at his instructional level with ninety percent success. In order to help the student meet this goal Mrs. Luck suggested the he start by using four to five Post-its to write down important events during reading. When he was done reading a text the student would mix up the Post-it’s and then put them back in sequential order. Mrs. Luck checked in with the student during small group and individual conferences to help track his progress. In conferences the student reflected on his goal and talked about his progress. Mrs. Luck further explained,
After two or three weeks using Post-it notes, Jason stopped using them and wrote down specific events after reading a text. Jason did a great job achieving this goal and I have witnessed his overall comprehension of texts improve after he worked on this goal. (2/15/12)

When I asked Mrs. Luck how she supports students who struggle she replied, I support students who struggle with reading and writing by giving them a lot of sustained independent reading time and goal setting. Setting goals raises student awareness of themselves as readers and provides little steps to get there. (2/15/12)

Mrs. Luck differentiates instruction according to “student readiness.” She meets more often with students who struggle with reading and writing and uses choice to engage and motivate them.

When I asked if she finds students who struggle with reading also struggle with writing she answered, “Usually yes, but it depends on what the reading deficit is. Decoding problems usually interferes with writing mechanics. One of my students, Rachel, is a great writer who has good ideas but struggles with reading comprehension.” In order to support Rachel, Mrs. Luck conferences with her more often (at least once a week) and offers her multiple ways to show comprehension. Mrs. Luck said that Rachel uses many different strategies to help herself comprehend such as Post- its during reading and graphic organizers after reading to organize her thoughts. In their reading conferences Mrs. Luck told me that it helps Rachel immensely when they set a purpose for reading and give her three to four things to
think about during reading (e.g., connections, reflections, analysis).

Summary

I observed whole group lessons during 90 minute English Language Arts blocks in Mrs. Luck’s fifth grade classroom on 2/10/12 and 2/16/12. Mrs. Luck is an experienced teacher who has been teaching for eighteen years with three years of experience in fifth grade. Mrs. Luck has the benefit of working with a consultant teacher to plan and support the students in her classroom.

Mrs. Luck has students with a wide range of reading and writing abilities. In order to address their needs Mrs. Luck differentiates instruction, conferences with students individually, and creates goals with students during conferences. She works with students to track their progress towards goals sharing results from running records and observations of student behaviors. Mrs. Luck has a good rapport with students which helps her to better understand her students as learners and students. This knowledge helps her to choose books at their independent and instructional levels, build on their background knowledge, and pick books of interest to students.

Mrs. Filup: Second Grade Teacher

“Readers who struggle need practice and time spent reading text that is independent.”

-Mrs. Filup, 2/16/12

Mrs. Filup has been teaching for fifteen years and has been teaching second
grade for ten. She has also taught first grade. She has a range of readers in her classroom as assessed using the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Students’ reading levels range between a 6 (beginning of first grade) and a 40 (fourth grade level). None of the twenty-two students (ten boys and twelve girls) in her classroom have been diagnosed with any disabilities.

I interviewed Mrs. Filup on 2/16/12 in the afternoon. We sat in the back of her room at her kidney shaped guided reading table. Mrs. Filup explained that in her experience, “second graders mostly struggle with fluency and comprehension.” In order to support and plan for these students, Mrs. Filup said she focuses “on what students need.” Mrs. Filup explained, “I listen to my students read daily in guided reading groups, small groups, and one on one instruction. I use DRAs, AIMSweb, and observational notes to track my student’s progress in reading” (Interview 2/16/12).

Classroom Environment

I perceived that Mrs. Filup’s classroom was set up in a way that celebrated literacy and students. The window sill had student made dioramas of a variety of animal homes such as skunks, squirrels, mountain goats, and snakes. The walls around the classroom were filled with student work and posters with reading strategies, word families, reading skills, and math and writing strategies on them. Figure 4.5 represents a teacher made poster explaining reading fluency.
Mrs. Filup explained that “the students and I made that a few weeks into the school year because I found out through my reading conferences many students were struggling with fluency and did not know what it was or how to be fluent.”

During our interview I noticed that were a lot of books and book bins behind the reading table. I asked Mrs. Filup what kinds of books were in the book bins and she replied, “Familiar books the students have been taught with in guided reading groups.” Mrs. Filup told me she levels her books according to DRA levels and uses those in guided reading groups that have three to four students in them. She explained,

I try to find books that are at student’s instructional levels and that will be interesting for them for guided reading groups. Students are motivated to read if they are interested in the topic. I also use comprehension cards, trade books, Reading A-Z books, and fluency passages. (2/16/12)

Mrs. Filup explained that all of the materials she uses are “based on my students’ experiences and needs.” Students also had their own personal book bins
where they had books at their independent levels for independent reading time. The classroom library was of abundance with books all over the room. There was a central area near the rug on the side of the room where most of the books were clustered. The books were categorized by author, genre, series, and topic in clear medium-sized bins. Mrs. Filup articulated,

I like to keep the books in bins because it makes it easy to organize, use for instruction, and find what you are looking for. I categorized my books the way I do because I believe students should have access to a wide variety of books, but be able to easily find what they are looking for. (2/16/12)

Student desks were arranged in small groups of four with two groups of five. There were lap-top computers on a back counter in the classroom. Mrs. Filup explained,

Students at this age are learning how to appropriately use a computer. Students use websites such as Raz-Kids and Starfall for independent skill work and reading. The computer programs we use are spread out throughout the year and are modeled at before students use the programs independently in the computer lab using the SMARTboard. (2/16/12)

**Student Behaviors**

During our interview, Mrs. Filup said, “Students who struggle with reading
usually struggle with fluency – knowing sight words and patterns in words and also comprehension strategies.” In order to support these students Mrs. Filup explained, I allow my students to have a lot of repeated practice with books at their independent level or books they are familiar with in order to improve their fluency rate. I also prompt my students to keep their eyes on the text. I incorporate skill work into reading. For example, I will pick a specific skill a group of students need to work on such as matching voice to print and during our guided reading group sessions for the week we will practice using our finger to match voice to print.

(2/16/12)

Mrs. Filup explained that she also believes that constant and meaningful feedback is important to helping students progress. Instead of saying “good job,” Mrs. Filup will say, “That was great reading, I really liked how you emphasized the sentences with exclamation points. It helped me to better understand how the character was feeling.”

When I asked her how she knows when students are struggling with reading she said, “I can usually tell through my reading assessments and observational notes of their reading behaviors.” Mrs. Filup addresses these struggles with more targeted, explicit, direct instruction in small strategy groups of three to four students or one on one instruction.
**Teacher Instructional Strategies**

Mrs. Filup plans her reading lessons based on students’ needs and experiences with literacy. For example, if a student is struggling with decoding strategies she might spend more time teaching, prompting, and reinforcing strategies in a more direct way than she did with a student who uses decoding strategies in a fluent way. Mrs. Filup revealed to me,

I use my colleagues at my grade level to plan literacy units and for help with some students. For example, I have a student who continues to struggle with comprehension and I am stuck in how to support him. I plan on bringing him up in our meeting on Friday to ask for ideas and strategies to further help this student. (2/16/12)

In both large and whole group settings, Mrs. Filup explained that she uses the “gradual release of responsibility model, a lot of modeling, and think alouds.” For example, when teaching about how to ask questions while reading she will read a book aloud to students and while she is reading she will ask questions out loud about what she is thinking as she reads in order to show students how a strategy that they can use while they are reading. She might then ask students for questions they had during the reading after she has modeled the strategy a few times.

Mrs. Filup structures her 90-minute reading block in the following way,

On Mondays we do whole group Reader’s Theatre to practice fluency and comprehension in an engaging way. We also read poems together on Mondays to discuss the different components of fluency. Tuesday
through Thursday I meet in reading groups based on abilities in needs. While I am meeting with students other students are working independently reading or writing. They also can be reading to a buddy when I am meeting with groups. On Fridays I have six to eight parent volunteers and we do centers. The volunteers do fluency, comprehension, and writing centers with students while I assess student’s reading progress. (2/16/12)

Mrs. Filup explained that she structured her reading block this way due to students’ needs for fluency instruction, direct instruction for comprehension, and in order to have on-going assessments of student reading.

In our interview Mrs. Filup stated,

We also do writing activities for at least one hour each week. I like to use what we are learning in our content area in writing. I usually conference with students one on one on writing pieces at least once each week. (2/16/12)

When I asked her if she finds that students who struggle with reading struggle with writing as well she said,

Usually, but it is very student dependent. I have one student who has great ideas and can write stories with details that are logical. However, he has very low reading fluency. We are currently working on his reading fluency in our guided reading group using repeated readings. (2/16/12)
Summary

On February 16, 2012, I interviewed Mrs. Filup in her second grade classroom in order to gain insights into how she plans for literacy instruction, her classroom environment, and what strategies she uses in the classroom. Mrs. Filup explained that she uses a variety of strategies in her classroom to differentiate to student’s individual needs. She plans for instruction by collaborating with other teachers at her grade level. They discuss strategies, individual students, and future instruction at these meetings. Mrs. Filup uses small guided reading groups to target specific skills or behaviors that are determined to be needed by the student. Mrs. Filup assesses students using a variety of assessments and uses these assessments to guide whole group and guided reading instruction. She uses read alouds to model positive reading behaviors and scaffolds reading instruction.

Mrs. Fitz: Fifth Grade Teacher

"Giving students choices lightens the feeling of responsibility students have and allows them to enjoy reading and writing."

-Mrs. Fitz, 1/24/12

Mrs. Fitz has been teaching for twelve years. She taught second grade for three years and fifth grade for nine. In her classroom of twenty-two students (eight girls and twelve boys), she has a range of readers as determined by the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS, 2009). Students’ reading levels range between I (end of first grade) and Z (seventh grade level). There are four students in
her classroom who have been classified with a learning disability; two of these students have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). One of her students has been diagnosed with autism.

Mrs. Fitz has the support of a consultant teacher during half of her two hour long English Language Arts block.

I interviewed Mrs. Fitz on 1/24/12 in the morning before school because that was the time that worked best for her. We sat at her circle shaped guided reading table. She explained, “I find that most students in fifth grade struggle with reading carefully in order to identify the main idea of a story with details” (1/24/12). In order to support students, Mrs. Fitz uses a lot of “modeling before independent practice, pre-teaches vocabulary, and breaks reading into smaller chunks for students who struggle.” For example, if students are learning about the Industrial Revolution, Mrs. Fitz will, in her small guided reading group of three to four students, go over specific vocabulary such as revolution, cotton gin, and industrialization prior to teaching about the Industrial Revolution. Mrs. Fitz explained, “I find that this is helpful for students who struggle with reading because it builds their background knowledge on a topic.” Mrs. Fitz assesses her students in literacy instruction using a variety of assessments such as Developmental Reading Assessments (DRA), AIMSweb, projects, response to reading, and the ELA Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP), which is a computer based test that assesses students with age-appropriate content three times throughout the school year.
Classroom Environment

I perceived that Mrs. Fitz’s classroom had a warm and inviting, welcoming feel. I noticed that the classroom was very organized with signs, such as ‘finished work’ and ‘notes to Mrs. Fitz’ on bins so that students had a clear understanding of where things in the classroom belonged. She had many posters (35) around the room that focused on literacy, math, and writing strategies (see Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6: Writing Process Poster

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Plan writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Edit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Conference with teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Revise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Conference with teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Write final draft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

She also had maps, a poster of the solar system, and a poster of an astronaut in her classroom. Student work was displayed on the walls and there were projects related to space on a counter on the side of the classroom. I also noticed that there were a lot of vocabulary words related to what they were studying in science on the wall. For example, one poster had a picture of an astronaut that said ‘astronaut – person who is trained to command, pilot, or serve as a team on a spacecraft.’ Mrs. Fitz told me, “I try to have posters with vocabulary relative to what we are learning in class in the content areas. I find this helps students use the vocabulary and have a better understanding of what we are learning about.”

During our interview I observed Mrs. Fitz’s book collection. Behind her
reading table she had bins labeled with names of her guided reading groups. In the bins she had books, which she said were “leveled by the students’ instructional reading levels.”

Mrs. Fitz meets with each guided reading group at least twice each week. She explained the process:

In my groups we discuss a reading strategy – like inferring – I will model the strategy, we work on it together through a text and then the students work independently at their desks answering questions or writing about the text. I use A-Z leveled books, Non-fiction books from the Benchmark Education Company (Bridges series), mini-articles, and a lot of non-fiction articles in my guided reading groups. (1/24/12)

Mrs. Fitz also has an extensive classroom library. The books are categorized according to topic, author, and series. She has a wide range of books including picture books and chapter books. Mrs. Fitz has a ‘book nook,’ which is a corner of the room that is sectioned off by bookshelves filled with books. In the nook there is a carpet and many pillows for students to “curl up with a good book.” Students have an independent reading time during the day when they can go to the ‘book nook.’ Mrs. Fitz explained, “Reading in the book nook motivates some students to read because it is a comfy and relaxing area devoted to reading.”

Students sit in four groups of five at a table with two groups arranged for six people. There were lap tops on a cart near the SMARTboard. Mrs. Fitz told me that
Students use the computers to research, type reports, and make PowerPoint’s. We just read *The Sign of the Beaver* (Speare, 1984) and students had to do a book project in groups of three. One group used the computer to find beaver and Indian pictures to put in their project. Another group made a PowerPoint about the book and why they would recommend it. I find that giving choice to students is very powerful and as long as they are all meeting the goal I can be flexible with how they get there. (1/24/12)

**Student Behaviors**

Mrs. Fitz stated during our interview that she sees that most students struggle with “getting words off the page or not understanding what they are reading.” In order to best support these students, Mrs. Fitz uses a “slower pace, meets more often in guided reading groups, teaches at their individual levels, gives repeated practice, and repeats and re-teaches reading skills and strategies.” She also explained that she tries to “have students learn in a classroom atmosphere where they feel comfortable asking a question.” Mrs. Fitz also supports students who struggle with reading by “giving them more space at their table than others, seated close to instruction, and giving them choices.” She pointed out that she tries to spread out readers who struggle in the classroom so they are not always grouped together or always with each other at the same table. Mrs. Fitz explained, “I do this to give them space and use more proficient readers as models.”
When I asked her how she knows when students are struggling with reading she said:

I use reading assessments such as DRAs, running records, plus my observations to inform me about a student’s specific reading behaviors. Then I use that information to focus my instruction, regroup students in guided reading groups, and discuss what I observed with the students in order to help them become more aware of their strengths and needs in reading. (1/24/12)

Mrs. Fitz said that she can also tell when students are struggling by watching their attention. She further explained,

If they are staring out the window, fidgeting with toys on their table, or talking with friends I can tell they are not engaged in the activity which may be because they do not comprehend it or cannot read it with accuracy. (1/24/12)

She told me that teacher proximity often refocuses student attention to lessons. She added, “This is one of the reasons I give students choice and try to use engaging activities in my lessons.”

**Teacher Instructional Strategies**

In order to plan her reading lessons Mrs. Fitz talks with her consultant teacher about appropriate books for her students. She explained, “My lessons are reflective of student needs, abilities, and interests.” For example, Mrs. Fitz has a student who is
struggling with reading comprehension so in order to help him develop strategies for comprehending she used books he was interested in which were *Magic Tree House Books* (Osborne, 1993). She explained:

A few weeks ago we started using post-it notes at the end of every chapter to summarize what happened. We focus on the main ideas from each chapter with at least one detail. Then we mix up the post-its and Johnny had to put them in order. This worked well for him and is still something he is working on. In the future I will have him use one post-it note for every three chapters, then one for every four chapters, and so on. Hopefully we will soon get to the point where he can summarize the whole book accurately using main ideas. (1/24/12)

Mrs. Fitz has a 120 minute reading block every day:

Students read independent books to themselves for thirty minutes every day while I walk around and try to listen to students read. Usually I can listen to ten students reading independently every other day. I have ninety minutes that I use for rotations. Students rotate between writing activities, independent work which is usually a response to text type thing, and 20-minute guided reading groups.

(1/24/12)

This large block of time lets Mrs. Fitz meet with her students individually and in small groups at least twice each week. Mrs. Fitz reported, “These blocks help me better understand my students as readers and writers and track their progress in
The students do writing activities every day. "Sometimes we write responses to our reading, we write stories, narratives, and informational pieces. We also write poems and short stories," Mrs. Fitz explained. Her students are able to choose what writing activity they would like to do during their independent time. She often has specific assignments that students work on for writing. For example, last month she had students writing five poems in two weeks. This month students are responsible for researching their favorite animal and writing an informational writing piece about it."

Mrs. Fitz does find that students who struggle with reading also struggle with writing. "I support students by modeling, doing shared writings, interactive writing, and by conferencing with students. I do find myself conferencing more with students who are struggling with the task," Mrs. Fitz disclosed.

**Summary**

I interviewed Mrs. Fitz in order to gain insights into her individual teaching practices, student population, and beliefs about teaching. Mrs. Fitz told me that she uses data from student assessments to guide her instruction. She uses a balanced literacy approach that includes shared writing, interactive writing, writing workshop, guided reading, and independent reading and writing. She tries to motivate students to read and write by using her knowledge of student interests and making comfortable spots in the classroom for the students to use. Mrs. Fitz uses technology to extend
student learning and also finds it motivating for students who struggle with reading and writing.

**Mrs. Waiters: Third Grade Teacher**

"I have to know my student's abilities and weaknesses in order to be able to teach them effectively."

-Mrs. Waiters, 2/08/12

Mrs. Waiters has been teaching for eleven years. She has taught third grade for eight. She has also taught fourth grade. She has a range of readers in her classroom as assessed using the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Students' reading levels range from a 4 (beginning of first grade) to an 18 (beginning of second grade level). None of the 25 students (thirteen girls and twelve boys) in Mrs. Waiter's classroom have been classified with a specific disability. She does receive consultant teacher support in ELA and math to support all students in her classroom who struggle. She explained that the “amount of students who struggle depends on the learning taking place. For example, Riley needs help with decoding during reading – but doesn’t need a lot of support in free writing.”

During our interview we sat in the back of the classroom at a rectangular reading table. It was an early morning before school started on 2/8/12. Mrs. Waiters explained that in third grade most students “struggle with word recognition which is the first signal to me that a student is struggling. I also find students struggle with
comprehension of text.” In order to support students with word recognition, Mrs. Waiters has students practice previously taught skills in multiple ways. For example, after she taught a lesson on blends, she had students play a game to reinforce the skill, work independently on worksheets she has created, and then she checked their use of the skill when they were reading independently and in a small group. She also records their use of skills using running records. She explained, “I will usually administer a running record on a student at least once a month, for my readers who struggle more I try to do a running record more often – like every two weeks.”

Classroom Environment

I perceived that Mrs. Waiter’s classroom reflected the students in her classroom. The students’ work and current topics they were learning about were on the walls, the ceiling, and on the whiteboards. Mrs. Waiters was currently doing a project with her students where they had to rewrite a Magic Tree House (Osborne, 1993) book using the same type of writing the series includes. Prior to starting the project they had read three of the books Tigers at Twilight, Polar Bears past Bedtime, and Hour of the Olympics together in a whole group read aloud setting. Then the students were guided a discussion about the different story elements that are in every Magic Tree House series book: same characters, always a problem, always a situation, always an obstacle, and always an adventure to find something. Mrs. Waiters had recorded the different story elements the students identified on a piece of chart paper that was hanging from the whiteboard at the front of the classroom (see
Figure 4.7: Magic Tree House Story Elements Poster

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magic Tree House book series</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Characters: Jack and Annie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- There is always a problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- There is always a solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- There is always an obstacle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- They are always fun to read because there is always an adventure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mrs. Waiters explained:

I wanted to hang this poster at the front of the room so that when students were writing their own Magic Tree House adventure they could look to the poster to make sure they include all of the story elements necessary. (2/8/12)

There were many books in Mrs. Waiter’s classroom. Most were in plastic bins under the windows on bookshelves. She had organized the books according to series, topic, author, season, and holiday. Mrs. Waiters said,

I like to have a large variety of books that are easily accessible to students. Students should not spend a long time trying to find a book they want to read. They should be able to easily find what they are interested in when reading independently. (2/8/12)

The students’ desks were clustered in five groups of four and one group of five in the front of the room. The SMARTboard was a focal point at the front of the room.
I use the SMARTboard for games, activities in all of the content areas, and as a whiteboard when teaching a specific topic. I also use the SMARTboard to enlarge text for whole group instruction. For example, when we read poems I will often give students their own copy of the poem and enlarge it on the SMARTboard for students to look at as we read. (2/8/12)

There was a stack of five laptop computers in the back of the room that Mrs. Waiters explained students “use for writing, reading, and go to various learning websites from our classroom webpage such as pbskids.com and brainpopjr.com. We use educational websites to practice and reinforce skills and extend our learning.”

**Student Behaviors**

“Students who struggle with reading in third grade have a hard time recognizing words and their meaning in a text,” Mrs. Waiters explained during our interview. She supports these students by teaching them to self-monitor their reading using meaning, structure, and visual cues identified by Fountas and Pinnell (2009). “I use Fountas and Pinnell’s Prompting Guide 1 (2008) as a reference when reading one on one with students and in my small reading groups. This helps me give specific teaching points, prompts, and reinforcement on skills for students,” Mrs. Waiters stated.

When I asked Mrs. Waiters how she can identify students who are having
difficulty with reading she stated,

these students are usually displaying avoidance behaviors when it is
time to read; such as, going to the bathroom for an extended amount of
time, dawdling trying to find a book, fidgeting, being off task in
general and talking with other classmates. I have also noticed that
students who struggle with reading tend to start more books and finish
less. I think this is because once a student starts a book he/she become
more disinterested in the book as the meaning gets more confused
through the student’s difficulty with word recognition and fluency.

(2/8/12)

In order to support these students, Mrs. Waiters focuses many lessons
throughout the school year on picking a ‘just right book’ where she teaches students
how to identify books at their independent level. She explained:

I teach them that if they can’t read more than five words on a page it is
too hard and they will be able to read it soon, but need to practice their
reading with just right books in order to improve their reading skills.

(2/8/12)

Mrs. Waiters uses running records, DRAs, and frequently checks for students’
understanding of a text during one on one reading conferences and guided reading
groups in order to track students’ progress. She shared, “I use these assessments to
tell me what my students know, what they don’t know, and where they need to go
next.” She does not use any specific reading or writing programs in her classroom,
but she does use leveled books at students' individual instructional level during guided reading group time.

Mrs. Waiters told me that she finds that students who struggle with reading also struggle with writing at the third grade level. Mrs. Waiters further explained, I find that students who struggle with writing struggle most with spelling, writing mechanics, and structure. These students often also struggle with word recognition. I also have students who are excellent word callers, but cannot generate and expand on ideas in writing.

(2/8/12)

In order to support these students Mrs. Waiters uses a lot of modeling, small groups, writing conferences, and graphic organizers. According to Mrs. Waiters, “I find that graphic organizers help students who struggle with writing to focus their writing and organize their ideas so that when they write it is more logical and sequential.”

Teacher Instructional Strategies

In our interview on 2/8/12 Mrs. Waiters said, I plan for my reading instruction with the consultant teacher. We take into account our student’s needs and blend that with our expectations. I am always planning, modifying, and meeting my student’s needs. For example, if we plan this great writing lesson on the difference between main idea and details and I find out my students are not all on the same
page or have the same amount of background knowledge on the topic I will take a step back and break the lesson into smaller chunks. My student’s needs are ever changing and I try my best to accommodate according to their needs. (2/8/12)

Mrs. Waiters explained that she follows a balanced literacy model in her classroom that is reflective of Fountas and Pinnell’s (2009) principles,

I read a lot of Fountas and Pinnell over the past year and have tried to adopt their ideas into my daily teaching. I still use DRAs for assessment because I have yet to be trained on using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. Our district just got the system in the fall, but I expect to be trained by the end of the school year. (2/8/12)

When I asked Mrs. Waiters about her ELA block, she reported,

My reading block is an hour and ten minutes long each day. I have reading centers which include independent reading, shared reading, and guided reading three times each week in twenty minute rotations. I also do direct instruction for writing three times each week for thirty minutes. Every day I do guided and full group instruction on reading skills according to what students have demonstrated they know and what they need to learn. (2/8/12)

Mrs. Waiters explained that when introducing a new skill she “models, has students practice the skill in groups or with partners, and then practice independently.”
I will then assess their use of the skills taught through running records or one on one reading conferences.” Mrs. Waiters uses read alouds as a model in her classroom, stating, “I believe by me modeling for students good and fluent reading they can learn what the expectation is.”

**Summary**

Mrs. Waiters uses her knowledge of her students and the data from various reading assessments to plan for her students’ individual instruction. She teaches students how to become independent readers by teaching them how to find “just right” books that are at their independent levels. With students who struggle with reading and writing, Mrs. Waiters uses more modeling, slower pace, and direct instruction in order to best support her students. She has found targeting student interests to be a motivator for students. She makes her expectations and goals clear for students so they understand what they should be doing.

**Looking across the Case Studies**

Looking across the case studies, I see similarities among the teachers’ classroom environments, literacy instruction, planning, and literacy assessments. Below I offer a cross-case analysis of seven teachers’ approaches to teaching literacy during a whole group, 90 minute English Language Arts block.
Classroom Environment

All seven teachers had literacy environments that were conducive to student learning. They had posters that referenced learning and served as a reminder for rules, routines, and strategies for reading and writing activities. In each of classroom student work was celebrated and displayed. The students’ desks in the seven classrooms were set up in ways that supported student learning and teamwork. Some teachers had students in groups of desks, tables, and in a U-shape around the classroom so that students could always see each other and be engaged in conversation. Regardless of the desk formation, seating arrangements were altered at various points throughout the year in order to maximize instructional efficiency, create alternative peer supports, and to build community within the classroom. The classrooms also had a rug area for meetings and whole group instruction. In addition, each classroom also had small rugs, pillows, beanbag chairs, and other comfy chairs to make students feel comfortable when engaging in reading activities.

Each of the classrooms contained a variety of student literature that was organized in bins and on bookshelves. Every classroom had books at individual students’ independent and instructional reading levels in order to meet students’ needs and interests.

I perceived the emotional environments in all seven classrooms as positive, open, and accepting. Teachers used humor and positive reinforcement to manage their students and create a classroom environment conducive to student learning. In the classrooms where I observed, I perceived that the students who struggle felt
comfortable as evidenced by their risk taking and question asking. I perceived that each teacher had a good understanding of their students who struggle with reading and writing and was proud of their students’ accomplishments.

**Literacy Instruction**

The seven teachers used differentiated instruction, flexibility, students’ interests, needs, and abilities to guide their reading instruction. The teachers used one on one conferences and small guided reading groups at their students’ instructional levels to teach and prompt student thinking and learning with direct instruction. All seven teachers cited a practice of flexible groups and changing the members of groups as necessary in order to maximize student learning. They also used a lot of modeling and scaffolded instruction in order to be effective with students. The teachers encouraged students to engage in sustained reading at their independent level often throughout the school day.

In whole group settings, the students who struggled appeared to be used to and comfortable with the classroom routines and participated in instruction. Students who struggle with reading and writing and needed to be refocused or redirected were taken care of by the teacher in a way that was not distracting to others. Teachers engaged students who struggle with reading during lessons by relating new learning and concepts to old learning and connecting new learning to personal experiences.

All the teachers had at least a 90 minute ELA block and structured their reading blocks similarly. Each reading block included students who struggle reading
at their independent level, their instructional level, writing, and conferencing with a teacher. Students in all the classrooms rotated between literacy activities and were able to work at their own pace and level. Regardless of the literacy program, the teachers appeared to have incorporated all areas of a balanced literacy curriculum: read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, guided writing, and independent writing.

**Teacher Planning**

All the teachers except one had some level of support from a consultant teacher in order to accommodate students who struggle with reading and writing. The teachers worked with the consultant teacher to plan and brainstorm ideas. The consultant teacher helped the classroom teachers support students with disabilities and those who struggle with reading and writing in various ways that were reflective of students’ needs, interests, and abilities.

The seven teachers took into account their students’ who struggle needs, interests, abilities, and levels when planning lessons and activities. The teachers planned activities that would be engaging and improve student learning. All the teachers used the Common Core (NYS, 2012) as a base for lessons and set goals for each of their students. Teachers planned to accommodate students who struggle with reading and writing through similar methods of modeling, scaffolding, conferencing, and differentiated instruction and work at the students’ independent and instructional levels. The teachers also used various methods such as running records, conferences,
and individual observations of student behavior to track student progress in reading
and used the records to guide instruction.

**Literacy Assessments**

Each teacher used various methods for assessing their students' literacy learning. The teachers used formative assessments such as AIMSweb, Fountas and
Pinnell’s Benchmark Assessment System, Developmental Reading Assessments,
running records, conferences, and individual observations of student behavior.

The teachers benchmarked students in September, January, and June using
AIMSweb, Fountas and Pinnell’s BAS, and DRAs. The third, fourth and fifth grade
teachers also use the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of
Academic Progress (MAP) assessment to benchmark students and monitor progress.
The third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers explained that the MAP was a helpful
assessment because it was individualized to student abilities and they could print out
data from the test pinpointing students’ needs. This helped teachers to plan for future
instruction.

The teachers used both formative and summative assessments to track student
progress and plan for future instruction. For example, Mrs. White used her data to
create groupings of students for guided reading groups. Mrs. Kay explained that
running records “help me to figure out the strategies the student is able to use
independently and what skills/strategies he/she needs to learn next.”
Summary

After analyzing all of the case studies by reading, rereading, and coding the data from my interviews and observations throughout the six week study I was able to find similar patterns. I see similarities among all the teachers’ approaches to their classroom environments, literacy instruction during a 90 minute English Language Arts block, planning for students who struggle, and literacy assessments. These similarities include how teachers create literacy environments conducive to student learning, literacy instruction, teacher planning, and teacher’s use of literacy assessments. Teachers set up their literacy environments with their individual student’s needs and learning styles in mind. They differentiate their literacy instruction according to students’ needs and abilities. Teachers plan collaboratively using data from assessments and their knowledge of students. They use similar literacy assessments throughout the school year to benchmark students and track their progress.
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

The focus of this six week research study was based on the researching how elementary teachers craft their instruction during a 90-minute reading block to meet the needs of readers who struggle. I conducted my research in a suburban elementary school in western New York. The participants were seven teachers in grades two through five. I observed student and teacher behaviors in four of the seven teachers’ classrooms twice and interviewed all seven teachers once in order to gain insights into their literacy beliefs and their planning and instruction related to students who struggle. Observing and interviewing teachers who have at least eleven years of experience and professional development helped me realize how I can structure my classroom and tailor my instruction in order to be effective with all students but particularly those who struggle with reading. My experiences with this research study also helped me realize subjects I would like to further research in the future.

Based on the case studies presented in chapter four, I am able to make several conclusions related to my research question: How do elementary teachers craft their instruction during a 90-minute reading block to meet the needs of readers who struggle?
Conclusions

The Teachers Created Classroom Environments That Were Conducive To Learning Where Students Who Struggle Felt Comfortable To Take Risks

Students were clearly celebrated in each of the classrooms which was apparent through the amount of student work displayed on the walls in each classroom. It was clear to me through observing students’ cooperative and positive attitudes as well as gaining insight into the teachers’ knowledge of individual students that students were a valued part of the classroom who worked together within the classroom.

During my observations I watched several students who the teachers identified as struggling with reading and writing take risks asking questions, responding to prompts, and interacting with other students in groups. It was also apparent during my observations that students felt comfortable in the classroom. The teachers helped students who struggle feel more comfortable during reading times by providing them with choices, which included opportunities to sit where they wanted and by making bean bags, rugs, pillows, and comfortable chairs available to students during reading and writing time.

When I asked teachers how they prepare effective literacy environments to support students who struggle in reading and writing, all of the teachers said that they do so based on their knowledge of students. As Vlach and Burcie (2010) explained, “Once struggling readers have a place in this community, they can transform their present narratives” (p. 524). In order to succeed, students need to feel that they are integral members of the class who are celebrated and appreciated by teachers and their peers. The seven
teachers helped students who struggle feel more comfortable by being flexible and giving them choices in reading and writing assignments. Students were responsible for their own learning and, according to the teachers, were more engaged and motivated to learn.

*The Teachers Use Their Knowledge Of Their Students And Individualize Balanced Literacy Instruction In Order To Best Support Students Who Struggle With Reading And Writing*

The teachers used their knowledge of their students’ interests, abilities, learning profiles, and needs in order to plan and guide their instruction. They used data from Fountas and Pinnell’s Benchmark Assessment System (2009) and the Developmental Reading Assessment (2005) to guide and inform their instruction. Learning how to read will be more likely to be rewarding and motivating for students if their interests are incorporated into daily plans and classroom activities (Tomlinson, et. al, 2003). Mrs. White, fourth grade teacher, shared that one of her struggling readers is “not motivated by reading and will often fake read.” (2/6/12) In order to help change this student’s thinking about reading Mrs. White

Incorporated a lot more books at her independent reading level that were of interest to her. She loves Barbies and dolls so I went out and bought a bunch of books related to those topics. She loves them! It is no longer a struggle to get her to sit down and read a book. It is also motivating for her because she knows she will always have time to read a choice book during the school day. (2/6/12)

Mrs. White used her knowledge of the student’s interests to engage and
motivate her to read. She also does this with writing by giving students choices for writing assignments. She knew her student’s profile and learning style and knew that she could engage the student with choice and flexibility. Teachers should have a good understanding of their students in order to support all of the different learning styles and profiles into their classrooms.

Mrs. Kay, fourth grade teacher, explained, “I have to differentiate instruction because not one of my students learns in the same way or at the same rate” (3/8/12).

To support students who struggle with reading Mrs. Ray groups them together, meets with them more often, works at a slower pace, gives them choice in completing assignments, has a large variety of books at their independent and instructional levels, and uses more scaffolding and modeling with direct instruction.

The seven teachers used responsive teaching by incorporating their knowledge of students’ culture, literacy background, and home life into their classrooms. Responsive teaching is an instructional strategy that has been shown to be effective with students who struggle with reading and writing because it involves teachers recognizing and capitalizing on the vast range of differences students bring into the classroom (Compton-Lilly, 2008). In Mrs. Luck’s fifth grade classroom had students’ biography projects hanging on one wall in the classroom. These projects were done and displayed so that each student had a better understanding of where each other comes from. Mrs. Luck also explained, “the projects are displayed so that students feel as though they have a place in the classroom – they are represented.”
Knowing students' needs, abilities, and interests enables teachers to individualize instruction and support students' learning within their zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky’s theory on ZPD which also involved scaffolding of instruction based on a student’s ZPD is to provide students with support through the use of models and guided practice while systematically reducing the teacher support to move the student to independent practice (Tomlinson, et. al, 2003). Based on their instructional levels which were determined by Fountas and Pinnell’s Benchmark Assessment System and the Developmental Reading Assessment the seven teachers were able to plan whole group and small group instruction with students who struggle. For example, in Mrs. Fitz’s second grade classroom she uses the assessments to discover what a student knows and does not know. She stated,

The ongoing assessments help me determine where a student is in the reading process and what things he/she needs to learn. I group the students according to their needs and then base my small group instruction on their needs. I also try to incorporate students’ interests in order to motivate and further engage them in the reading process.

(1/24/12)

All seven teachers base their literacy instruction on a balanced literacy model. The teachers use the various components of balanced literacy (shared reading, read aloud, interactive writing, shared writing, reading workshop, and writing workshop) to support students who struggle progressively become more skillful readers and writers (Fountas & Pinnell, 2009; Marshall, 2011; Mermelstein, 2006). For example,
each teacher used shared reading in guided reading groups, read alouds in whole
group instruction, shared writing in writing conferences and whole group instruction,
and both reading and writing workshop in small groups of three to five students.

Wharton-McDonald, et. al (1997) believe that balanced literacy instruction is
a best practice used by highly effective literacy teachers. The students in these
balanced literacy classrooms had higher levels of engagement, consistently high
levels of reading, and produced sophisticated writing products. (Wharton-McDonald,
et. al, 1997). All of the teachers used balanced literacy models in their classrooms and
Mrs. Filup, a fifth grade teacher, stated, “The balanced literacy model supports
students who struggle because it is comprehensive and enables reading and writing to
be taught in congruence.” She explained that with a balanced literacy model, students
who struggle can gain learn more because there is so many opportunities within the
components.

*The Teachers Use Reading And Writing Together In Literacy Instruction In Order
To Best Support Students Who Struggle With Reading And Writing*

All the teachers used reading and writing daily in their English Language Arts
block to support students’ learning. Students were reading, writing about reading, free
writing, and working on spelling activities. They were also engaging in shared
reading, shared writing, interactive writing, and reading and writing conferences. This
is important because as Briggs and Anderson (2011) point out, “when we write, we
read; when we read, we compose meaning” (p. 546). Although there was not a
consistent pattern found in this research study based upon students who struggle with
both reading and writing teachers did express the value and importance of teaching
reading and writing together in order to support students who struggle with either. The teachers expressed a similar belief that reading and writing are reciprocal processes and should be taught concurrently in order to best support student achievement and success. As Mrs. Kay shared, “I try to use reading and writing in daily instruction because I find that students who are struggling can learn from both ways and can become better readers if they are given multiple opportunities to write and vice versa” (3/8/12).

It became apparent through my study that students who struggle with reading did not necessarily struggle with writing. Every student who was identified as struggling had different needs and if they were struggling with reading it did not necessarily mean they struggled with writing too. For example, Mrs. Luck, a fifth grade teacher, had a student who struggled with generating ideas for writing, but was a fluent and expressive reader. She explained, “Michaela is a great reader. She has good expression, intonation, and phrasing. However, she struggles to generate complete ideas for writing,” (2/15/12). In order to support her, Mrs. Luck has discussions with Michaela about author’s purpose for writing a text and breaking down a text into outlines so that Michaela can get a better idea of how the writing process works.
Implications For Student Learning

Individualized Instruction Based On Students’ Needs, Abilities, Strengths, And Interests Will Be Most Effective For Students Who Struggle With Learning How To Read And Write

The teachers used literacy instruction that was individualized based on students’ individual needs, interests, and abilities. Two of the teachers across the grade levels explained that they use this method because “past experiences and successes with students who struggle would happen when I made instruction reflective of my knowledge of the student” (Mrs. Kay, 3/8/12; Mrs. Day, 1/23/12). The teachers use ongoing running records, reading and writing conferences, and observations of student behavior to identify students’ needs, abilities, and strengths and then teach and group students accordingly.

For example, Mrs. Kay grouped students into guided reading groups based upon interest, ability, and needs. She uses flexible groupings as the needs and interests of her students change throughout the school year. She further explained using an example of a student who struggles with reading in her classroom,

Johnny likes to read about dinosaurs so I found books at his independent and instructional level to have him read. Right away I noticed a difference in his engagement and motivation to read. This is a kid who avoided reading at all costs, but was able to engage and improve his reading skills once I included his interests and background knowledge into reading. (3/8/12)

The teachers implied that by basing their literacy instruction on students’
needs, abilities, strengths, and interests students who struggle with reading and writing will be more motivated and engaged because the instruction is reflective of their profiles.

**Students Who Struggle Should Engage In Sustained Independent Reading During The School Day In Order To Improve Their Reading Skills And Abilities**

The fourth and fifth grade teachers engaged students in long periods (20-40 minutes) of sustained independent reading. I learned that it is important because students need to interact with books at their individual level in order to become more engaged and proficient readers. As shown in my research study, the teachers planned for students to have multiple opportunities and uninterrupted time to do this effectively.

Mrs. Luck explained that last year part of the reason students did poorly on the New York State testing was because they were not used to reading for long bouts of time such as the 90 minutes required during the test. This year they have been practicing increasing their reading stamina and have noticed that the students have increased their stamina since the beginning of the year. Mrs. Luck told me that her class, as a whole, was not able to sit and read for fifteen minutes at the beginning of the year and now they can sit and read for 40-50 minutes. In order to help her students increase their stamina she had them read for one minute one day and then gradually increased the amount of time having students keep track of how long they could read in a chart. Eventually she gave students 40-50 minute blocks of time to practice their stamina and students were able to stay focused during this time.
The fourth grade teachers, Mrs. Kay and Mrs. White talked about the importance of sustained independent reading and had similar experiences with their students as Mrs. Luck did trying to get their students to increase their reading stamina. Mrs. White stated, “Students who struggle with reading need a lot of time with books in order to become engaged in the story and comprehend the text as a whole” (2/16/12).

Students Who Struggle With Reading And Writing May Have Increased Motivation If They Are Engaged And In Activities That Relate To Their Interests

Students who struggle learn best in classrooms where they are motivated and engaged. As Mrs. Luck, a fifth grade teacher explained, “In my experiences, students are more likely to close the reading gap if they are engaged in meaningful reading and writing activities that are interesting to them.” I observed students who struggle motivated by choice and things of interest to them in all of the classrooms I observed. I watched students who struggle with reading and writing engage in many activities throughout my observations and noticed that when students were reading choice books that were at their independent level or writing a story about monsters or the ocean they were engaged. For example, I observed a student in Mrs. Kay’s fourth grade class, Charles who struggles with word decoding reading a book about snakes during independent reading time. Mrs. Kay shared with me that at the beginning of the year he would scream when it was time for reading and run to the bathroom. She explained, “Now he is engaged in reading because he knows that he will always be
able to read a book of his choice for at least some part of the school day.” He no longer runs away or avoids reading because he knows that he will be able to do something that is interesting. As for his decoding, Mrs. Kay reported that because books of choice are motivating for Charles he works harder using his decoding strategies and has been able to improve his reading comprehension because of this. She also reported that the decoding skills he has developed this year has carry over to books read during guided reading and other assigned books.

These students’ teachers had planned for engaging and motivating activities because as Mrs. White explained, “that’s how you get kids to learn. You need to tap into their interests and allow them to make choices in their own learning in order to motivate them and give them a purpose.” Giving students who struggle to have choice in achieving goals will promote student engagement and motivation because students are responsible for their learning.

**Implications For My Teaching**

*I Should Create A Classroom Environment That Is Reflective Of My Students’ Interests, Needs, And Personalities In Order To Best Support Students Who Struggle With Reading And Writing*

From conducting this research study, I have learned that I should set up my classroom in ways that are effective for student learning and inviting so students feel comfortable and safe. I saw this done by having student work around the classroom, current learning represented in multiple ways, various cultures represented by flags and pictures, and pictures of students working and having fun around the classroom.
The teachers’ classrooms celebrated students’ accomplishments and had it displayed throughout the room. The teachers were proud of their students and their accomplishments.

I also learned that it is important to have literacy posters or visual cues and reminders displayed in the classroom that students can reference when working independently. This is especially important for students who struggle with reading and writing and need visual cues in order to succeed. I should also have current learning represented by pictures, charts, books, and graphs around my classroom because it will keep the learning fresh in students’ heads so they are always thinking of the content. The teachers explained that having the posters available for students helps support their independence and their thinking processes.

In all seven classrooms there were various spots designated for reading. Students were encouraged to be comfortable when they were reading and had choices of using rugs, pillows, couches, and cozy chairs. This showed me that in order for my students to feel comfortable and excited to read and write they need places that are designed for them and to be able to have choice of where to sit and things to grab when they are reading. You want to make spots in the classroom for reading and writing that are comfortable and safe – a place where students can be independent and excited to read.
The research I conducted in this study showed me the importance and effectiveness of collaboration and sharing responsibility for students. The teachers shared with me that they planned for instruction with their consultant teacher and within their grade level. This supported teachers because as Mrs. Waiters, a third grade teacher explained, “The responsibility for students and instruction is shared and the learning happening at our grade level is consistent.” Three teachers (Mrs. Kay, Mrs. Waiters, and Mrs. Fitz) reported that collaborative planning helps especially when working with students who struggle. Mrs. Fitz, a fifth grade teacher stated,

This process helps because at times I get to the point where I have tried everything with a student and it is still not clicking with him/her. I use my colleagues to discuss different strategies. For example, I have a student who struggles with decoding and relies too much on intitial sounds and tends to over generalize. We tried breaking the word up, using his background knowledge, using picture cues, looking around the word, everything. I finally brought him up to my team and they gave me a catchy bookmark they use with their students that has five strategies. Since then he has been able to remember the strategies in his head and can use multiple tools to figure out a word. It has made a big difference. (1/24/12)

Through this research study I have discovered the success and value in
collaborative planning for instruction with students who struggle with reading and writing. I have learned that I should use my colleagues to learn new ideas, strategies, skills, and techniques to use with my students who struggle. I learned this will help me become an even more effective teacher with my students.

I Should Use My Students' Needs, Abilities, And Interests To Guide My Literacy Instruction In Order To Be Effective With Students Who Struggle With Reading

The teachers in this research study expressed that instruction should be reflective of student needs, abilities, and interests in order to be most effective with students who struggle with reading and writing. As Mrs. Day, a third grade teacher stated, “Reading and writing instruction should be well planned and individualized in order to be effective for students who struggle.” This tells me that I should gain a good understanding of individual students prior to teaching them. I need to build a rapport with students in order to gain their trust so that they are comfortable to learn in my classroom. I learned that I should have on-going assessments with my students who struggle in order to better understand their strengths, needs, and interests so that I can apply those to their learning. Students should be learning in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). I can better understand individual students’ ZPD through assessments and observations of reading behaviors.

I learned how to incorporate choice into daily literacy instruction so that students are constantly engaged and have choice in literacy activities. This will peak student interest and learning. I also learned more about the importance of flexibility in a classroom. Students’ interests, needs, and abilities are always changing and it is
important that students do not stay in the same groups all year. Teachers showed me how they use ongoing assessments to determine student and grouping needs. I learned that it is also important to change up goals and groups of students in order to keep students engaged and motivated. Mrs. White stated, "You don’t want to keep the same kids in the same groups focusing on the same thing all year because they will get bored and learning will stop."

**Recommendations For Future Research**

*Research Teacher Planning And Instruction For Readers Who Struggle In Multiple Schools Or School Districts*

I believe it would be beneficial to observe and interview teachers from multiple schools or school districts about how they plan for students who struggle with reading and writing during whole group English Language Arts blocks. This would provide opportunities to gain different perspectives of teachers and possibly administrators from more than one school in one school district. The researcher could then compare and contrast instruction across school districts in order to better understand the best way to support students who struggle with reading. The data could be further explored and compared with school achievement rates.

*Include Interviews With Students Who Struggle In Order To Understand Both Teacher And Student Perspectives On Instruction*

I think it would be important to include the opinions of students who struggle with reading and writing to learn more about their experiences as learners. I believe it would be insightful to hear their reflections about their own learning and their
development. This may also lead to insights about students who struggle learning and individual interests.

**Research For Longer Periods Of Time During Literacy Instruction**

Due to time and job constraints I was never able to spend an entire reading block (the entire 90 minutes) in any one classroom. I recommend that researchers observe teachers more than twice in a six week period in order to observe the teacher and student behaviors during whole group literacy instruction that focuses on multiple skills and texts. I think it would be appropriate for a researcher to observe teachers twice a week during a six-week period in order to gain a better understanding of individual students, teacher planning, and instructional styles. Such research could provide more evidence of how teachers plan to support students who struggle with reading and writing during whole group English Language Arts instruction.

**Final Thoughts**

The purpose of this six week study was to investigate how elementary teachers craft their literacy instruction during a whole group 90-minute reading block to support students who struggle with reading. I designed this study of seven classroom teachers to parallel my personal philosophy that all students can learn how to read. As a new special education and consultant teacher I struggled with effective ways to plan my reading lessons to accommodate the range of students, particularly those students who struggle with reading and writing. Conducting this study has
given me a better understanding of some of the processes teachers use to plan, implement, and support students who struggle with reading and writing during whole group instruction. I am now better able to support my students who struggle because I have learned new strategies, skills, and techniques.

The experience of researching a topic that is relevant to my current teaching practices helped me improve and build upon my researching skills. During the process of conducting this study, I enhanced my researching skills such as effective data collection, analysis, and synthesis, and I learned effective qualitative research methods and ethical practices that I anticipate that I will use in future research projects.

I believe that because of the findings from this research I am now a more effective observer of classroom instruction especially as it relates to supporting students who struggle with reading, which I anticipate will help me be more purposeful and knowledgeable in my future literacy instruction. Through the research process I built relationships with my new colleagues, which will be beneficial for my professional development and success as a teacher.
Appendix A: Interview Questions

(Researcher will scribe)

Numerical ID of interviewee: _________
Date of Interview and time: __________________________

The objective of the interview is to give the participant the opportunity to explain how they craft literacy instruction for readers who struggle during a 90-minute reading block. Any insights and perspectives that you are willing to share will allow me to more effectively consider my personal use of planning and strategies I use to support students who struggle with reading during whole group lessons. If you at any time feel uncomfortable with a question I ask, please know that you have the choice not to respond. You may withdraw from the interview at any time. I anticipate that our interview will last 20 to 30 minutes.

**Questions:**

1. What does it mean for a reader to be struggling? Describe some characteristics? How are you supporting him/her?

2. How do you structure your 90-minute reading block? Is there writing involved?

3. How do you plan for literacy instruction for struggling readers?

4. What programs do you use and why do you use it? How do you use it?

5. How do you assess students in literacy instruction?

6. What do you find most students struggle with in reading? Do you find that students who struggle in reading struggle in writing as well?

7. What do you find students who are struggling with reading benefit from?

8. What strategies do you use in the classroom to help diverse learners?

9. What else would you like to share about literacy instruction for struggling readers?

**Closing:**

I truly appreciate your participation and willingness to share your thoughts with me. Your participation and insights will help me use my planning time more purposefully and support students who struggle with reading more effectively during whole group
lessons. As noted in your consent form, I will keep your identity confidential.

In the event that I need clarification after transcribing this interview, may I request a follow-up discussion?
Appendix B: Observation Sheet

Observation Protocol (attached is description of lesson activities)

| Participant Identification Number: __________________________ |
| Observation Date and Time: ________________________________ |
| Length of Observation: ___________________________________ |

| Teacher lesson (basic overview)                          |
| Teacher language used (non-verbal and verbal)            |
| Clarification from teacher                               |
| Teacher directions                                       |
| Teacher movement                                         |
| Teacher redirection                                      |
| Non-verbal and verbal language of struggling students    |
| Questions asked by struggling students                  |
| Questions answered?                                      |
Closing: I truly appreciate your participation and willingness to share your thoughts with me. Your participation and insights will help me use my planning time more purposefully and support students who struggle with reading more effectively during whole group lessons. As noted in your consent form, I will keep your identity confidential.
Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Informed Consent Form for Interview and/or Observation

The purpose of this research study is to examine how teachers craft their 90-minute literacy block to meet the needs of students who struggle with reading. The researcher, Jennifer Berrigan, is a graduate student at The College at Brockport, SUNY in the Department of Education and Human Development. The researcher will conduct interviews with teachers to discuss their perspectives on planning and implementing reading and writing instruction while supporting students who struggle with reading.

If you agree to participate in this research study, you will take part in an interview and be asked about how you plan and implement reading and writing instruction during the 90-minute literacy block while supporting all students. You may also agree to participate in two observations. Observations will allow the researcher to see how you use your planning to support students during 90-minute literacy blocks.

In order to participate in this study, your informed consent is required. You are being asked to make a decision whether or not to participate in the study. If you are willing to participate in the study, and agree with the statements below, please check your consent options and sign your name in the space provided at the end.

I understand that:

1. My participation is voluntary and I have the right to refuse to answer any questions.
2. Although my participation is not anonymous, I understand that measures will be taken to assure my participation and responses are confidential. My name will not be written on any notes taken by the primary researcher. If any publication results from this research, I would not be identified by name.
3. My participation involves completing a personal information sheet regarding my education, experience, and certification. The information sheet will only be read by the researcher and only used for contextual information.
4. Time is a minor risk. My participation will be no more than 30 minutes. If I agree to be observed, it will only be 80-90 minutes during my reading block.
5. My participation involves answering nine open-ended interview questions about how I plan and implement reading instruction while supporting students who struggle. The questions will be provided to me prior to my scheduled interview, so that I have the opportunity to gather any resources I would like to share with the researcher.
6. I may consent to be observed during my 90-minute literacy block. I understand that the observation will not be recorded. The researcher will use
field notes to record her observations. All field notes will be shredded after the thesis research has been accepted.

7. The interview data will be transcribed by the researcher and will be used for data analysis only. The results will be used for the completion of a master’s thesis by the researcher.

8. All data will be destroyed by shredding after the research has been accepted.

9. I understand that administration may request a summary of results. I understand that my name and information will be kept confidential. Administration will not know which teachers participated in the study.

I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understand the above statements. All my questions about my participation in this study have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the study realizing I may withdraw without penalty at any time during the survey process.

I agree to participate in the interview.

Signature of Participant ___________________________ Date: ____________

I grant consent for two observations.

Signature of Participant ___________________________ Date: ____________

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the researcher or thesis advisor using the contact information below.

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